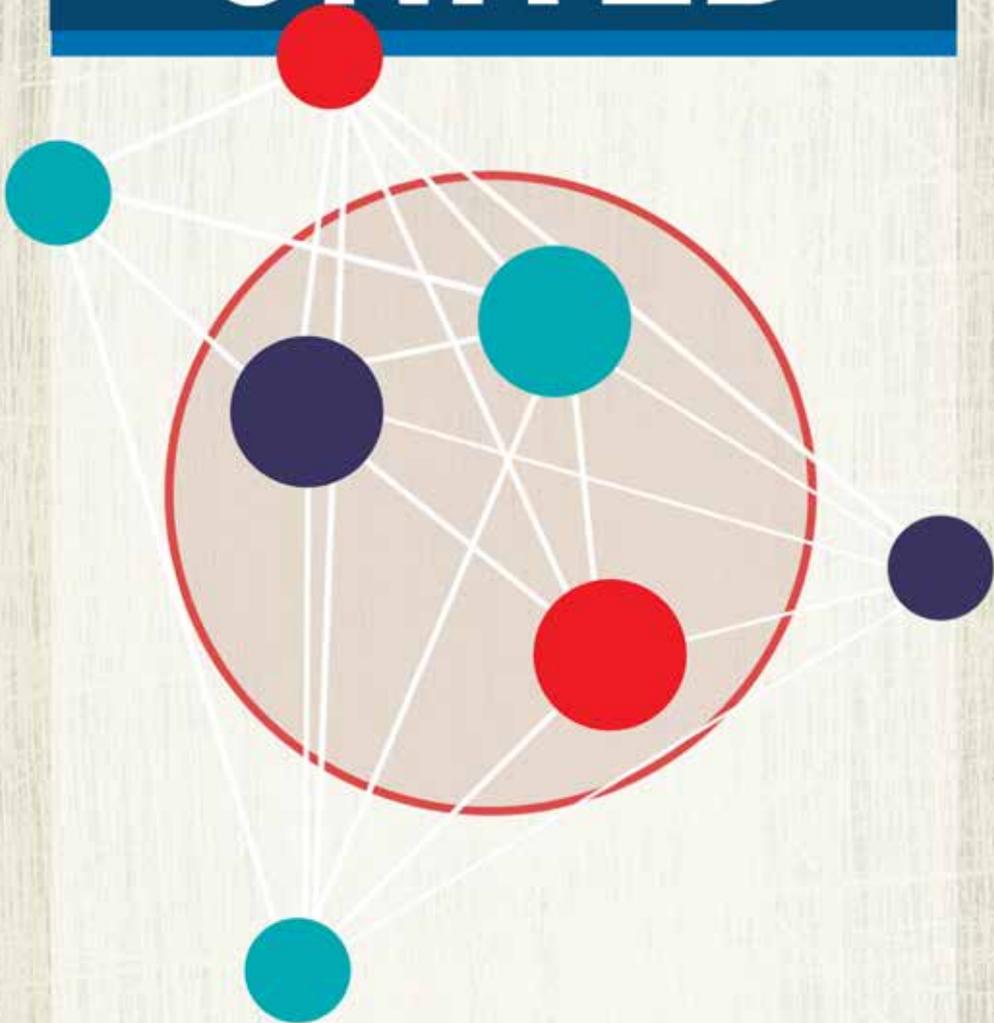


# UNITED



A NINE-WEEK SERIES THROUGH  
1 CORINTHIANS



# UNITED

Compiled by James Burkett  
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# Introduction | Welcome

Thank you for joining us for this nine-week journey as we explore the book of 1 Corinthians. Before your group meets together, we encourage you to read each lesson and answer the questions for that week. These lessons are designed to parallel the sermon.

Imagine a church where everyone got along perfectly. No one had disagreements about theology, preaching styles or worship. Every Sunday consisted of perfect unity among the entire congregation. Nobody was upset or disgruntled with anyone else.

This church setting would be really quiet because nobody would be attending. The lobby, sanctuary and classrooms would be void of people.

Once personalities are added to any situation, there will be disagreements. This is not to say that the church is full of constant bickering and strife, but not everyone is in perfect agreement all the time. Even people with the same goals do not always agree on the process for accomplishing those goals.

The church in Corinth had its fair share of disagreements. Throughout 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul mentions divisions, quarreling and jealousy arising in the church. All this occurred because people lost their focus. For some, going to church became more about their own needs and wants instead of focusing on Christ. Paul tells the church at Corinth that Christ is not divided, and neither is His church.

Over the next nine weeks, we are going to study some very practical advice given to the church at Corinth. This advice will cover unity, wisdom, how to live in an immoral world, marriage, gray areas, communion, spiritual gifts, love and worship. Paul's advice still rings true today as it did over 2,000 years ago in Corinth. No matter the situation, Paul's desire was for the church to be united in mind and thought. This can only occur when we focus on Christ and not ourselves. This study is designed to spur conversation and further study into each of these areas.

# LESSON 1 | Unity

Written by James Burkett

*Study Text: 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 ; 3:1-23*

<sup>10</sup> I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. <sup>11</sup> My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. <sup>12</sup> What I mean is this: One of you says, “I follow Paul”; another, “I follow Apollos”; another, “I follow Cephas”; still another, “I follow Christ.”

<sup>13</sup> Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? <sup>14</sup> I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup> so no one can say that you were baptized in my name. <sup>16</sup> (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don’t remember if I baptized anyone else.) <sup>17</sup> For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

## PRACTICAL APPLICATION

From a very early age, all of us are taught to get along with those around us. These simple life lessons often begin in the home with siblings learning to live in unity with each other. If there are not siblings, then the lessons are applied to friends or neighbors. Toys are to be shared. Household responsibilities are divided evenly.

Imagine for a moment a child who is completely determined to have everything her way all the time. No matter what the situation is, she is unwilling to forgo her personal desires for the good of the entire family. For a lot of us, this example does not take that much imagination. The goal should be for the child to learn to live in unity with others as they mature and get older.

Just like a parent raising a child, the Apostle Paul was raising up the church in Corinth. The Christians in Corinth were struggling with multiple areas, such as spiritual gifts, communion and marriage. In 1 Corinthians 3:1-2, Paul says, “but as people who are still worldly — mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it.” Paul wanted them to mature and set aside their personal agendas for the church as a whole. But like young children, they were unwilling to pursue unity and instead chased their own desires.

As with most situations, bad news travels quickly. In 1 Corinthians 16:17,

Paul was told of all the problems the church was having. It was in response to this report that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, calling for the church to be unified.

### *DEFINING UNITY*

How do you define unity? Does the definition change when you are at work, your neighborhood or church? Is unity just the absence of fighting and arguing? Does there have to be 100 percent agreement on any subject for unity to exist?

These are just a few of the questions surrounding the topic of unity. We tend to know when unity is present or absent, but we have a difficult time defining it. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines unity as “the quality or state of not being multiple.”<sup>1</sup> According to this definition, then, unity can only exist when no one has a difference of opinion. If this is the only working definition, then unity has probably never existed in any situation or scenario.

The Apostle Paul is not calling us to be mindless drones when he is speaking about unity in the church. He knew people would not agree in every situation all the time and differences of opinion would occur. He was referring to the church having a general solidarity with a singular focus on Christ.

One way to define unity is by having a mutual respect for those around you. Too often when a disagreement arises, we are tempted to go after the person instead of the issue. This can occur with something as insignificant as the temperature setting in a room. One person wants it hotter; the other person wants it cooler. Instead of talking about the actual temperature, the temptation is to say something like, “Maybe if they just dressed warmer, they wouldn’t be so cold all the time.” Although this is a trivial example, it demonstrates how disagreements are often handled.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTION**

1. Discuss as a group how you would define unity.

### *PERSONAL AGENDAS*

In literature, archenemies exist to create drama and a great story line. Some examples of this are Spiderman vs. Green Goblin, Batman vs. Joker and Superman vs. Lex Luthor. The biggest archenemies to unity are our own

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<sup>1</sup> Merriam-Webster, I. (2003). Merriam-Webster’s collegiate dictionary. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc.

## DIGGING DEEPER

There were divisions and contentions in the church (3:3, 11:18, 12:25), even at the Lord's Table (11:20–34)! Paul begs them to be “perfectly joined together” (verse 10), which in the Greek is a medical term that refers to the setting of a bone that was broken or out of joint. Whenever Christians cannot get along, the body of Christ suffers.

Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). *Wiersbe's expository outlines on the New Testament* (p. 419). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

personal agendas. This happens when we are so narrowly focused on our own wants and desires that we become oblivious to what is good for the group as a whole. Paul urges us to agree with one another in what we say so that there will be no divisions among us (see *1 Corinthians 1:10*).

The church in Corinth was forming religious cliques based on different leaders within the church. Disunity occurred when the

church became more focused on who was leading instead of the gospel message. The Gentile group predominately followed Paul. The group that followed Apollos probably enjoyed his fluent speaking style (*Acts 18:24-28*). The Jewish Christians would have gravitated toward Peter. The fourth group tried to be more spiritual than the rest and rejected all human leadership by following Christ alone.

Paul explains that no one was baptized in the name of any human leader. Everyone was baptized into the name of Christ, and Christ is not divided. Each one of these groups needed to set aside its personal agendas for the church as a whole. Similarly, these passages call us to be “perfectly united in mind and thought” even today.

