

I Corinthians

Introduction

The book of I Corinthians was written by the Apostle Paul as he was inspired by the Holy Spirit. It was written during an extended stay at Ephesus at the beginning of the third missionary journey, A.D. 55 & 56.

The church had been founded at the end of the second missionary journey. In the Acts the writer records the circumstances in Chapter 18. According to Luke's record Paul faced great difficulty at Corinth. In Acts 18:9, we read:

One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision "*Do not be afraid keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you because I have many people in this city.*" So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

Reflecting on the experience in I Corinthians 2:3, Paul writes; "*I came to you in weakness and fear and with much trembling.*" However with God's help a church was established. It became gifted and prosperous. In the introduction to I Corinthians Paul says: "*Because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you, therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.*"

It was a gifted and prosperous church but it was not without problems. Often when we read about people in the Bible we get the impression that they were spiritual giants and we see ourselves as midgets by comparison. This was not the case at Corinth. They had problems which were widely reported, these problems occasioned the letter (see Ch. 1:11; 11:18).

It was not a perfect church at Corinth and we who also are involved in imperfect churches can identify. We are not thankful for error but we are thankful that in the process of correcting errors at Corinth the Apostle teaches us about God's will and purpose for the church. Our problems may be different but we see that there are ways of dealing with them and grace from God to see them corrected.

The format for this study is slightly different than in past studies because we have attempted to set out the guide as an inductive study. Each lesson has three parts:

1. Observation -- the questions will help us to focus on the facts in the passage. These questions will seem quite simple but they are not unimportant.

2. Interpretation -- these questions will help us to understand the purpose and meaning of the facts in the passage. They may require some reference help and certainly need to be thought through carefully. We not only want to know what the Bible says (observation) but what it means as well (interpretation).

3. Application -- each study asks two application questions. Here we have the opportunity to apply the passage to current situations. These questions will help us sense the divine direction for our own local church.

As in the past it is important to attend a small group study and to maximize the benefit for everyone in the study, preparation is necessary. Please go over the questions carefully at home so you will be able to participate profitably in the group discussion.

STUDY 1
READ: I Corinthians 1:1-17

Part 1: Observation:

1. How does Paul describe the believers at Corinth in v.1 & 2?
2. What relationship do all believers have with Christ v.2?
3. List the things for which Paul gives thanks, v.4-9.
4. Why is Paul so sure about the future, v.9?
5. What is one of Paul's chief concerns about the Corinthian church, v.10-16?
6. Paul states his main mission as a servant of Christ in v.17, what is it?

Part II: Interpretation:

1. The Corinthians are said to be "*sanctified and called to be holy*," what does this mean?
2. Explain v.6 in the context of v.4-9.
3. State Paul's desire for the church recorded in v.10, in your own words.
4. Explain Paul's argument against division given in v.13-17.

Part III: Application:

1. Christians are said to be "sanctified and called to be holy," what life style does this position dictate.
2. List the specific steps that need to be taken to achieve the unity desired by Paul in v.10.

STUDY 2
READ: I Corinthians 1:18-2:16

Part I: Observation

1. How has God made the wisdom of the world foolish v.18?
2. What does Christ become to those truly called by God v.24?
3. Why has God designed the plan of salvation as it is described in v.26-31?
4. State Paul's reason for preaching as he did in Corinth.
5. What is compared in 2:6-16?
6. How can the wisdom of God be known and understood 2:6-16?

Part II: Interpretation:

1. Why is the message of the cross foolishness to some and the wisdom of God to others?
2. How is Christ the "*wisdom of God*" and the "*power of God*" to believers?
3. Is Paul's denouncing of man's wisdom an anti-intellectual attitude? Explain your answer.
4. How does the Spirit of God impart divine wisdom?

Part III: Application:

1. The Jews and Greeks of Paul's day had a specific response to the gospel, what is the attitude of man's wisdom toward it today?
2. List some practical suggestions that would help a person who wanted to understand God's wisdom.

STUDY 3
READ: I Corinthians 3:1-4:20

Part 1: Observation:

1. List the signs of worldliness that are stated in 3:1-3:
2. Men like Paul and Apollos are given two titles in v.5-9, what are they?
3. What are the three analogies used to describe Christians in Ch.3?
4. When will the success or failure of a Christian servant be revealed, v.10-15?
5. What is the important thing in Christian service 4:1-12?
6. Paul claims a unique relationship with the Corinthians in v.14-16, what is it?

Part II: Interpretation:

1. Explain v.10-15 in your own words.
2. Refer to question 2 above, why are these expressions used to designate Christian leaders?
3. Refer to question 3 above, why are these expressions used to designate Christian people?
4. What point is Paul making in 4:6-13? Why is it important?

Part III: Application:

1. What steps could be taken, according to this study, to overcome division in the church today?
2. Verses 10-15 in Chapter 3 and 4:5 refer to the Judgement Seat of Christ, list some of the challenges and encouragements involved.

