

WE WANT TO CHANGE

The Book of 1 Corinthians (Part 1)



1 CORINTHIANS | WE WANT CHANGE

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INTRODUCTION TO 1ST CORINTHIANS

THE HISTORY OF CORINTH

The city of Corinth is located on an Isthmus, a narrow neck of land (only four miles across) in Greece with a harbor on each side. Its location made it a major center for international trade. Lying at the crossroads of such important trade routes had its benefits and led to the city being known as, “wealthy Corinth”. The city originally began as an ancient Greek city-state. During the 2nd century, when Rome sought to conquer Greece, Corinth was the leader of the opposition. Not able to stand against the Romans, the city fell in 146BC and lay in ruins for nearly 100 years. Its strategic location for defense and commerce led Julius Caesar to rebuilt Corinth in 44BC. It was reestablished as a Roman Colony named Corinth, settled chiefly by and for Roman veterans.

Roman rule brought order, and order attracted many immigrants, adventurers, and entrepreneurs. Order, geography, diversity, and opportunity were the perfect recipe to produce a competitive city booming with business and affluence. The city’s population quickly soared, reaching upwards of a half a million people; positioning it as a major cultural center for the Greco-Roman world. Moreover, tourists flocked to Corinth for the biennial Isthmian games. These ancient games had continued to take place for hundreds of years, even after the city had been destroyed. Second only to the Olympics, this athletic festival brought in the greatest athletes, spectators, and consumers from across the world. Corinth became one the most popular and prosperous cities in all of Rome. The rapid rate of growth, however, hindered the development of an aristocracy, any sense of tradition, or even healthy citizens. In time, this resulted in a culture devoted to self-indulgence, self-promotion, and self-reliance.

THE PLANTER OF CORINTH: *Paul the Apostle*

Paul the Apostle planted the church in Corinth. We are first introduced in the traveling to a city called Damascus, hell-bent on imprisoning and executing Christians. With every zealous step he unwittingly walked closer to a face-to-face encounter with the one true God he thought he was serving. Without warning, Saul is kicked off of his horse because of a blinding, a heavenly voice, and finally a powerful name...Jesus. It was on the Road to Damascus that Saul the Persecutor of Jesus became Paul, the Apostle of Jesus; from Christian murderer to Christian martyr.

After his powerful encounter with Jesus, Paul spends the next several years maturing in his new faith and serving the church. In Acts 13, the Holy Spirit calls Paul to a new mission and the church at Antioch commissions him to preach the gospel and plant churches. The book of Acts records Paul's three missionary journeys over 13 years. Paul came to the city of Corinth on his second missionary journey, recorded in Acts 18:1-21. His strategy on his missions was to plant churches, particularly in major urban centers. Through these cultural hubs, the gospel would organically spread to the entire Roman world. Paul initially came to Corinth alone and remained in the city almost two years. During that time, Paul befriended Aquila and Priscilla, also believing Jewish tent-makers and solid biblical teachers, who had been forced out of Rome in A.D. 49 by Claudius' edict against any Jewish rites or rituals.

He began his mission in Corinth by teaching in the synagogue until the Jews rejected him and kicked him out. It was at this time that Paul shifted his missionary energies to reaching the Gentiles. He remained in Corinth but moved his worship gathering to the home of a man named Justus living next door to the synagogue. Paul had his first converts and the church was born. In time, many Corinthians believed including the very leader of the synagogue and a few other influential city leaders.

THE LETTER(S) OF CORINTH

After 18 months, Paul left Corinth and traveled to Ephesus with Priscilla and Aquila. He left his companions there to help strengthen the disciples and returned to Antioch. Eventually, after visiting several other cities, Paul returned to Ephesus where he spent stayed for two years teaching in the Hall of Tyrannus. While in Ephesus, Paul receives two reports about Corinth, one in the form of an oral report about the Corinthians, and the other a letter from the Corinthians. "Chloe's people" (1Cor. 1.11) arrives to report about serious problems in the church. The church in Corinth writes to ask specific questions about complex and even sensitive issues. 1Corinthians is his response to what he has heard and read. The letter was written near the end of his time at Ephesus, and sent by way of a young pastor named Timothy.