## DISCUSSION QUESTION

2. How can someone know if his or her personal agenda is causing disunity within the church?

## STAYING FOCUSED

*1 Corinthians 1:13* reads, “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?” The obvious answer to these questions should be no. Paul is calling the church to stay focused not just on Christ, but on the cross. Before being crucified, Jesus prayed in *John 17:22-23*, “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may

be one as we are one — I in them and you in me — so that they may be brought to complete unity.” Jesus prayed before being crucified that the church would be united. Jesus knew that disunity would give Satan an opportunity to attack the church.

How can someone remain focused on the cross? Staying focused means stepping back from a situation and seeing the bigger picture. What is more important, to adjust the temperature by a few degrees or for someone to accept Christ as their Savior? Is it more important to follow a singular music style or have someone accept Christ? Not everyone understands the cross of Christ. For those who rely on human wisdom and personal agendas, it is foolishness. For others who stay focused, it is the power of God.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

3. Unity doesn't necessarily mean 100 percent uniformity. How can people disagree and still maintain unity?
4. In what ways does church disunity affect the non-Christian's view of the gospel message?
5. Discuss a time when you were completely right in your thoughts, words and actions and yet you chose to remain silent to keep the peace.

### **DIGGING DEEPER**

Instead of glorifying God, the church at Corinth was hindering the progress of the Gospel. How did this happen? The members of the church permitted the sins of the city to get into the local assembly. Corinth was a polluted city, filled with every kind of vice and worldly pleasure. About the lowest accusation you could make against a man in that day would be to call him “a Corinthian.” People would know what you were talking about. Corinth was also a proud, philosophical city, with many itinerant teachers promoting their speculations. Unfortunately, this philosophical approach was applied to the Gospel by some members of the church, and this fostered division. The congregation was made up of different “schools of thought” instead of being united behind the Gospel message.

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 568). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

6. Read 1 Corinthians 1:10. Sometimes, even when people have the same goal, their methods for achieving it may be different. What steps can believers take to become unified even when their methodologies differ?

7. Read Colossians 3:13-14 and 1 Peter 3:8. What role do forgiveness and humility have in maintaining unity within the church? How can forgiveness and humility help maintain unity with your family, work and friends?

8. Read Galatians 3:26-28. In what ways does staying focused on the cross help remove barriers causing disunity?

9. It is not wrong to have differences of opinion or personal preferences when it comes to areas of the church. It is wrong to tear apart the bride of Christ. What steps can Christians take to make sure their preferences or opinions are not causing the church body harm?

10. Read Philippians 2:1-4. In what ways does valuing others above yourself and looking after the interest of others help preserve unity?

11. Whether it is at work, school, home or church, we all have areas where we need to pursue unity. Take a few moments and write down some names you know with whom you should work on unity. This may involve offering forgiveness or seeking forgiveness. Make a plan for this to happen within the next couple weeks.

## **FURTHER STUDY**

*Deep and Wide* by Andy Stanley

## **REMEMBER THIS**

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.” Colossians 3:15

# Lesson 2 | Wisdom vs. Knowledge

Written by James Burkett

*Study Text: 1 Corinthians 1:18 - 2:16*

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

<sup>13</sup> This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. <sup>14</sup> The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.

<sup>15</sup> The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, <sup>16</sup> for, “Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

Our society is driven by the pursuit of wisdom. This pursuit started all the way back in the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 3:5-6, the conversation between Satan and Eve went like this: “‘For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.”

This scenario brings up the question of the difference between knowledge and wisdom. Eve may have immediately gained knowledge, but her actions certainly would not be considered wise. The Hebrew word for wisdom in this passage is *haskîl*. Its meaning can vary, including “insight” and “success.” In this passage, Eve was looking for insight into things she didn’t understand. Unfortunately, she was seeking this wisdom apart from God.

The modern pursuit of knowledge starts at the young age of 5 in kindergarten. We continue our formal education process all the way through the age of 18 as a senior in high school. For some, once this is done, a decision is made about where to attend college. The college years can range from four to eight or more years of additional education. Do these countless hours of study, work, reading and writing equal wisdom? Is it possible to gain all the factual knowledge this world has to offer and still not be considered wise?

The answer to this question will differ depending on a person’s perspective. People who believe in the cross of Christ know that knowledge does not equal wisdom. Any knowledge gained without the knowledge of Christ is garbage. In

Philippians 3:8, the Apostle Paul wrote, “What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ.” Throughout this lesson, we are going to explore the differences in human knowledge and Godly wisdom.

## *SHEER FOOLISHNESS*

All of us have done something foolish at some point in our lives. Some common foolish acts include eating something when it is too hot, climbing on that last step of the ladder or picking up something way too heavy. Who knows what is going through our minds when we do these things? It doesn't make sense to put something in your mouth while steam is rising off of it. This single act is usually followed by the it's-hot dance, which includes saying over and over again “it's hot” while waving your hand in front of your mouth. Then there is the genius act of lifting something up that is way too heavy and then wondering how you are going to put it down. It is really easy to get caught up in a moment and leave common sense behind.

### **DIGGING DEEPER**

It is impossible to exaggerate the almost fantastic mastery that the silver-tongued rhetorician held in Greece. Plutarch says, “They made their voices sweet with musical cadences and modulations of tone and echoed resonances.” They thought not of what they were saying, but of how they were saying it. Their thought might be poisonous so long as it was enveloped in honeyed words. The Greeks were intoxicated with fine words; and to them the Christian preacher with his blunt message seemed a crude and uncultured figure, to be laughed at and ridiculed rather than to be listened to and respected.

Barclay, W. (Ed.). (1975). *The letters to the Corinthians* (pp. 19–20). Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster John Knox Press.

Foolishness is defined as “lacking in sense, judgment or discretion.”<sup>1</sup> This seems like a really good definition when it comes to describing some of the crazy acts all people get caught up in, but not when it comes to describing God. The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:25 mentions “the foolishness of God.” How can God be considered foolish? What does the “foolishness of God” look like?

Paul is telling the Corinthians that the least of all of God's wisdom is greater than all of human wisdom combined. The “foolishness of God” specifically

<sup>1</sup> Merriam-Webster, I. (2003). Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc.

refers to the cross of Christ. From a merely human perspective, the cross was a horrible, humiliating way to die that signified complete defeat. God's wisdom was to use the cross to bring salvation to all creation. 1 Corinthians 1:23 reads, "Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles." Both Jews and Greeks did not understand how a Nazarene carpenter dying a criminal's death could bring salvation. The Jews didn't understand their own Scriptures. Isaiah 53:5 reads, "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed." Mankind's instrument for death became God's instrument for life. It was through the weakness of dying on a cross that the power of sin and death were broken for all eternity. 2 Corinthians 13:4 reads, "For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power." No human strength can offer forgiveness of sins or eternal life; all of this only comes from God's power and wisdom and through the cross.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTION**

1. What are some reasons people don't accept the cross of Christ as God's instrument of salvation?

## *WISDOM OR KNOWLEDGE*

There are no detailed descriptions of how a crucifixion was carried out. This in part is due to the horrific nature of the crucifixion itself. Writers during that time were cautious about being very descriptive about such a brutal act. The history of crucifixion can be traced back to the Persians, who may have taken it from the Assyrians. The Romans later adopted it as a form of capital punishment for slaves, non-citizens, criminals or insurgents. The victims were flogged and then had to carry their own crossbeam to the place of crucifixion. At the place of crucifixion, the crossbeam was fastened to a pole and then placed upright in the ground. "If the executioners wished a particularly slow, agonizing death, they might drive blocks or pins into the stake for a seat or a step to support the feet."<sup>2</sup> This would prolong the crucifixion process by providing the victim enough support to barely breathe. The victims would either die from shock of excruciating pain or by suffocation. Their fatigued muscles would give out, causing the lungs to collapse. This was a slow process that could often take days to complete. In some cases, the executioners would break the legs causing the victim to lose

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2 Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). In Tyndale Bible dictionary. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

any support for breathing. The Romans would often leave the victim's body on the cross to rot as a deterrent to all who passed by.

In 1 Corinthians 2:1-2, the Apostle Paul wrote, "And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." Is the beginning of wisdom just knowing about the crucifixion of Christ? Can you know that Jesus was flogged, beaten and nailed to a cross and still not have gained wisdom?

There is a difference between having knowledge of how Jesus died and having that knowledge impact your life. This is the line between knowledge and wisdom or facts and application. It is not enough to just know all the facts about Jesus' death; they need to create a change within you. If Jesus' death remains in the area of knowledge, then the whole plan of salvation will really just be the "foolishness of God." In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul wrote, "But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ." Paul didn't want the Corinthians to just have knowledge about the crucifixion; he wanted their knowledge to lead to a devoted life.

### DIGGING DEEPER

Crucifixion by itself damaged no vital organs, and it is unlikely that any wounds inflicted in the practice would have resulted in excessive bleeding. The likely cause of the consequently slow death, then, would have been shock or a painful process of asphyxiation as the muscles used in breathing were exhausted. As a result, Roman citizens were generally spared this form of execution. Crucifixion was a public affair. Naked and fastened to a stake, cross or tree on a well-traveled route or crossroads, the executed was subjected to savage ridicule by passersby. Moreover, under Roman practice the person crucified was denied burial, the corpse left on the cross as carrion for the birds or to rot.