STUDY 4
READ: I Corinthians 5:1-6:20

Part 1: Observation:

1. What attitude does Paul condemn in the Corinthian church regarding sin in the fellowship v.1-2?
2. Why is it dangerous to neglect church discipline v.6-7?
3. What should be more acceptable than lawsuits in the interpersonal relationship of believers according to 6:1-8?
4. Who should be asked to judge disputes among believers 1-8?
5. What makes the permissible, unpermissible 6:12?
6. Why is purity important in the Christian life 19 & 20?

Part II: Interpretation:

1. Why does Paul insist on disassociation when sins such as described in 5:1-13 are practised?
2. Explain Paul's attitude to civil courts. Should Christians avoid the secular legal system entirely? Explain your answer.
3. What does 6:9 & 10 mean? Do certain sins exclude the guilty from the Kingdom of God?
4. Explain the temple analogy and the use Paul makes of it in Ch.6.

Part III: Application:

1. Paul calls for exclusion from fellowship as discipline in certain cases, if this occurs how can restoration be achieved?
2. How should a present day Christian decide if the permissible is beneficial?

STUDY 5
READ: I Corinthians 7

Part 1: Observation:

1. State Paul's initial judgement regarding marriage given in v.1.
2. Marriage involves a mutual commitment, how does Paul explain this in v.3-5?
3. What is Paul's attitude to separation and divorce, v.10-14?
4. According to v.19, what is of real importance in the Christian life?
5. In v.32-35 we are told that the single state has certain advantages, what are they?
6. Does Paul recommend second marriages?

Part II: Interpretation:

1. The Apostle Paul is often denounced for what is seen as a negative attitude to marriage; is his attitude really negative to marriage? Explain.
2. What does v.12-14 mean?
3. Explain the point that is being made about change in v.17-24.
4. It is a fact that many married women have been wholly committed to the Lord, and some single women have been wholly committed to themselves, does this contradict what v.32-35 is saying? Explain.

Part III: Application:

1. Are there occasions or circumstances that would make marriage unwise today? Explain your answer.
2. We live in a world where change is considered to be good and necessary, how does this attitude conflict with what the Bible says in v.17? What makes change right or wrong?

STUDY 6
READ: I Corinthians 8, 9.

Part I: Observation:

1. What is of major importance in the Christian life v.1-3?
2. State Paul's attitude toward idols v.4-6.
3. How should freedom be used v.7-13?
4. Have Christian workers no rights 9:1-14?
5. What is often required if we are to really serve God and people 9:15-23?
6. What is necessary to succeed as a Christian according to 9:24-27?

Part II: Interpretation:

1. Why does Paul introduce this chapter by commenting on knowledge and love?
2. What principle is declared in v.7-12? Explain the point that is being made.
3. Explain the difference between the statements made in v.19-23 and present day situational ethics, "being all things to all men."
4. Explain v.24-27 taking into consideration the context of Chapter 9.

Part III: Application:

1. What present day situation would compare to the Corinthian problem stated in v.4-8, how would the principles presented be applied?
2. How do we judge when it is proper to stand up for our rights and when to renounce our rights?

STUDY 7
READ: I Corinthians 10:1-33

Part 1: Observation:

1. What reason does Paul give for discussing Jewish history at this point in his letter?
2. Make a list of Israel's sins referred to in v.6-10.
3. What sin at Corinth makes the reference to the O.T. particularly relevant v.14-22?
4. In v.24 we are given a good rule of thumb for deciding what is both permissible and beneficial, what is it?
5. Why is it unadvisable to eat certain things v.25-30?
6. What should the Christian's goal be in all that is done v.31?

Part II: Interpretation:

1. Israel's experience teaches us lessons, put the general lesson in your own words.
2. Explain the relationship Paul is drawing between the Lord's Supper and pagan worship v.14-22.
3. What does it mean to seek the good of others over our own good? Is there a limit to doing this?
4. Why does Paul make the statement found in v.12?

Part III: Application:

1. Is it possible today for a person to drink of the Lord's table and the table of demons? Explain and illustrate your answer.
2. Not causing others to stumble is a key idea in I Corinthians, list some of the actions or attitudes that might cause stumbling today?

STUDY 8
READ: I Corinthians 11:1-16

Part 1: Observation:

1. What other examples are available to Christians besides Israel v.1?
2. List the order of headship outlined in v.3.
3. What dishonours the head of men and the head of women?
4. A man's head should not be covered, not the reason and compare it with the comments about women, v.7 & 8.
5. List the three reasons that are given to explain the woman's position, v.8-10.
6. Verse 12 tells us that men and women are interdependent, what is the source of everything?