It should be noted that, while our New Testament "officially" contains two letters to the Corinthian church, a careful reading of these two letters reveal that there were probably a total of four written by Paul. In addition to the two letters we have in our New Testament, Paul references a "Previous" letter (1Cor. 5.9) and a "Severe" letter (2Corinthians 6.14). Some scholars believe that two of the four letters are lost, while others argue that they are in fact contained with, or attached to, 1 and 2 Corinthians. A proposed historical time line for Paul's interaction with the Corinthians, whether in person or through letters, is as follows:

1. Paul preaches the gospel in Corinth during his 2nd Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36-18:22). Paul stays for 18 months building the church.
2. Paul leaves for Ephesus and hears news of issues in the church. He writes the "Previous Letter", mentioned in 1Cor. 5.9, which may be contained in 2Corinthians 6.14-7.1 (or does not exist).
3. After the Arrival of Chloe's people, and letter of response to Paul from Corinth, Paul writes 1Corinthians in reply, sent by way of Timothy.

4. Situations grow worse and, at some point, Paul pays personal “painful visit” to confront them which is a complete failure.
5. Having left some unresolved issues, Paul writes the “Severe letter referenced” in 2Corinthians. This is possibly contained as the end of 2Corinthians, chapters 10-13 (or does not exist).
6. Paul sets out to meet Titus before any response is heard. Meets him in Macedonia, learns that his tearful letter was received well. Paul is elated as he had been concerned, fearing it might hurt the Corinthians unnecessarily.
7. Finally, he writes 2Corinthians (possibly only chapters 1-9) which many call the letter of “Reconciliation”.

THE CULTURE AND CHURCH IN CORINTH

As stated, the letter we know as 1Corinthians is Paul’s response to a disturbing report. And while he intends to answer many of the complex questions contained in the Corinthian letter he received, he is more concerned about the verbal report of the conduct of the Christians living in Corinth. From all signs, the “church was not in Corinth as much as Corinth was in the church.” Instead of wisely going out into culture as the family of God, they are foolishly bringing the culture into their church family. And it is changing them—their relationship with God, themselves, and one another. Like the ambitious Romans fighting for power and prosperity in their city, self-absorbed Christians have begun to compete with one another for prominence in the church. They have abandoned the cross and allowed the world to become central to their identity both individually and collectively.

This has led to a church that is divided. A young city with opportunity for great wealth attracted a myriad of diverse people who were out for themselves—they were very self-centered. The Corinthians citizens considered themselves individually, and corporately, to be the center of the Roman universe. This

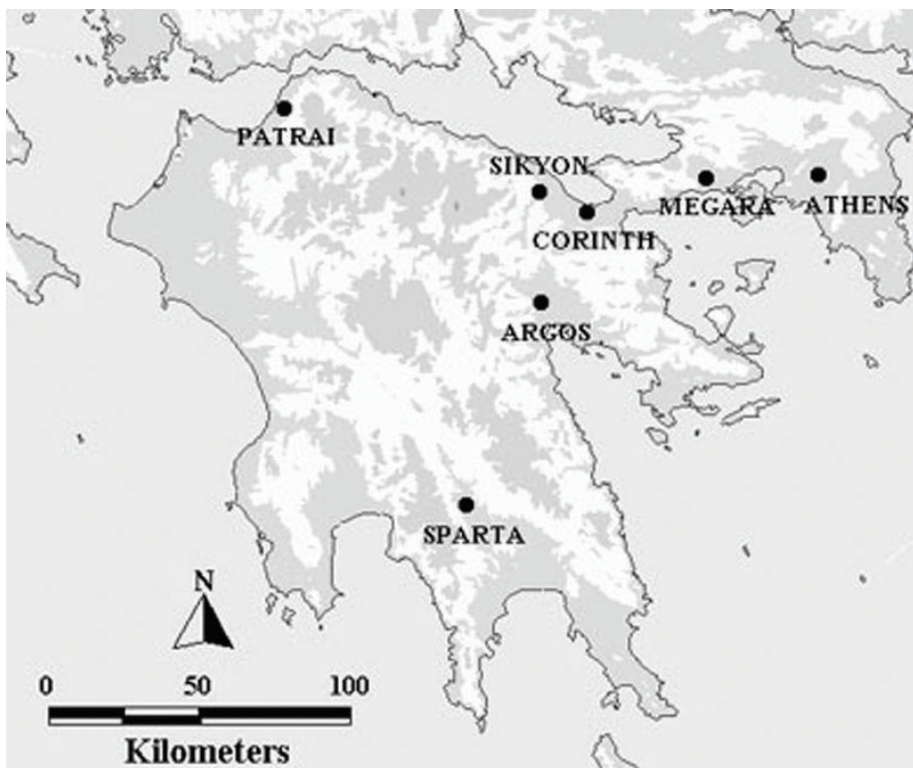
led to the Corinthian church believing they were the cream of the crop spiritually. Everyone ended up being as competitive in life as they were in their athletics, and their drive to “get ahead” negatively impacted every relationship they had. Their devotion to “winning,” and admiration for those who “won,” made for a prideful people who exploited people and institutions for personal gain. Everyone (even the church at this point) wanted little to do with a Savior who by all earthly measures, served and lost. Success was measured by popularity, power, and prosperity; gospel values like humility, weakness, and sacrifice were all despised. In turn, this made them very self-reliant and less dependent upon one another.