Hawthorne, G. F., Martin, R. P., & Reid, D. G. (Eds.). (1993). In Dictionary of Paul and his letters. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

When does the cross cease to be a stumbling block and become the plan of salvation? This process occurs by faith. You may know that Jesus died for your sins, but it is by faith that you accept Him as your Savior. In Matthew 5:46-47 Jesus said, "If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?" He was pointing out that even nonbelievers can do and know what is right. The same

illustration is true for knowledge. There are a lot of unbelievers and atheists who know all about Christ's crucifixion but have not gained the wisdom of salvation. Hebrews 11:1 reads, "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." Faith does not negate wisdom or knowledge; it is the way in which the knowledge of the crucifixion becomes the wisdom of God.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTION**

2. Discuss as a group the difference between wisdom and knowledge.

## *SPIRITUAL WISDOM*

Imagine for a moment a group of people who lived in the desert their whole lives. Their only source of water was from a single well. They never experienced the luxury of swimming in a pool. For them, water was for survival, not recreation. Trying to explain the concept of swimming would be a difficult task. The one thing they know for sure about water is that things sink when placed in it. Telling them that the human body can swim and float in water would be a completely foreign concept.

The task is equally as difficult when trying to explain spiritual wisdom to a non-believer. This is not an insult to their intelligence, but it is the Spirit of God that gives believers wisdom to understand spiritual realities. The Apostle Paul made a really bold statement in 1 Corinthians 2:16 when he said, "But we have the mind of Christ." How can a mere human claim to have the mind of God? This is the line between knowledge and wisdom that only is understood by the Holy Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 2:14, Paul wrote, "The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit." Unless someone accepts Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and receives the Holy Spirit, then understanding all the spiritual realities is not entirely feasible. The Holy Spirit can still work in their lives and call them into a relationship with God. For believers, it is by the Spirit and by the reading of God's word that they obtain the mind of Christ.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

3. Whom do you consider to be a person of wisdom in your life? Why? What characteristics do you associate with wisdom?

4. Describe a time in your life when you felt like you knew everything but lacked the wisdom to make good decisions.

5. Read 1 Corinthians 2:7. Why doesn't God just reveal all His wisdom to all people so everyone could understand spiritual realities?

6. Pray, read Scripture and seek advice from godly people. Of these three areas, which one do you rely on the most when seeking wisdom? Why?

7. Read Proverbs 3:19 and Jeremiah 10:12. In what ways can creation help explain the wisdom of God? How can the design of creation be used to point a non-believer to God?

8. If the crucifixion of Christ is only fully understood by those with the Spirit of God, then how do you explain God's wisdom to unbelievers?

9. There are atheists and other non-believers who have a good understanding of the Scriptures. How is it possible for them to read and yet not gain God's wisdom?

10. Read James 1:5. Write this verse down somewhere you will see it throughout the week. Whenever you face a decision or need understanding, ask God for it. When you meet next week, take a few minutes to discuss how asking God for wisdom affected your week.

## **FURTHER STUDY**

*Pursuit of God* by A.W. Tozer

## **REMEMBER THIS**

"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus." Philippians 2:5

# Lesson 3 | Living morally in an immoral world

Written by Ron Seibel

*Study Text: 1 Corinthians 5 - 6*

<sup>15</sup> Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! <sup>18</sup> Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually sins against their own body.

<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 honor God with your body.

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

All of us live in bodies, and hopefully we value them and try to take the best care we can. God created them for His purposes and glory. When we sincerely place our trust in Jesus for salvation, we give our whole life to him, which includes our body. That means that we need to give special attention to how we use these bodies.

In our current culture, the human body seems to be, for many, a central focus of life. Health clubs are flourishing. All kinds of programs for exercise, weight loss, skin enhancement, hair treatments, plastic surgery and even things to stop aging are increasingly popular. Keeping fit is good Christian stewardship as much as managing our time and finances. Perpetual dangers to health are not exercising enough, eating too much junk food, not getting adequate rest and more. However, a much greater threat is engaging in sexual immorality. In 1 Corinthians 6:18, Paul admonishes us to “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually sins against their own body.” In Ephesians 5:29, he says, “No one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body.” So, engaging in sexual immorality is hatred for our own body.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTION**

1. In what ways does sexual immorality hurt not only ourselves, but also our relationships with God and others?

## *DEFINING IMMORALITY*

The word immorality appears 21 times in the New Testament. Defining immorality is increasingly difficult in our world that denies that there is any

such thing as right and wrong. For many, the best way to live is simply to follow one's natural instincts. Sex, like hunger and thirst, is simply one of several appetites or drives to be fulfilled as we choose. Therefore, sex within marriage, with another married person, with someone outside of a marriage relationship, or even same sex encounters are totally legitimate. Our culture tells us that it's your call or preference to make those kinds of decisions.

The word "immorality" in this context speaks of sexual sins in particular. Whatever the actual definition, Paul's opening words of 1 Corinthians 5 make it clear that it is something awful, worse than even what unbelievers and pagans do.

### DISCUSSION QUESTION

2. Why is extramarital sex wrong? What reasons can you think of in addition to quoting Bible verses or passages?

### PERSONAL ISSUES

Church discipline is usually quite risky, but doing nothing is also very risky. Referring to the first century church, Craig Blomberg, a biblical theologian, states, "The church's reaction to this affair was as bad or worse than the affair itself. Instead of grieving over sin in their midst, they were actually smug over their newfound, 'enlightened' tolerance as Christians."<sup>1</sup> When churches have deep problems of character, conduct or relationships, it is easy to act like everything is OK, try to ignore the problem, or play it down and hope it will go away.

Various authors suggest that one reason the Corinthians may have not been taking action was because of the status of this person in the community or the church. Perhaps he was a wealthy or prominent person, or even an elder

<sup>2</sup> Craig Blomberg (op.cit., p.105).

### DIGGING DEEPER

'Sexual immorality' translates from the Greek word *Porneia*, the most general of all terms for sexual sin. In 1 Corinthians 5, however, Paul is specifically addressing a matter of incest. This kind of incest was strictly forbidden in Jewish law (Leviticus 18:8). Despite the general moral laxity of the Greco-Roman world, this kind of incest remained one form of sexual sin that was relatively rare and widely condemned there too. *Porneia* is the source for the English word pornography, a vice that is pervasive in our society today and even among Christians.

Craig Blomberg, The NIV Application Commentary, Zondervan Publishing House, (1994), p.103-104.

in the church.

The action Paul urged upon them was to disfellowship this brother and “hand this man over to Satan” (1 Corinthians 5:5). This is a stern action, but the sinful behavior is reprehensible. It would seem that some attempt may have been made to admonish him but he persisted in his sinful lifestyle.

It is helpful to understand “hand over to Satan” in light of the church situation in those early years. In those days, there were not two, five or 20 churches in any given city — only one. So to be put out of the church was to be put out into the realm of Satan, “the world.” In today’s culture, it is easy for such a person to just leave and move over to another church that may be more tolerant of sin rather than face loving discipline that seeks to restore.

The intent for handing him over to Satan, as translated in the NIV, is “for the destruction of the flesh.” The action sounds very harsh. Destruction of the flesh may not necessarily mean that he would end up dying, but that he would come to his senses, repent and put to death the deeds of the sinful flesh, as Scripture call us all to do.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTION**

3. What is your attitude when you learn of immorality or other situations where individuals in the church are regularly involved in sinful behavior?

### **URGENCY**

Paul is insistent that drastic steps be taken quickly. The reason? “Don’t you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?” (1 Corinthians 5:6) Unchecked sin in our lives or in the church has a way of spreading its negative influence. It defiles everyone to some extent, and the church loses its ability to have a witness to the world that is ensnared by sin. In James 1:14-15 we read, “Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown gives birth to death.” We individually and as the church corporately always get hurt to some degree when we commit and tolerate sin.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTION**

4. How many persons living in sin does it take to destroy the witness and spiritual vitality of a church or Christian community (see Joshua 7)?

### *FOCAL ISSUE*

Another issue the apostle touches on briefly in 1 Corinthians 6 is that of believers taking fellow believers before secular courts to resolve differences. This, too, defies the ability to comprehend such behavior by those who will one day judge unbelievers and angels (verses 2-3). A focal issue that should affect all behavior in the body of Christ is to remember who we are, both individually and corporately. Who or what are we?

In 1 Corinthians 6:15, Paul expresses astonishment that they don't seem to remember their identity. "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?" Again in verse 19, "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?"

Over the years, there has been a general respect for a house of worship. Often parents have said to a child, "Don't run in church." It was common to wear special clothes called "Sunday clothes." In other religions, temples are entered with great reverence. Many will remove shoes, bow in reverence, wear headcoverings and offer prayers in great humility. In some parts of modern Christianity, church sanctuaries are no longer considered sacred space. Dress and conduct is often very casual. That same spirit can sometimes carry over into how some Christians view their bodies.

It is often said, "Nothing is sacred anymore." As much as the culture may change around us, one thing will continue to be as sacred as ever, and that is our bodies and the church body. Dragging fellow believers to court, engaging in sexual immorality, being proud or puffed up one above the other, taking communion with known sin in our lives, or maliciously denigrating another believer are all ways we desecrate God's temple.

While we should utilize a church facility in a respectful way, it is not the dwelling place of God. We, the people, are. The Corinthians had a variety of problems and sinful behaviors because they had lost sight of the sacred reality that their bodies, and they as a people, were the temple of the Holy Spirit, and they were members of Christ.