Part II: Interpretation:

1. Explain the meaning and purpose of Paul's statement in v.3.
2. Read I Cor.14:34-35, does this contradict chapter 11:5? If not can you suggest an explanation.
3. We are often told that chapter 11:1-16 is dealing with a cultural problem at Corinth, do you accept that explanation? Why or why not.
4. Some commentators have suggested that the woman's covering is her hair, is this a possible explanation in this context?

Part III: Application:

1. Women have sometimes felt that this passage discriminates against them by assigning them an inferior role to men, is this true or is there a more constructive purpose in the teaching?
2. How can we overcome an attitude in the church that has led some women to feel that they are not appreciated? How can we take I Cor. 11:1-16 seriously without discrimination.

STUDY 9
READ: I Corinthians 11:17-33

Part I: Observation:

1. Compare chapter 11:1 and v.17, note the difference and explain.
2. How did Paul know about the activities of the Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed, v.23?
3. Why does Paul say in v.17, "*for your meetings do more harm than good*"?
4. What is the purpose of the bread and wine and what is accomplished by those who partake of it?
5. Certain consequences to misusing the emblems are given in v.27-30, list them.
6. How can we avoid God's judgement v.31?

Part II: Interpretation:

1. Review v.17-22, what is the chief problem at this Corinthian meeting? What is being denied by their action?
2. Explain how the Lord's Supper "*proclaims the Lord's death until He comes*."
3. What does it mean to eat the bread and wine in an unworthy manner?
4. Considering the context, explain the meaning of v.31.

Part III: Application:

1. Why is the Lord's Supper so important to corporate worship?
2. The Corinthians had a set form of gathering which detracted from, rather than enhanced worship, is this possible in our form? What is important as we come together to keep the Lord's Supper.

STUDY 10
READ: I Corinthians 12-14.

Part 1: Observation:

1. According to v.1-7, what is the purpose of spiritual gifts?
2. Who provides spiritual gifts, v.11?
3. The Lord's Supper demonstrates the unity of the body, what do spiritual gifts emphasize, v.12-13?
4. What does Paul say is more important than spiritual gifts, Ch.13?
5. Why is the Corinthian practice called in question by Paul in Ch.14?
6. God has an overriding interest which must be accomplished when believers come together, what is it, Ch.14:26-40?

Part II: Interpretation:

1. How can the large number of diverse gifts be for "*the common good*?" What interferes with this purpose, what will enable it to be accomplished?
2. Explain the place of the Holy Spirit in the distribution and use of spiritual gifts.
3. What is the purpose of I Corinthians 13 in Paul's presentation of spiritual gifts?
4. Why do you think the gift of tongues was a problem at Corinth?

Part III: Application:

1. If, as we are told in I Corinthians, every Christian has a spiritual gift today, why is it some Christians feel unneeded or unwanted in the church? What can be done to solve this problem?
2. Why is the principle of love, outlined in I Corinthians 13, so difficult to accept and to achieve as the guiding principle in church operations? What is the solution to solving the problem?

STUDY 11
READ: I Corinthians 15

Part I: Observation:

1. List the major components of the gospel message v.1 & 2.
2. Make a list of the resurrection appearances enumerated by Paul in v.3-8.
3. According to vs.12-19, what three things are true if the resurrection is not a fact?
4. State the resurrection order from v.20-24.
5. Note and compare the difference between the pre and post resurrected body, v.50-54.
6. What is Paul's mystery?

Part II: Interpretation:

1. Why are the two points "received" and "taken your stand" emphasized in the introduction to chapter 15?
2. Explain v.19 in your own words.
3. What is the ultimate goal of Christ's resurrection? How is it achieved?
4. Explain what is meant in v.45 where we are told that "the first man Adam became a living being" and "the last Adam, a life-giving spirit."

Part III: Application:

1. Resurrection and the resurrection of the Christian dead is not taken seriously today, what would help solve this problem inside and outside the church?
2. Explain what v.57 means in its context. How should it be applied to Christians today?

STUDY 12
READ: I Corinthians 16

Part 1: Observation:

1. What is the subject of Chapter 16:1-4
2. Why does the Apostle suggest the arrangements outlined in v.3 & 4?
3. What reason does Paul give for staying on in Ephesus?
4. In v.10-12 Paul mentions both Timothy and Apollos, what relationship does he have with them?
5. Why are Stephanus and others brought into the letter in v.15-18? What caused the thanksgiving?
6. Describe the interpersonal relationship of believers as seen in vs. 19-20.

Part II: Interpretation:

1. What are the rules laid down here for giving to the Lord? List the principles you see here.
2. Explain what Paul is saying in v.5-9.
3. List the five exhortations given in v.13 & 14. Try to explain the meaning of each and the difference between them.
4. Explain the phrase in v.15, "*they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints.*"

Part III: Application

1. Giving to the work of the Lord is an important responsibility for Christians. Have patterns and methods of giving changed? If so, do these changes help or hinder Christian work?
2. In v.9 Paul says he has both an open door and opposition, how do you recognize an open door and how do you cope with opposition today?