Their extreme narcissism leads to a church full of Christians more immoral than their pagan neighbors. Their culture already had a renowned reputation for self-indulgent living. Unrestrained, they freely sought to satisfy every pleasure, resulting in rampant immorality, drunkenness, and sexual promiscuity. The city was built under the shadow the great temple of Aphrodite. Each evening, a thousand sacred prostitutes would descend upon the city to offer their services. In time, the name of city became an international byword for evil living and sexual perversion. “Living like the Corinthians” back then was like “Keeping up with the Kardashians” today—it became synonymous with hard partying and loose living.

Finally, the Corinthians developed a reputation for self-promotion. Every part of their lives, from material wealth to spiritual ‘knowledge’, even eating and drinking, became a tool through which they made much of themselves to gain the approval of men. The appearance of wisdom and persuasive rhetoric became the determiner of value. Proving one’s superiority in a relationship became more important than the relationship itself. Much like the superficial culture created by today’s Social Media, one committed to gaining “followers”, being “liked”, or going “viral”, pretense reigned. Being forced to “keep up appearances, fostered an environment of performance, antagonism, intimidation, and depression. Perhaps this explains why Paul says he came to Corinth with “*fear and trembling*.”

There is much to change in Corinth. And while Paul is very practical in his letter, his hope for change rests with the power

of the gospel. Paul does not want them to stop engaging in the world or run from it, rather, he wants them to stop thinking and acting like the world as they live in it. In simple, direct, and at times severe words, he calls for them to reject the words of the world and return to the Word of the cross. He calls for them to abandon their love for the world, and to renew their love for Christ. He calls them to stop their competitive fighting like the world, and live as the one fellowship they are called to be in Christ Jesus.



CALLED: to be Saints (1.1-3)

Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes, To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This book is a letter to one of the first century churches: the church in Corinth. As Paul begins his letter to them, he establishes a few ground rules for the discussion (one-sided) that he is about to have with them. The first thing that Paul clarifies is his authority. He identifies himself by the calling of God on his life: to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. The second detail he adds is to whom he is writing. It is the church, but more

To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

specifically, it is those sanctified in Christ Jesus. Their identity is not in their own work but in that of Jesus. Third, Paul makes it clear that there is a purpose to their gathering together. They are not to create their own idea of what it means to belong to God, they are called to be saints. The rest of this study will be Paul fleshing out what it means to be a saint, united as a church, as a servant of Jesus Christ. His description is just as true for us today as it was for a small gathering in Corinth 2000 years ago.

KEY VERSE

To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (2)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. Who is this letter written to?

2. How does the fact that this was written to a specific church 2000 years ago affect our reading of it?

3. What does Paul's verb usage (called, sanctified) infer about his view about God's work vs. our work?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. How should we understand the word 'calling?' Who are they called by? What are they called to?

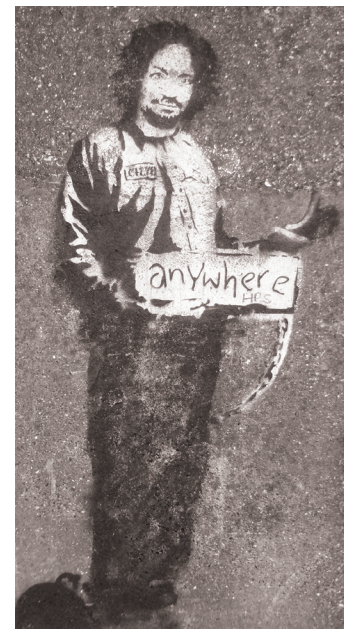
5. Paul assumes that these people united as the church will share a common goal. How does his assumption mesh with the current obsession with relativity?