This should be a sobering thought whenever we think of participating in anything sinful. Again Paul says, "Shall I then take the members of Christ

and unite them with a prostitute? Never!” (verse 15). We do well to ask ourselves before we engage in any activity, “Is this something that Christ would be pleased to be engaged in with me? Will I be honoring the indwelling Spirit with my body?” (verse 20)

## **DISCUSSION QUESTION**

5. What are some things you take into consideration as to whether or not you, as a child of God and temple of the Holy Spirit, can participate in a particular activity? Consider activities such as attending movies, company party activities, casinos, entertainment venues, or taking a job that would require a compromise of morals, etc.

### *IN THE WORLD BUT NOT OF THE WORLD*

Jesus and the apostle Paul took a strong stand toward persons who persisted in sinful behaviors. Back in 1 Corinthians 5:9, Paul says, “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people” (also 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15). He quickly clarifies, “not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world” (verse 10).

You have heard it said that we believers are supposed to be in the world but not of the world. We reside here, but we are citizens of the heavenly kingdom and God’s temple. Our primary allegiance is to Christ, and our affections and actions should reflect that.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

6. Read 1 Corinthians 5:9-11. How can we, like Jesus, be friends of sinners but not be infected with their sinful language, behaviors, attitudes and values?

7. Paul has some amazing things to say in this letter about these believers who had so many spiritual, moral and relational problems. Read 1 Corinthians 1:2, 30 and 6:11. Jot down each astounding truth and then explain what you understand each one to mean.

All these things have been accomplished in us and for us by the Holy Spirit (who is mentioned 14 times in 1 Corinthians). In Galatians 5:24-25, God says through Paul, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” Begin each day by presenting your life and body to God. Trust Him to enable you to live in any context in a way that it will be evident you are a temple of the Holy Spirit.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

8. Sometimes believers are tempted and fall into sexual or other sin. This is not their pattern of life, but it is something that happens. What should that person do to settle that issue and move on with life in victory?

9. Most of us find it hard to openly admit a sinful action or word to a spouse, child, fellow believer or an assembly of believers. Why?

10. In the previous generation, it was common for those who had fallen into sexual sin to be required to come before the church and confess. 1 Timothy 5:19-20 says, “Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. But those elders who are sinning you are to reprove before everyone, so that others may take warning.” The church has occasionally applied this to more than just elders and pastors. What would you think of reinstating this practice?

11. Our church website states, “We are a community that is passionate about admitting our brokenness, boldly following Jesus, and impacting our world.” True confession of sin requires brokenness — not just feeling bad when you fell or were caught. What is your response when someone expresses brokenness? (Example: Cardboard testimonies)

## **REMEMBER THIS**

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” Psalm 139:23-24

# Lesson 4 | Marriage and Singleness

Written by Glenn Lygrisse

*Study Text: 1 Corinthians 7*

<sup>17</sup> ‘Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.

<sup>26</sup> Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for a man to remain as he is.

<sup>31</sup>...those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

This chapter is loaded with verses and comments that have been the epicenter of controversy, confusion and doctrinal division since early in church history. So, our brief exercise here will probably not answer all questions for all time. However, there are a few basic points we can learn from a careful look at this chapter.

To begin, note that Paul begins this chapter with the comment that he is responding to their inquiry; the folks there had some question or confusion and he is trying to respond to their questions. It would be helpful this side of history to have a copy of their questions to help us better understand the answers. Since we do not have that luxury, we are called to be more discerning on these interesting points of information. Note that in this chapter, Paul uses phrases 10 different times that indicate these statements are his opinion vs. God’s commandments. In two places (verses 26 and 40), he uses such terms as “I think” and “In my judgment.” The point here is that we need to be careful about being adamant about pulling out one verse or one phrase and making it a doctrinal statement.

It seems that there are at least two cogent points that qualify the many statements on marriage and singleness. One is verse 17, which admonishes us to live according to our calling. That “situation” to which the Lord has “assigned” us is broad and comprehensive in its scope of understanding. It seems to say that if God has called you to be married, then be the best married person you can be. If you are called to be single, then be the best single person you can be. If God has called you to be a teacher, then be the best teacher you can be. If God has called you to be \_\_\_\_\_ — you fill in the blank, but you get the idea. The point here is that if God calls you to be something, in some “situation,” then it is your responsibility to be that and,

with God's help, be that well.

And as a caveat to that, don't be whining that you want something else. Some of us are better being married, and some are better at being single. That is Paul's point — that each of us are called to different situations at different points in our life, so when we are called, it is important to be sensitive to that call for that season of our life.

It seems that verse 26 also underscores this concept. Paul is stating that his opinions are based on "the present crisis." This tells us that something else was going on; this was not Paul sitting down at his leisure and writing doctrine. We can speculate about what the crisis was, but we only have educated guesses. Many scholars feel that this related to the extreme pressure that was being placed on the church at the time. While it may not be a perfect analogy, we could ask ourselves, is it wise for two individuals to get married just prior to one being shipped out to the front lines on a dangerous military assignment? Maybe so, maybe no. But the point is, proceed with caution in whatever situation you find yourself.

One additional point is made in Paul's discussion that seems important. If you are single or married, be that for the right reasons. Don't change your status because of external pressures or because you think is it more holy one way or the other. Paul's case was unique. In recalling a discussion with an individual, a question was raised that Paul was "anti-woman" because of his statement "against marriage." But if you look at Paul's life, it seems that he had a high respect for women and, in his case, he knew his future well enough that he did not want to have a spouse go through the trials and tribulations he would face.

It seems that one other verse in this chapter could be added to our focal point verses, and that is verse 31. This verse has the content that transcends these particular issues. Take a re-read on this verse, and note that the key point contained within is that of priorities. While that word is not used, it is clear from reading the entire text of this chapter that establishing correct priorities is God's priority for our life and the key principle here.

### *DISCERNING MARITAL STATUS*

It is fair to assume that some utilizing this study are single (never married), some are single (widowed or divorced) and some are married. So what can we learn from this chapter? As you look at your particular status, are you where God wants you to be? If you are unmarried and would like to have a spouse, why? Is it for the right reasons? If you are married and contemplating divorce, is that really God's will?

Perhaps you are one of those whom God has called to be an example to others by living for God in your current life status. How can God use you to be a witness to others who are in that “debating” stage of changing their life status?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss as a group how you can best be a positive witness to others based on your current life status.
2. Discuss what pressures our culture places on us to change our life status regardless of what it is. Why? How do we deal with that?

### DIGGING DEEPER

Find a good Bible commentary and read the notes about this chapter. Also read the “Confession of Faith” for the MB churches. Note especially Article 2. A suggested commentary would be *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*. Also check with the church office for a copy of the MB “Confession of Faith.”

### STAYING FOCUSED

Don’t allow yourself to be trapped into a situation that is based on cultural pressure. That was one of the key issues of the Corinthian church in Paul’s time. That is also one of the key issues today. Does the church shape the culture, or does the culture shape the church? And by extension, does

the current culture shape my thinking, my action and my doctrine? Remember verse 31, to not be engrossed in the things of the world, “For this world in its present form is passing away.”

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

3. I know someone who is contemplating a divorce. What should my advice to them be? What if they tell you, “I think God wants me to get this divorce”?
4. I’m young and single. My parents want grandchildren and wonder why I have not found someone. What is my best response to them?

5. I am divorced. Should I remarry?

6. I am a widow/widower and I am lonely. How do I cope with those feelings?

7. How can I respond to those who believe, by their church doctrine, that certain specific church leaders are commanded to not marry (i.e., Catholic priests/nuns)?

8. How can I best respond to those critics who feel Paul was either anti-marriage or anti-women?

9. How has studying this chapter helped me better understand my role that God has for my life?

**REMEMBER THIS**

"Nevertheless, each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them." 1 Corinthians 7:17

# Lesson 5 | Gray Areas

Written by James Burkett

*Study Text: 1 Corinthians 8, 10:23-33*

## 1 Corinthians 8

<sup>1</sup> Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that “We all possess knowledge.” But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. <sup>2</sup> Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. <sup>3</sup> But whoever loves God is known by God. <sup>4</sup> So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that “An idol is nothing at all in the world” and that “There is no God but one.”

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

Map reading nowadays is a lost art. Most of us will use either our GPS units or cell phones to guide us where we want to go. The crazy part about getting directions from an electronic device is that it will usually present you with more than one route. Just to get from one point to another, you will be presented with multiple options: the shortest route, a longer but faster route, a scenic route and a route that avoids traffic. At some point in the advancement of technology, getting from point A to point B has become complicated. The days of “just go three miles, take a right and your destination is on the left” are a distant memory. Why can't everything be simple and easy to understand? Now, you have to calculate distance, time, speed and scenery in making a decision. A once black-and-white decision has become gray.

The church in Corinth didn't struggle with directions, but it did struggle with gray areas of the Bible. What are gray areas? These are areas where there is not a specific right or wrong position. Gray areas are not a matter of salvation or the truth of the Gospel. For the church at Corinth, it included areas where its old life and new life in Christ collided.