WHAT DO I DO?

6. The word saints here is a very inclusive word, connecting to God's people throughout time and across the globe. How does the recognition of your inclusion in this group make you feel? How does it change your view of the church?

7. What does it look like for you to live out the calling of being a saint here and now? What specific steps should you add to your life to ensure that you are living this out?

**ARE YOU
WILLING
TO GO
ANYWHERE
GOD CALLS
YOU?**



CALLED: to be thankful (1.4-9)

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The general sense of the church in Corinth is that they were a mess. As we dive into the sin of this church, it will become more and more difficult to argue. However, Paul begins his letter to them by thanking God for the grace that He has given to them. The grace that he speaks of is more than protection from hell. Paul makes it clear that the work of Jesus Christ has changed the very way that a Christian lives in the present. He thanks God specifically for three gifts that have been given to the church. First, he thanks God for enriching them in speech and knowledge. God has given them the ability to see the truth of this world and to speak and apply it. Second, Paul thanks God for changing the people into functional members of the body, supporting one another with complementing spiritual gifts. Third, he thanks God for the strength and courage that comes from knowing that God will faithfully sustain to the end. In some ways it seems that Paul is buttering them up for what is to come, but more than that, he is reminding them that their action is a response to what they have been given. Remembering WHO has called us is just as important as remembering what He has called us to.

***God is faithful,
by whom you
were called into
the fellowship
of his Son, Jesus
Christ our Lord.***

KEY VERSE

God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (9)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. Why does Paul begin his letters with thankfulness? How is this reminiscent of how Jesus taught His disciples to pray **(Matthew 6.9-13)**?
2. What are the 3 things that Paul thanks God for? How are these evident in your own life? In the church?
3. How many times if Jesus mentioned in these verses? What is Paul trying to make clear?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. In what ways is Paul preparing them for the rebuke to come?
5. Paul using thanksgiving as an opportunity to give God credit for what He is doing? How does confirming God's work give assurance to the believer?

WHAT DO I DO?

6. Think about your own conversion and growth in the faith. How has God worked together the details of your life to bring you to where you are?

7. How often do you step back and just thank God for what He is doing? How can you make this a regular part of your spiritual disciplines?

CALLED: to be unified (1.10-17)

I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know

Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

whether I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Paul begins his appeals to the church of Corinth with a response to some negative news that he has received:

that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. Specifically he points to the fact that people are divided over which teacher to follow. The interesting fact is that none of these men were heretics, and they didn't seem to have a beef with one another. The problem with the church is not that they were chasing something apart from Christianity, but that they were focusing on one part to the exclusion of others. There was no real division, just a perceived division, which then manifested itself as division. Paul doesn't tell them to simply stop, but to recognize that their conflict stems from a misunderstanding of the gospel. They don't need to be unified, they already have been unified. They need to lay aside their individualized perspective to appreciate the diversity that makes up the church.

KEY VERSE

Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. (10)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. What, specifically, are the Corinthians quarreling about? What do you think is at the heart of these factions?
2. What are some cliques/teams that you have experienced in the church? What was at the root of these divisions?
3. For what is Paul thankful in this passage? How does Paul's view of his mission differ from that of Corinth's view of his mission?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. What does it mean for a church to have divisions? What does it not mean?

5. Is it possible for the church to have differences and still be united? **(See Philippians 2)**

WHAT DO I DO?

6. How does viewing yourself as an individual in the church, versus viewing yourself as a family member, change your experience with the church?

7. What are some personal truths that you have defended to the point of division?

CALLED: to be fools (1.18-31)

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Here Paul pulls one of his greatest feats: presenting wisdom as foolishness. The people of Corinth prided themselves as being a cultural and intellectual center. They, like us, measured the worth of a person by what they could do. What Paul says here is, the very wisdom you celebrate is the barrier between you and God. He is not saying that no wise person will ever be a Christian, but that their wisdom will not be what gets them there. What God uses to change a person is humility (what is weak in the world). The gospel is a message of victory through sacrifice. This message is foolishness to a world of strength. In order for this message to have any traction to a person they must have first given up the pursuit of power. Why would God do this? So that

For consider your calling brothers: Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise.

we do not get confused by what is actually making the change. If believe that it is great music, talented speakers, or wise authors that make the difference for the kingdom of God, we will spend all of our time praising the work of men. The only reason why we are saved and the only way that we will save others is through the work of God changing hearts. Consider your calling. Boast in the Lord.

KEY VERSE

For consider your calling brothers: Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise (26-27)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. In what ways is the “word of the cross” foolish to the world?
2. Why do you think Paul emphasizes the “Word of the Cross” and not the Word of the Resurrection (or something else)?
3. What does Paul says is God’s ultimate purpose for saving through such “foolish” or “weak” methods?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. Read ***Ephesians 3.8-13***. How will a deep belief in the foolishness of the cross impact what the church looks like?

5. What does the world value or admire? How do gospel values conflict with these values? Explain how they differ in their understanding of love, suffering, grace, etc.

6. What does it mean to *boast in the Lord*?

WHAT DO I DO?

7. How will a “Cross-centered” life govern your relationship with God, self, and others? How does abandoning the cross impact these relationships?

8. When was the last time you did something for the Lord that the world might consider foolish?

DEPEND: on Power of the Spirit (2.1-5)

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

The power of the Spirit is present within us. Paul uses the beginning of chapter 2 to use himself as an example of what this means for us. When Paul came to Corinth, he was intimidated by the great rhetorical masters. Even with his education, Paul could not keep up with these men when it came debates and

speeches. But Paul also understood that he didn't need to. Rather than spend his time sharpening up on his skills, Paul used this opportunity to dig down and focus on the one thing that he had that they didn't: the good news of Jesus Christ. This is a motivation to us, because we have the same good news. We may not be articulate; we may not be that smart; but we are equipped with the power of the Spirit and the gospel that God said he would use to change the world. Even *in weakness and in fear and much trembling*, God can and will use you.

KEY VERSE

For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (2)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. How does Paul describe the quality of his preaching? Is this how you think of him?

2. What is the demonstration of the Spirit and of power that Paul demonstrated to them?

3. This is not a command for bad preaching. What then is the purpose of downplaying the quality of the delivery?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. Is it possible for the medium to be so good that it gets in the way of the message? What might this look like?

5. In light of these verses, how would Paul view the modern American church? What are some things that are out of balance?

WHAT DO I DO?

6. Paul's main concern is that their faith rest in God, not in man. In what ways does your faith rest in the strength of man? The fear of man?

7. If the power is in the message, then you have no excuse. Who are three people that you can share the gospel with this week??

WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF?



DEPEND: on Wisdom of the Spirit (2.6-15)

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him" —these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

Paul shifts from speaking about just himself, to talking about the whole church. His focus is on the wisdom that is given to the Christian. This does not mean that when we are regenerated that we suddenly have a full and complete understanding of God. But we do have the ability to discern things that at one time we had no chance of. When we read our Bible, it is difficult, but because of the indwelling Spirit, we can understand it. Through the study

of God's revealed Word, we can know how to interact with the world around us. The natural person does not have this ability. It is no wonder we differ so starkly on issues of ethics and morality with the world. We can have confidence in our world-view, even as it continues to become less and less the popular perspective, because we know that we have the Spirit illuminating us to the very mind of Christ.

KEY VERSE

But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. (7)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. What is the wisdom of God that Paul is reminding them of?
2. Who is the 'natural person?' What is the posture of this person toward God?
3. Who is the 'spiritual person?' How does this person relate to God?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. If the gospel can not be understood by those of the flesh, what does this do to our evangelism?

5. How does the world-view of the natural person and spiritual person differ? How does this make a dialogue on truth almost impossible?

6. How does this push back against the trend toward Christians seeking relevance in the world? What must be done to truth in order for it to be acceptable to a natural person?

WHAT DO I DO?

7. We live in what is called a Post-Christian society. This does not mean that there are no Christians, but that the wisdom of God is no longer deemed credible. How do these verses give us confidence in the midst of this culture?

8. What is the significance of us having 'the mind of Christ?' What is it toward?

BUILD: with and on God (3.1-22)

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and

behaving only in a human way? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human?

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s field, God’s building.

So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their craftiness,” and again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.” So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.

After defining a clear difference between people of the flesh and people of the Spirit, Paul turns back to the Corinthians and shows them how their divisions reveal that they are investing in the earthly side of their identity. By fighting over who should be followed, they show their utter lack of concern for the things of the Spirit. Instead of telling them that all of these teachers should be honored, he instead dismisses all of these leaders as servants. They are nothing, it is God who is doing the work. The reason why this is important, is Paul wants to make it clear that their building must be judged by their faithfulness to the gospel. Nothing else will last. Paul reminds them that he laid the foundation of Jesus Christ, and any building that happens upon it must continue to build on the same truth. All will be tested by fire. What is built on Christ will last forever; the rest will be burned up.