The city of Corinth was a major metropolitan area, thus making it a melting pot of several cultures. Some consider Corinth to be the third most important city in the Roman Empire only behind Rome and Alexandria. The landscape of the city itself was riddled with pagan temples. In these temples, they made animal sacrifices to false gods. A portion of this meat was then taken to the marketplace where it was sold. Anyone shopping in the market wouldn't necessarily know if the meat they bought was sacrificed or not. Believers knew all idols were meaningless, but there was still the question of the sacrificed meat. This was a gray area for early Christians. Over the course of this lesson, we are going to cover the topic of gray areas and how it impacts our faith today.

## MISSING THE MARK

Do not commit murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Honor your father and mother. Do not covet.

These are all really clear directives. Most believers do not sit around contemplating if they should commit murder. Hopefully, most believers do not go shopping for the sole purpose of stealing. However, there are areas in the Christian life that are not as clear. Can a Christian watch an R-rated movie? Is it OK to listen to hard rock-n-roll music? How casual can I dress for church? Is it OK for a Christian to drink alcohol? These are just a few of the questions some believers have today.

The church in Corinth dealt with meat sacrificed to idols. Some of the people probably sacrificed to these very idols the week prior to becoming a believer. They didn't want to support their old life, and yet they knew there was freedom in Christ. This meat was in abundance at the local market and typically sold for a cheaper price. Given the number of idols in Corinth, avoiding the meat at the market would be very challenging. What could it hurt to eat sacrificed meat since the idol was nothing but sticks and stones?

All of chapter 8 in 1 Corinthians deals with the singular issue of eating this meat. 1 Corinthians 8:1 reads, "Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that 'We all possess knowledge.' But knowledge puffs up while love builds up." This verse sets the basis for the rest of Paul's explanation.

The Christians in Corinth had knowledge of the one true God and knew the other idols were worthless. With this knowledge, they should have been able to freely eat whatever they wanted to. A group of believers in Corinth could have gone around letting everyone know that they have weekly BBQs with sacrificed meat and that they are just fine. But the use of their knowledge doesn't necessarily take into account love. Just because someone knows all the facts doesn't necessarily mean they make the right decision or that it will change their behavior. The love factor takes into account the spiritual maturity of other believers. Is eating this meat possibly worth the risk of damaging somebody else's relationship with God? Technically, believers were able to eat what they wanted, but they were missing the mark on Paul's intentions.

## DISCUSSION QUESTION

1. What is the difference between a believer acting only on knowledge or acting on knowledge and love?

## *PREFERENCE OR TRUTH*

Concerning the entire issue of sacrificial meat, Paul could have just referenced the letter the apostles sent to the churches in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. Jewish Christians from Antioch went to Jerusalem wanting the Apostles to make a decree requiring all Gentile believers be circumcised. This was their preference. The response they received didn't even address their original question. Acts 15:20 reads, "Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood."

The primary reason for this letter was to help build a relationship between the new Jewish Christians and new Gentile Christians. The message of the Gospel was recently extended to the Gentiles, but a lot of Jewish Christians had problems with accepting them. The Jews wanted the Gentiles to believe in the Gospel, along with adhering to circumcision and the Law of Moses. This would have put the entire Gospel message into a category of something that is earned and not a free gift. The apostles recognized this fact and sought to bring unity among the primary areas of division. Since this was written to new Christians, the topic of meat polluted by idols is addressed. The apostles wanted for these new believers to make a clear distinction between their new life in Christ and their old life of following idols. If this letter was meant to be applied to the church at Corinth, then Paul could have just cited it. He chose to address the issues with his own authority as an apostle.

This letter written to the churches in Acts does not carry directly over to the church in Corinth. Deciding what applies and what doesn't apply is still a hot topic today. There is a tendency to turn tradition into Biblical absolutes. There are gray areas for both individuals and the church as a whole. One tradition that churches deal with is the use of the church building. Is it OK to sell items within the church? Can food and drink be brought into the sanctuary?

What might be acceptable in one church may not be acceptable in another. When addressing these questions, one must keep in mind that early Christians met in homes and did not have church buildings. It wasn't until the time of the Roman emperor Constantine that Christians started building corporate areas of worship. Over time, the church building has become a sacred place instead of a corporate meeting area. When talking about the church, it is important to remember that Christ died for people, not a building.

Another topic deals with the area of worship. This can cover everything from music choice to appropriate clothing during services. Should churches stick with hymns or more-modern worship styles? Is it OK to use robotic colored

lights to enhance a worship experience? Some believers may find it more engaging with all these modern additions, while others find it distracting. The problem arises when believers start determining that one method is right while the other one is wrong. Paul's answer to these questions can be drawn from 1 Corinthians 9:19-23:

<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. <sup>20</sup> To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. <sup>21</sup> To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. <sup>23</sup> I do all this for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessings.

Paul was less worried about following tradition or adhering to a strict set of rules as he was about winning people to Christ. If Paul thought that robotic colored lights and rock music would win people to Christ, then he would be all in. If he determined that adhering to a traditional worship service would win people to Christ, then he would be all in with that, as well.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTION**

2. Discuss as a group some traditions of the church that have the potential to become roadblocks.

## *MAKING A DECISION*

As convenient as it would be, we cannot just ignore the topic of gray areas. Churches have the potential to divide over areas that have nothing to do with salvation. Whether it is drinking alcohol, watching R-rated movies or regarding the sanctuary as a sacred place, there are certain questions every believer needs to ask.

First, is it beneficial? 1 Corinthians 10:23-24 reads, "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. No one should seek their own good, but the good of others." The beneficial question can address the main point behind the activity. Just because you have the right to do something doesn't mean the answer is always "yes."

Second, will it hinder the spiritual growth of another believer? 1 Corinthians 8:7-9 reads, "But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are

still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak.” The spiritual maturity of other believers must be taken into account. Believers need to remember that it is OK to have differences of opinion. Just because someone believes differently regarding a gray area doesn’t make him or her any less of a Christian or any holier.

Third, is the decision made in love? Romans 13:10 reads, “Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.” Making decisions through the lens of love will help believers think of others and not just themselves.

Finally, will it glorify God? 1 Corinthians 10:31 reads, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” Gray areas have the potential to distract people from the ultimate purpose of bringing glory to God. These questions will not eliminate gray areas, but they can provide general principles for making decisions.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

3. Discuss as a group how you would define a gray area within the church.
4. What are some gray areas you have struggled with?
5. How can someone determine if the stance they are taking on a gray issue is a personal preference or biblical truth?
6. If two believers have very different opinions concerning a gray area, how should they resolve it?

7. Read 1 Corinthians 8:9 and 10:23. Why should a believer's freedom in Christ be restricted by another believer's spiritual maturity?

8. It can become easy to look at other Christians who don't hold the same viewpoint on some of the gray areas as not being as holy. How can believers safeguard themselves against this holier feeling?

9. Read Romans 14:5-9. What role does your conscience have in determining decisions you make concerning gray areas?

10. In what ways have church traditions over time become regarded as biblical absolutes? Although beneficial, how can some traditions hinder people in their relationship with Christ (i.e., dress code)?

11. Our personal preferences about church are highly affected by our upbringing and past history. How would you answer a new believer's questions concerning the topic of gray areas? What steps would you give them in helping them formulate their own opinions?

### **REMEMBER THIS**

"Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister." Romans 14:13

# Lesson 6 | Communion: A Sacred Meal

Written by Ron Seibel

*Study Text: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34*

<sup>17</sup> In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. <sup>18</sup> In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. <sup>19</sup> No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. <sup>20</sup> So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, <sup>21</sup> for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. <sup>22</sup> Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter!

<sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, <sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." <sup>25</sup> In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." <sup>26</sup> For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

<sup>27</sup> So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. <sup>29</sup> For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.

<sup>30</sup> That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. <sup>31</sup> But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under judgment. <sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

<sup>33</sup> So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together. <sup>34</sup> Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.

## *ORDAINED BY CHRIST*

In addition to all His teachings, there are two tangible acts that Jesus commanded His followers to observe after He departed. One is baptism in water. This is to take place at the beginning of the Christian life. It is an outward sign and public witness that we have passed from death to life and now belong to the people of God, which is Christ's body. This is a onetime act, an initiation into the Christian faith and family.

Just before His crucifixion, while sharing the Passover meal with His disciples, Jesus instituted what we commonly call the Lord's Supper, Communion or Eucharist (which means "to give thanks"). He instructed them to do this repeatedly. This was to be a recurring ordinance. He said, "Do this in remembrance of me." He knows how prone we are to forget even the most important things in life. Unfortunately, we need constant reminders of the awful price He paid to save us from sin and hell. Every time you partake, He said, "You proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). The bread and fruit of the vine symbolize His suffering and death to purchase our salvation and take away our sin.

It is important to remember that being baptized or participating in communion does not make a person a child of God. That comes by faith alone in Jesus.

### *TRADITION*

Something most Christians love to do is eat together. This was true with Israelites under the God-ordained Old Testament festivals. It was also a common practice in the church from the very beginning (Acts 2:46).