KEY VERSE

So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. (7)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. If they are the church, why is Paul addressing them as *people of the flesh*?
2. What is the main problem with their ‘I follow _____’ positions?
3. What are 3 different metaphors that Paul uses to describe the people of God? What does each one reveal about the connection to God and each other?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. After downplaying the value of the workers, Paul takes time to make it clear that HOW we work matters. How does Paul describe the kind of building that we should do?

WHAT DO I DO?

5. Paul's teaching here assumes that all of those who are called by God are building. How are you building for the kingdom? How can you assure that your building will last?

BUILD: as servants of Christ (4.1-7)

This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

Paul here gives the Corinthians a lesson on freedom. He tells them that because of the gospel, he is free from the trappings of performance of this world. He tells them that it is of no

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself.

concern to him what they think of him, or what some human court decides; he doesn't even regard his own opinion of himself worth anything. The only view that matters is that of God. God has looked down, and because of the righteousness of Christ, has placed His stamp of approval on him. What this means is that everything Paul is and has is because of the gift of Jesus. He does not act to gain the favor of men, but he continues to strive because he already has all he needs. He is compelled by the recognition Jesus has made him whole and has called him to live out that wholeness, no matter how ridiculous it looks to those around him. And he calls the church to be imitators of him in this.

KEY VERSE

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. (4)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. What does it mean to be a servant of Christ? How does this lead to humility?
2. What does it mean to be a steward of the mystery of God? What responsibility does this give us?
3. How does the humility of servant-hood and the reasonability of stewardship lead to freedom for us?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. How can we be fully aware of our sin and yet it have no bearing on our identity?

5. How does hope drive the servant steward to live faithfully? What gets in the way of this faithfulness?

WHAT DO I DO?

6. What are the things of this earth that you allow to judge you? How do these things draw you away from the faithfulness to which you have been called?

7. What things help you re-center on your identity in Christ? What can you do to make these disciplines a more regular part of your daily routine?



**ARE YOU BUILDING
SOMETHING THAT
WILL LAST?**

BUILD: as stewards of the mysteries of God (4.8-21)

I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you! For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.

I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church. Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power.

For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in ower. What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

Paul refers to the gospel as the mystery of God, because it goes against every understanding that we have of work and reward. The gospel tells us that our work gets us nothing. That the greatest work we have to offer is rags. We can accomplish nothing. BUT. We have received everything. Not something... everything. The gift of the gospel is the one and only thing that we need in this life. If that is true, then we are rich! We are kings! We have all we need! But we must be careful that our possession of the treasure does not make us blind to how we received it. We have the power and wisdom of the Spirit, but it is not because we have done anything to earn it. It has been entrusted to us with a purpose: to manifest the power, love, and mercy of God in a world that does not recognize Him as Lord.

KEY VERSE

For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? (7)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. How does Paul's description of his ministry prepare us for the 'cost of discipleship?'

2. The recipients of God's grace can sometimes be the most arrogant and prideful people. How is this possible?

3. Why is Paul so serious about defending his part as the spiritual father of the church in Corinth?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. Paul makes it clear that the Corinthians are rich because of Christ. How does this inheritance give a perspective to deal with both the ups and downs of life and ministry?

5. After making it clear they should not put their trust in spiritual leaders, Paul calls them to be imitators of him. What is he calling them to imitate?

WHAT DO I DO?

6. Why is pride such a dangerous sin to the church? What can you guard against in your own life?

7. Our greatest defense against pride is the very mystery that we are called to steward: the gospel. The first step of building for the kingdom is stewarding this mystery in your own life. How are you preaching the gospel to yourself on a regular basis?

JUDGE: Sin in the church (5.1-13)

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—

not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

Judge not lest ye be judged (**Matthew 7.1**), is the most oft and misquoted verses in Scripture. Too often it is used as a defense

against anyone saying that anything is ever wrong. It is used to make sure that no one gets their feelings hurt and that everyone feels okay about what they are doing. BUT EVERYONE IS NOT OKAY. As a matter of fact, we are all very not okay. To pretend like everything is okay is a denial of sin and of our need for a savior. Part of this means upholding the health of the church. We are entrusted with making sure the worship that we are giving is grounded in sincerity and truth, not malice and evil. This is not just a job for the pastors as the holiness police. It is the job of every member to look out for the health and well being of the rest, to keep the church from becoming a place that glorifies sin and encourages hypocrisy. This begins by defining what sin is. It means being willing to call people to repent who are living in sin. It means being willing to tell someone that their lifestyle will lead them to hell. We do this not to shame, guilt, or destroy a person, but to lovingly call them back into relationship with a just and holy God.

KEY VERSE

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? (6)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. What is the sin that has been reported to Paul? What is the churches response to this sin?
2. What is Paul worried will happen if the church does not act?
3. How does Paul tie this church discipline to the Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. How is rebuking a sinner the most loving thing we could do?

5. Why must the body be diligent to eradicate the sin in its midst? Think of an example where a *little leaven leavens the whole lump*?

WHAT DO I DO?

6. Have you ever experienced church discipline (to yourself or others)? What was your initial response to it?

7. Read **Matthew 18:15-17**. What steps should you take if you are aware of habitual sin of other church members?

JUDGE: Sin against a brother (6.1-11)

When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you

wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers?

To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers!

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

The outlook in our world is one of rights. These rights are laid out in our constitution, written into our laws, and defined by our courts. What this has produced is a mindset that is focused squarely on getting our fair share and not being taken advantage of. But who gets to decide what we deserve? The people of Corinth were basing their rights on what the society told them they should get. They would then appeal to the courts to rule over whether or not they are entitled to what they thought. Paul is rebuking them, reminding them that they live by a different standard. It was not just the fact that they were suing each other that was the problem (though he does make it clear that: *To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you*), but the fact that the absolute authority that they were appealing to was not a biblical one. They were allowing the truth of the world to rule over people who are no longer of this world. We are called to a higher standard and higher authority. As people *washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ*, we must no longer waste our time being led and judges by the morality of this world.

So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church?

KEY VERSE

So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? (4)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. Is Paul trying to tell us that human courts have no place? How can you respect the ruling of an 'unrighteous' judge?

2. Why does Paul not want matters between believers taken to public court?

3. What are the practices that Paul lists as disqualifiers from the Kingdom? If you practice these things, what hope do you have of being accepted?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. Paul sets up distinctions between those of God and those of the church. What does his contrast reveal about the things that we hold to as rights?

5. How does the way that you fight reveal your ultimate source of worship?

WHAT DO I DO?

6. How can you give up your rights while assuring that you will not be walked all over? Is this a concern we should have?

7. What are some rights that you have placed above obedience to God? How will you fight to put God back in His place as supreme authority?

JUDGE: Sin against yourself (6.12-20)

"All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything. "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom

you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Not only does our knowledge of good and evil come from a different place, but so does our motivation. Paul quotes a popular phrase: *All things are lawful for me*, and shoots it down with the Christian world-view. He shows them that while the grace of Jesus Christ covers all sin, this does not free you to pursue whatever you desire. What it does is give you the freedom to not be brought down by and dominated by the things that don't matter. To use your freedom in Christ to indulge in sinful pursuits shows a disregard for Him. Jesus did not save you from sin to sin; He saved you to be united with Him. Paul uses a new phrase here to describe the gospel transaction: *bought with a price*. You were called into God's family freely, from nothing of your own doing, but now that you are part of it, there is an appropriate response. Your life is no longer about your rights, but is now about worshiping God in all you do.

KEY VERSE

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (19-20)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. How does Paul define the freedom that we have in Christ?
2. How does Paul connect the truth of the resurrection to our actions?

3. Why is sexual immorality such a problematic sin for the people of God? How does it affect their relationship with God?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. How does our understanding of desire change when we become a Christian?
5. There are no victimless crimes if all sin is an attack on God. How does the reality that your sin is an offense to your Savior affect you?

WHAT DO I DO?

6. What sins in your own life have you convinced yourself are under control and not hurting anyone?
7. REPENT. What steps can you take moving forward to honor the price that Jesus Christ paid for you?



***IF SIN IS DESTROYING
US, WHY DON'T WE
JUST STOP?***

RELATE: in sex (7.1-9)

Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.