The very first communion was instituted by Jesus together with the Passover meal. Doing this with a meal was continued for some time in what was identified as a "love feast." The only use of this description in Scripture is found in Jude 12. But it appears to have been practiced widely, even in churches founded by Paul far from Jerusalem decades later. In one form or another, love feasts were practiced for several centuries, along with the Lord's Supper. Believers sharing communion has been observed by the church universally. It has become a sacred and significant tradition over the centuries.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTION**

1. How can we prevent this practice from being a mere tradition, but a dynamic experience each time, as well?

### *TWISTING TRADITION*

Communion in the early church seems to not be a brief ceremony tacked on at the end of a worship time; it was a special event of fellowship that included a meal which was followed by partaking of the Lord's Supper. Sharing a meal together in their house churches was to be a way for Christ

## **DIGGING DEEPER “NEW COVENANT”**

Jesus is referring to the ‘new covenant’ prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31. The idea of covenant dominates the Old Testament. The people entered into a covenant with the Lord (Exodus 24), and from then on they were God’s people. The prophecy of Jeremiah shows that this was not permanent, but that the old covenant in due time would be replaced by a new one, based on forgiveness of sins, and with the law of God written in the hearts of the people. Jesus is saying, then, that the shedding of His blood is the means of establishing the new covenant. It provides forgiveness of sins, and opens the way for the activity of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer.

Leon, Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids: Eerd-mans Publishing Co., 1963), p.161-162.

followers to express their unity as one body. At Corinth, however, the way they went about it came to be an occasion to foster division instead of unity.

At that time, each person brought food and they all ate their own meals. Some who came earlier ate without waiting for others to arrive. It also appears that the wealthier brought a lot and the poor maybe sat alone and ate their tiny lunch. They didn’t make this a potluck meal where sharing and eating together was at the core of the gathering. This got out of hand to the point that Paul castigates them, in essence saying that they are not really gathering to partake of the Lord’s Supper; rather they are gathering to feast and indulge the flesh. He said, “When you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper you eat, for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk” (verses 20-

22). What a travesty of something so sacred.

Some of these young believers had a lot of sinful practices to overcome. Overcoming a sinful lifestyle often takes time. It seems they carried a bit of their worldly revelry over into the assembly of the saints. It is a natural tendency of younger and older believers to take what is good and holy and neglect, abuse or distort it.

He then proceeds to reiterate what He had taught them in the past about the simplicity and significance of the Lord’s Supper as originally instituted by Christ. In Luke 22:20, He calls the cup “the new covenant in my blood.” In 1 Corinthians 11:26 Paul says, “Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

## DISCUSSION QUESTION

2. How would you elaborate on what you are proclaiming when taking communion? Flesh out this illustrated message a bit further.

### *WORTHY AND UNWORTHY PARTAKING*

Go back to the beginning and read 1 Corinthians 11:27 - 32. It is clear that taking communion is never to be a glib and thoughtless event. It is a serious act that has both wonderful positive benefits but can also have dire negative consequences. We are urged to be sure to not partake "in an unworthy manner" (verse 27). Verse 29 says, "For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves."

We all know that no one is perfect and sinless. We all come up short to one degree or another. So how can anyone be worthy to partake? A marvelous thing happens when we repent of our sin and receive Christ as Savior and Lord. "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). That being true, how may some be guilty of taking communion "in an unworthy manner"? Consider several things that Paul may have had in mind in the Corinthian context.

Back in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, he lists a variety of pagan practices so abhorred that those living that way cannot inherit God's kingdom. He said that some people did some of these things in their past but have been washed clean by Christ. These things are to be put behind us as we live life in Christ. So if some of them are still willfully, and maybe regularly, indulging the flesh but then come to the assembly and partake of the Lord's table, it is a grave affront to Christ, who came to destroy the works of the Devil.

Similarly, go back to 1 Corinthians 10:14-21. One of the abhorred practices in the list was idolatry. To offer sacrifices to an idol is not just a pagan act. "The sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons ... I do not want you to be participants with demons." That suggests also that partaking of the Lord's Supper is more than a religious act or ritual. It is participating in intimate fellowship with the Lord who bought us at a great price (1 Corinthians 6:19). "You cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons" (1 Corinthians 10:21).

In other words, you cannot go out and indulge in sinful practices, party and get drunk, engage in immorality, live together outside of marriage and participate in acts or entertainment inspired by demons and the prince of darkness, and then gather with the saints and partake from the Lord's table.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

3. If you try to eat from both tables, what may be some of the consequences (1 Corinthians 11:29-32)? Do you think anything like this has happened in our times?

4. Turn to Hebrews and read 10:26-31. What makes willful living in sin so serious and, on top of that, then coming to church and taking communion?

Paul states that we partake in an unworthy manner when we fail to “discern the body of Christ” (verse 29). This has been a difficult phrase for translators and commentators. To discern can also be translated to mean “to distinguish.” “The body of Christ” is not in all ancient manuscripts. Some think this to be a reference to the church, which is the Lord’s body. Others believe that it refers to the meaning of the crucified body of our Lord.

Two sobering truths are consistent with the overall context. 1) It is a grave offense before God to thoughtlessly partake of the elements as a mere ritual without giving serious thought to its meaning relative to our soul and life, and our relationships in the body of Christ. 2) It is a grave offense to fail to distinguish between an ordinary meal and this sacred meal, which includes a remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice to save our souls. “What does the Christian see as he sits at the Lord’s table? Just little pieces of broken wafers? Just some grape juice in a cup? If so, he should not partake. These emblems speak of His love to us, and our participation should speak of our love to Him.”<sup>1</sup>

Ponder what it must have been like for Jesus to have His body brutally broken over several hours of torture and His blood ooze from His body when whipped and then nailed to the cross for you. Then partake in awe, reverence and heartfelt thanksgiving.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul R. Van Gorder, *The Church Stands Corrected*, (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1976), p.108-109.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

5. When you examine your life and heart before you partake of the communion elements, what may be some sins you can overlook at the moment and maybe deal with later because they aren't that serious?

6. Identify some blessings, spiritual encouragements and nurture you receive when partaking of the Lord's Supper with a right heart and in all sincerity.

## **REMEMBER THIS**

"For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." 1 Corinthians 11:26

# Lesson 7 | Spiritual Gifts

Written by Glenn Lygrisse

*Study Text: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 28*

<sup>1</sup> Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.

<sup>4</sup> There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.

<sup>5</sup> There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.

<sup>7</sup> Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

<sup>11</sup> All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

Here is another one of those sections of Scripture that has created division and misunderstanding over the years. When we talk about spiritual gifts, there has been a tendency for some segments of Christendom to automatically think of speaking in tongues. This lesson provides us a platform to examine the concept of spiritual gifts and come to a conclusion that is accurate, rational and useful. So, with an open mind and heart, let's see what Scripture can teach us. Keep in mind all the while that there will still be differences of opinion as we are doing this lesson, so it is good to keep in mind the things learned in Lesson 1 on Unity.

Perhaps one of the more important verses in this section that should put our mind at ease is verse 1. Paul tells us "I do not want you to be uninformed." Some versions would read "ignorant." Now with that in mind, what follows is an attempt to put to rest some of those questions that the Corinthian church had some confusion about. So, the explanation that follows helps to address some of those specific questions and concerns. Let's see if we can pick up on a few of the main points and center in on those points and try to not get lost on a "rabbit trail."

Point one (verse 4): There are different kinds of gifts. This is key! We are not all the same and God does not intend for us all to be the same. Can you imagine a church composed of only those with the gift of teaching? You would need a lot of small classrooms! What if everyone had the gift of administration? Now that would be a challenge to moderate that group! You get the point. However, allow me to make a caveat point here: There are some things all Christians are expected to do — pray, study the Word, etc. These are not "gifts," per se; they are the basic expectations and responsibilities of every believer, so let us not allow ourselves to get caught up in that debate.

Point two (verse 4): It is the Holy Spirit that gives us each and separately those gifts. The Holy Spirit is the gift-giver. There is not a process of us “learning” the gift; they are God-given. We have to separate out talents and abilities from spiritual gifts. While it may be accurate for us to say that spiritual gifts follow along the line of our natural abilities, they are not necessarily the same thing. You may know someone who has the talent to play basketball, but it would probably be a fallacy to suggest that it is a spiritual gift. However, I think it is true that God may use that talent to put a person in a position to utilize the gift of evangelism, compassion, etc.

Point three (verse 5): There are different kinds of service. We know this intuitively, but sometimes we live like we should all do the same things. It is good we don't, for if we were all ushers, who would we seat? It is imperative that we not involve ourselves in criticism of those who do not do things as we do. It seems by implication that this means not only are there different kinds of service, but also different styles of service.

Point four (verses 5 and 11): Spiritual gifts come from God. Many people can tell of times when they just knew they were empowered by God. They did things, said things or endured things that were not in their human nature. An example might be those involved in teaching when they were able to recall Scripture, answer questions and explain things that are really beyond them. If you have sat under the teaching of such an individual, you truly know it is a gift from God.

Point five (verse 7): Perhaps the most cogent point of all: “Now to each one...” Note, EACH ONE! This tells us that everyone one has a spiritual gift. Many people languish under the misconception that they do not have a spiritual gift. Generally, that is because they don't feel they have the gift of preaching or teaching. We should not consider ourselves less Christian if we do not possess those public gifts. They are not to be desired, because as we observe in our culture, as in others, it can lead to egotism and lead themselves and others astray. The key is the point made by the example in verses 12-27 of this chapter: how it all fits together like a body. This is a very practical metaphor and one that helps us understand that while we can function without every part in perfect condition, it sure makes things easier when each part is doing its function in harmony with others.

### *DEFINING SPIRITUAL GIFTS*

How do you define spiritual gifts? We tend to mix the terms with talent or skill, but there is a difference. Leaning on the definition given by Dr. Wayne Grudem, “A spiritual gift is any ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church. This broad definition includes both gifts that are related to natural abilities and gifts that seem to me more

‘miraculous’ and less related to natural abilities.”<sup>1</sup>

Another question we may have: “What is my personal spiritual gift?” There are many good resources to help us discern our personal spiritual gift. However, for the sake of this study, suffice it to say that they may fit into two broad categories. The first is, as suggested above, those that fall along with our “natural” abilities, such as teaching, showing mercy and hospitality. The second category would be those things that fall outside our natural skill set. These may include prophecy or healing. This second category is not something to be exploited, but neither is it something to be shunned.

### *STAYING FOCUSED*

If we have no other takeaways, these two things would be: 1) Every person has a spiritual gift. 2) Every person is to use that spiritual gift in the ministry of the church. The gift may change due to need, maturity or circumstances. All one has to do is look at the early church in the book of Acts to see that concept. We should also be careful to not compare our gifts with someone else’s. Remember from verse 5: The same Holy Spirit gives to everyone, so understand that your spiritual gift is tailor-made by God — just for you!

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Have you ever been affirmed for some of the things you do in church/Christian groups? If so, do you consider that your spiritual gift?
2. How can you be of help to others in discerning their spiritual gifts?
3. Do you feel you possess a spiritual gift that is not being utilized? Why?
4. Have you ever felt like you either don’t have any spiritual gifts, or don’t know what they are? If so, are you willing to involve yourself in discovering those gifts?

### **FURTHER STUDY**

Take time to read Romans 12:6-8, Ephesians 4:11 and 1 Peter 4:11. Take time to re-read 1 Corinthians 7:7; 12:8-10, 28. All of these verses broaden our scope of spiritual gifts. Gain additional insight by performing an

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994). p. 1016

Old Testament search regarding the Holy Spirit.

**REMEMBER THIS**

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.”  
1 Peter 4:10

**DIGGING DEEPER**

Consider becoming involved in a study, either as a group or on your own, to discover your spiritual gifts. There are many good tools to do this. Consult the church library to discover one or more of those tools.

You may wish to read Chapters 52 and 53 from Dr. Wayne Grudem’s book, *Systematic Theology*. This book offers great insight not only into spiritual gifts, but to all matters doctrinal.

Also consider going to the National MB website and looking up the Confession of Faith when it comes to spiritual gifts in Article 6. Learn what our denomination teaches about spiritual gifts.

# Lesson 8 | Love

Written by James Burkett

*Study Text: 1 Corinthians 13*

<sup>1</sup> If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. <sup>4</sup> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup> It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup> Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. <sup>8</sup> Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. <sup>9</sup> For we know in part and we prophesy in part, <sup>10</sup> but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. <sup>12</sup> For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. <sup>13</sup> And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

Everyone likes a good love story — a story in which true love prevails and all the obstacles in its way crumble. A warm feeling rises up within us when we see love triumph. Unfortunately, these stories occur more in the realm of fantasy than reality. Why? Because in our society, we have taken the word “love” and stripped it of its original meaning. No longer is love reserved for describing the most precious of feelings. Someone can say now that they love the color of their socks. A lot of people will use the word love when describing their favorite sports team. And who doesn’t love a good bowl of ice cream?

When a word is thrown around and can be used in almost every conceivable scenario, it loses its meaning. Imagine for a moment a young man telling the girl of his dreams that he loves her for the first time. After that special, heart-touching moment, he hears a song on the radio and immediately pronounces his love for the song, as well. Maybe society should be less concerned with defining love and spend more time reviving forgotten words, such as “like” and “prefer.” Wouldn’t it be better to hear someone say, “I prefer blue socks” than “I love blue socks”?

Throughout the course of this lesson, we are going to define what love is and what love is not. One of the most quoted chapters in the Bible deals with the subject of love: 1 Corinthians 13. There are different types of love. The two main types of love mentioned in the Bible are taken from the Greek words *agape* and *phileo*. *Agape* is used to describe the love that God has for humanity. *Phileo* is used to describe the affection one person has toward another. The Apostle Paul uses the perfect *agape* love throughout the entire chapter. God's love should be set before us as an example of perfect love. As we go through this lesson, we can recognize areas in each of our lives where we need to work on showing and receiving love.

## NOTHING COMPARES

Just like any area of life, if you are going to strive to be like something, it needs to be the best. You don't want to pattern your life after someone who consistently messes up every opportunity he or she has been given. You also don't want to model your life after someone who is angry or impatient all the time.

Who is our model for love? The obvious answer to this question is Jesus. Although we know that this is true, our perception of perfect love is marred by bad life experiences. Unfortunately, there are a lot of other less-than-desirable examples of love in our lives. Nobody express or receives love perfectly. Your perception of love can be easily marred by your experiences with friends or family.

Your heart can be completely hardened by a lifetime of receiving poorly expressed love or no love at all. The only way to get past the hurt associated with "bad love" is to look to the perfect example of God's love.

Bad experiences with love do not change God's perfect love, just your perception of it. If the relationship examples you experienced were either disconnected or angry, then this could ultimately affect how you see God. You might perceive Him to be an aloof, strict disciplinarian who cares for little involvement in your life. Perceptions of God are different for everyone. It is

## DIGGING DEEPER

It was Jonathan Swift, the satirical author of *Gulliver's Travels*, who said, "We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another." Spiritual gifts, no matter how exciting and wonderful, are useless and even destructive if they are not ministered in love. In all three of the "body" passages in Paul's letters, there is an emphasis on love. The main evidence of maturity in the Christian life is a growing love for God and for God's people, as well as a love for lost souls. It has well been said that love is the "circulatory system" of the body of Christ.

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 610). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

different for the child who was abandoned by his parents; the person who was physically or emotionally abused; the young lady who, through no choice of her own, finds herself working the streets; the kid down the street who is provided with everything he ever wanted but at the price of never seeing his dad. All these experiences can affect how we receive or even understand God's love.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTION**

1. In what ways can bad experiences with love hurt someone's relationship with God?

This singular topic of love is often the most difficult for people to talk about. It is one of the strongest human emotions, which can either invoke memories of joy and happiness or has the potential to drag you down into a pit of depression and anger.

Paul spends the entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 13 defining love, not through the lens of human experiences but by making comparisons of the way love was meant to be. The first comparison the Apostle Paul makes is that it is better to have love than to speak in the tongues of men and angels. Being able to speak multiple languages is a tremendous gift that not many Americans possess. Paul places love above the ability to speak. To speak in the earthly languages of men or the heavenly language of angels is meaningless without love. These tongues would sound like a resounding gong or clanging cymbal — basically, an empty noise without love. This comparison is very true in our lives. We tend to turn people off when we speak with a harsh or unloving tone. Paul is reminding us that the sound of silence is better than speaking without love.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTION**

2. How can someone know if they are speaking with or without love?

Paul goes on to say that the gift of prophecy and the knowledge to fathom all mysteries are meaningless without love. God is the only one in all creation that can possibly fathom all mysteries. Wouldn't it be great to be able to know all mysteries — to know everything about how everything works? Paul says this gift is completely meaningless without love. Knowledge has value, but love is priceless.

The next comparison Paul makes is between love and faith. Matthew 17:20 reads, “Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” Even the faith to move mountains is meaningless without love. Giving everything you have to the poor is meaningless without love.

## *LOVE DEFINED*

After describing everything that love is not, Paul spends verses 4-7 describing what love is. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 reads, “<sup>4</sup> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup> It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup> Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

Reading this passage of Scripture can be overwhelming to the point of discouragement. It is such an idealistic picture of love set to be lived out in a world filled with love of self. On any given day, a quick read of the news headlines could dispel any picture of love. This is why Paul wrote in his letter to the church in Rome in Romans 12:2, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The word “mind” in this passage can be translated as “soul,” “spirit” or “heart.” It is often difficult to make the distinction in the translation since everyone has a soul, mind and heart. The only way for Paul’s definition of love to be lived out is if Christians do not conform to the pattern of the world. As you try to live out God’s love, do your best to not get overwhelmed by all the examples of “bad love” within the world.

Finding ways to express love has often been a difficult task for the Christian community. Too often, believers can fall into the trap that telling people what not to do is the best way to express love. Believers can stand on the street corner and hold up an anti-abortion sign but not take the time to express love to a young woman who doesn’t see any other choice in front of her. Love is a messy thing. It takes time, energy, effort and vulnerability to express it. Instead of driving by the strip club and thinking, “How could anyone ever want to work there?” maybe you could creatively think of ways to minister to the people inside. Instead of using break times to talk bad about a boss or co-workers, maybe you could figure out a way to invest in their lives.

It is often fear that holds believers back from loving one another. Fear of rejection. Fear of ridicule. Fear of offering forgiveness. Fear and perfect love cannot coexist. This is one of the reasons Paul made the statement, “Love keeps no record of wrongs.” This single concept goes against the idea of keeping a relationship scorecard. It means letting go of the hurt and figuring

## DIGGING DEEPER

First-century mirrors had polished metal surfaces. The best of them distorted the image of the person looking into them, offering only a “poor reflection” of reality. Similarly the gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge, as vital as they may be, can offer only an imperfect image of the spiritual realities they represent. Let’s appreciate spiritual gifts and their contributions. But remember that our religion is anchored in faith, hope and love. And that “the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Richards, L. O. (1991). *The Bible reader’s companion* (electronic ed., p. 769). Wheaton: Victor Books.

out how to express fearless love. The problem is that nobody wants to completely forget all the wrongs that have been done to him or her. Keeping no records of wrongs means you won’t be able to justify your own expression of “bad love” if you don’t keep track of other people’s mistakes.

## DISCUSSION QUESTION

3. Discuss some ways Christians can express love to those in need.

## COMPLETENESS

Paul spends this last section in the chapter setting priorities between spiritual gifts and love. Interpreting the use and demonstration of the spiritual gifts has been a challenge for the Christian community. This passage of Scripture is not meant to explain in depth the use of spiritual gifts. Paul is merely making a comparison between the use of spiritual gifts and the more perfect demonstration of love. A believer may have the gift of generosity and seek every opportunity to help those in need, but if it is done without love, it is meaningless. A preacher may have incredible insight into the Scriptures and be able to deliver an incredible Gospel message, but if it is done without love, it is meaningless. Paul uses these points of comparison to make his point that love is the greatest gift above everything else.

Throughout the entire book of 1 Corinthians, Paul makes several references to the Corinthian church being like spiritual children. In 1 Corinthians 3:1 Paul writes, “I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly.” Again in 1 Corinthians 14:20, Paul writes, “Stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults.” This may seem like a strange point for Paul to be making to the church, but he is focusing on it because it is easy for believers to get their priorities out of order. Sometimes, believers can place a higher emphasis

on those who express their spiritual gifts in a charismatic way than on those who express their gifts with love. This is like watching a whole show about love without figuring out how to demonstrate it in your own life. Paul is challenging the church to grow up and to know that out of faith, hope and love, the greatest of the three is love.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

4. Who in your life do you consider to be a really loving person? Why? How are their actions defined by love?

5. How have your life experiences affected the way you receive God's love? In what ways has it affected how you demonstrate love to others?

6. Read Matthew 5:44. Why does God require believers to love their enemies and those who persecute them?

7. Read Romans 12:9-21. How does this passage describe sincere love? Discuss how you would describe sincere love to someone who does not believe in Christ.

8. Read 1 John 4:18. In what ways do fear and love conflict with one another?

9. Paul describes the importance of love throughout the entire passage of 1 Corinthians 13. What are some practical ways in which believers can demonstrate this love to those around them?

10. How can someone try to heal either emotionally, spiritually or physically from a “bad love” experience? In what practical ways can the church be a part of that process?

11. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. What do you feel and think when you read about what love is supposed to look like?

12. Think of someone whom you struggle demonstrating love toward. Discuss as a group some practical ways that you can show love to the hard-to-love.

## **FURTHER STUDY**

*Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman

## **REMEMBER THIS**

“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”

1 John 4:18



# Lesson 9 | Worship

Written by Matt Ehresman and Kim Bontrager

*Study Text: 1 Corinthians 14*

<sup>26</sup> What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.

<sup>33</sup> For God is not a God of disorder but of peace — as in all the congregations of the Lord's people.

<sup>40</sup> But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

## *DISORDER VS. PEACE*

I wish I could have attended a church service in first century Corinth. To be frank, it sounds like complete chaos! Listen to these warnings and instructions from Paul:

<sup>9</sup> Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air.

<sup>16</sup> How can someone else, who is now put in the position of an inquirer, say “Amen” to your thanksgiving, since they do not know what you are saying?

<sup>27</sup> If anyone speaks in a tongue, two — or at the most three — should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret.

<sup>29</sup> Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said.

<sup>30</sup> And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop.

Read those descriptions again and try to picture what a typical church service in Corinth must have looked like — perhaps a large group of people all trying to speak at the same time. Some were speaking in tongues and languages that no one else could understand. Even if you could understand the speaker, apparently they weren't very good at taking turns. The teachers kept interrupting each other, and seemingly everyone had a specific song or hymn they wanted to sing.

Just reading these words makes me exhausted!

In verse 23, Paul asks the Corinthians to imagine how an outsider would respond if he or she happened to visit their church that day. Understandably so, he predicts that the newcomer would accuse them of being out of their minds. How could someone possibly learn about Jesus in such a noisy and messy atmosphere?

For a moment, let's put aside the issue of speaking in tongues. However you feel about that (or really, any potentially controversial issue), Paul reminds us that the end goal of a church service should be the building up of Christ's church (see verses 5 and 26). He seems to contrast the craziness of this church get-together with the character of God, which he describes as peaceful (verse 33).

### **DISCUSSION QUESTION**

1) How would you describe the atmosphere at your church to a friend who may want to visit? What areas do you think we need to improve on?

### **PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

In our modern church context today, this amount of disorganization sounds absurd. If you invite a friend to join you at First MB for a Sunday service, you hopefully won't experience this level of crazy disruption. However, for these Corinthians, it took an outside observer (Paul) to help them realize how silly they were being. As one of my college professors was fond of saying, humans are often "blind to our own blindness." It is difficult for us to spot our own problems or shortcomings, but it is easy for us to point out inconsistencies or mistakes in those close to us (see Matthew 7:3).

Our specific church culture and tradition does not regularly encounter people who speak in tongues. However, there are many other issues that seem to divide us and cause unnecessary stumbling blocks that may distract us from the real issues that are crucial to "the building up of the church." In today's world, many Christians debate about the style of music that is appropriate for a church setting. Or maybe it's the use of media, wardrobe choices or whether it's acceptable to read Scripture on a smart phone or tablet.

Any of these issues (and a host of others) could bring up strong opinions about what is and is not appropriate behavior for a church service designed

to honor God and build His kingdom. Before rushing to any sort of conclusion, it is important for us to remember the theme of this study and this letter from Paul. As believers, we are called to love and respect each other and strive toward an atmosphere of unified community.

As Pastor Brent often says, none of us are wrong on purpose. An individual's preference to be more conservative and honor Christian traditions typically comes from a desire to give God the proper honor and respect He deserves. Some people feel that certain musical instruments or media elements distract and take away from the underlying message of a song or sermon. At the same time, others may find this kind of variety and creativity to be helpful as they worship. Still others may point out that modern music styles and the use of media can help newcomers feel more comfortable while expressing the same Christian truths in a more culturally relevant manner.

When you take time to consider the rationale behind the preferences (instead of attacking the individuals who have them), it becomes harder to argue with varying opinions, doesn't it? Of course we wouldn't intentionally build a service that dishonors God, and we don't want newcomers to think we've lost our minds like the believers in Corinth.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTION**

2) Think of a time when you disagreed with someone about his or her preferences in a worship setting. Were you attacking the individual, or did you take time to think about the rationale behind their thinking?

## *DEFINING WORSHIP*

Perhaps at this point, it would be helpful to look at a few examples of worship found in Scripture. In its earliest form, worship was expressed through acts of obedience and sacrifice. This was true in primitive cultures, regardless of who or what was being worshipped. The very first time the word "worship" is included in the Bible is in Genesis 22:5 when Abraham is literally seconds away from killing his own son in an act of obedience to God. That level of deep sacrifice was the first time we're introduced to the word "worship" in Scripture.

As we read further into the story of God and God's people, we find the expression of worship growing beyond just these acts of sacrifice. In Exodus 15, after God clearly saves His people through massive miracles, the people

sing a song of praise to Him.

The character of the Bible that most of us think about in regards to worship is probably King David, who penned the Psalms and is known as the man after God's own heart. Throughout his writing, we see that sometimes David praised God in really great circumstances, and sometimes he was quite miserable and angry with God. In 2 Samuel 12, David begins to worship God shortly after the tragic death of his infant child.

In the New Testament, we read about the environment of corporate worship created within newly forming churches, and we find stories about meaningful, intimate moments of worship (Luke 10:38-42). The instruction about what worship is becomes personal in Romans 12, where we're told to offer our bodies as sacrifices as our "true and proper" offering of worship.

That is a pretty wide spectrum of situations and definitions. While we may have varying definitions and understandings of the word "worship," we can all agree that God is most concerned with our heart. When we worship, are we willing to make incredible sacrifices like Abraham? Are we willing to sing praise to God both in great and horrible times like David? Are we speaking loudly out of turn in a way that is distracting and confusing to outsiders, or are we committed to being a church that focuses on truth that makes sense to outsiders? To me, those questions are much more important than arguing about a specific instrument, clothing style or cultural preference.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTION**

3) Remember the stories of Abraham and David and their responses of worship. Think back to a time in your life that was particularly difficult or painful. How could you have worshipped God in that moment?

### **CONCLUSION**

The verse mentioned above from Romans 12 instructs us to offer our lives to God as an act of worship. We're not asked to give one hour a week in a specific building, and we're not asked to devote one specific genre of music. Our weekly worship services should definitely be focused on God and designed in a way that makes it easy for people to connect with God, but it's also important for us to remember that God cares about and is present in every area of our lives. We should view every act of our lives through a filter of worship, with the end goal of bringing honor to God and spreading his fame in a "fitting and orderly way."

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

4) Has there ever been a time when you felt particularly close to God when you weren't in a church service? Would you define that moment as "worship"?

5) How and when do you typically read your Bible and pray? Are there other ways or other locations you could try that may lead to a deeper time of worship?

6) What styles of worship do you prefer? Contemporary or more traditional? Think about the pros and cons of both styles, and consider attending a service that is different from your typical preference.

## **REMEMBER THIS**

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship." Romans 12:1









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