To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

Paul has made it clear that sexual immorality is defiling the temple of God, now he moves forward to answering some of the questions that he knows will come out of this. He focuses specifically on 3 aspects that relate to relationships and sexuality:

sex, marriage, and singleness. He begins by addressing a quote that seems to have either been floating around Corinth, or was a misunderstanding of something he previously said: *It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.* Apparently some from Corinth were from the better safe than sorry club. What Paul makes clear is that sex is a trap whether you engage in it or not. It is a powerful tool for connection within marriage, a destructive force when practiced outside of marriage, and an overwhelming passion when simply abstained from. What is needed is not a refinement in practice, but in perspective.

KEY VERSE

Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. (6-7)

***Now as a
concession, not a
command, I say
this. I wish that all
were as I myself am.
But each has his
own gift from God,
one of one kind and
one of another.***

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. Why does Paul equally address the concerns of men and women? How does this go against the culture of the day?

2. What distractions does Paul attach to sex? How is marriage a defense against these distractions?

3. What was the confusion about abstinence? How is a 'better safe than sorry' approach just as damaging as promiscuity?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. Sex has power. What are some ways in which sex is used for power in our culture?

5. Sexual immorality is all sexual activity (including images and movies) outside of the bonds of marriage. If this is true, how commonplace is sexual material? How blind are we to the affects of it on our relationship with God?

WHAT DO I DO?

6. How has your interaction with sex and sexual material affected your relationships? Marriage? View of self? Connection to God?

7. How can you restore the passion and purpose of sex?

RELATE: in Marriage (7.10-16)

To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.

To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her.

If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband.

Marriage is the union of a man and woman bound together into one flesh by God. As the beginning of the chapter makes clear, their bodies are no longer their own. By taking to vows of marriage, what you are doing is being connected to another human being in a relationship that is meant to mirror the relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For this reason, breaking these bonds is not something to be taken lightly. Paul lays out some specific situational commands as to how divorce should be handled. While these verses have been used to lay out dead regulations, Paul's argument is a positive one. He frames it from the perspective of being used as the saving agent of God in specific instances, both for spouses and for children. Christians must be looking for opportunities to sacrificially love, rather than exercise rights, and there is no better place to love in this way than in marriage.

KEY VERSE

For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. (14)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. What was the cause of divorce being questioned by the Corinthians?
2. Read **Mark 10.6-12** and **Matthew 19.1-9**. What did Jesus say about divorce?
3. What is the reason for staying married that Paul gives?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. What does Paul mean when he says: *the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband?*
5. Read 2 Corinthians 6.14. How do we reconcile this with his teaching here to stay married to an unbeliever?

WHAT DO I DO?

6. How can the teaching of Jesus and Paul on marriage be distorted to trap people in abuse?
7. If you have been divorced and remarried, how should you view this?
8. Ultimately, Paul is reintroducing marriage as a tool for salvation (and sanctification). How does this help you to live out the vows of marriage in good times and bad?

RELATE: in Singleness (7.17-40)

Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches. Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God. Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. Were you a bond-servant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) For he who was called in the Lord as a bond-servant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bond-servant of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become bond-servants of men. So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.

I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have

worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.



WHY DOES GOD CARE SO MUCH ABOUT OUR RELATIONSHIPS?

I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry—it is no sin. But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well. So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better.

A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. Yet in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God.

If one phrase of Paul could be used to sum up this section, it would be his declaration: *I want you to be free from anxieties.*

What Paul is doing is trying to free up the notion here that being married is necessary for a full and complete life. As a matter of fact, he argues strongly on the freeing benefits of remaining single. This entire chapter needs to be taken as a whole to be understood, lest we fall into the trap of taking a small piece out of context. Paul wants everyone to *lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him*. There is a measure of contentment here. If you have been given a spouse, love them well. If your spouse has passed, you can remarry, but look to what would best serve the place where God has put you. If you are single, how can you view your singleness as a gift rather than a burden? How can you best serve and glorify God in the place He has put you?

KEY VERSE

I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord. (14)

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. What does it mean to *remain in the condition in which he was called*?

2. Why does Paul use 'singleness' as a positive?

3. How is the big idea here about much more than marriage vs. singleness?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. The church seems to elevate marriage above what the Bible does at times. Why do you think that is? How is our sin revealed in the things we choose to focus on?

5. Paul is writing this in a time of extreme persecution. How do some of the ideas expressed here change with context? What remains the same?

WHAT DO I DO?

6. The chapter hinges on the phrase: *I want you to be free from anxieties*. Why do relationships cause so many anxieties? How can we fight back against this no matter what situation God has placed us in?

NOTES: