

1 Corinthians 1-10

DISCONNECTED

GROUP GUIDE

During Easter we remember and celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Cross and Empty Tomb are central to our Christian Faith. Yet, how does this message impact our everyday lives? In many ways, 1 Corinthians is about connecting the message of Jesus with every aspect of our lives, making the Gospel a lived experience every day.

Thinking about the relevance of 1 Corinthians, Steve Rockwell (lecturer at George Whitefield College) writes, *“It’s arguably one of the most practical and almost directly relevant letters that we have in the New Testament, particularly in the world we are quickly finding ourselves living in which is becoming more and more like the 1st Century Roman world every day.”* And when you start exploring the historical context of 1 Corinthians, you will see why.

Like many ancient cities that rivalled Rome, Corinth was destroyed in 146 BC. Yet, in 44 BC Julius Caesar issued that Corinth be rebuilt. During this time, Corinth became a melting pot of Greek and Roman culture (rich in philosophy and the worship of the Greco-Roman gods). Once re-established, Corinth became a very prosperous port. It also was home to the Isthmus games (second only to the Olympics).

Corinth was also infamous for its sexual immorality. People who were sexually immoral were often called *“Korinthiazos”* (acting like a Corinthian). Commentator Gordon Fee describes ancient Corinth this way, *“All of this evidence together suggests that Paul’s Corinth was at once the New York, Los Angeles and Las Vegas of the ancient world”* (2014:3).

Paul’s time in Corinth was not easy. Paul was opposed by the Jews (Acts 18:6, 12-17) and needed special encouragement from God to stay in Corinth to share the Good News of Jesus. God told Paul that He had “many people in this city” (Acts 18:9-10). It was to these many people that Paul was writing. People who were struggling to connect the Gospel of Jesus to their everyday lives; living in a city famous for sexual immorality, idolatry, wealth and philosophy. Often living lives disconnected from the Gospel.

It is our prayer that as we journey through 1 Corinthians (seeing how the Gospel connects to everyday life) that we (as a church family) would have lives fully connected to the Gospel of Jesus.

In Christ with much affection,

Carel Pienaar
Phil. 1:21

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

A holy people

STUDY 1

The Bible commands us to be “*be imitators of God... live in love, just as also Christ loved us*” (Eph. 5:1-2) or to “*Be holy, because I (God) am holy*” (1 Pet. 1:16); which is really a call to be what we were originally made to be: image-bearers of God (Gen. 1:26-27). So...

1. How do you think you match up to these commands?
2. Do you think we can become what we are commanded to be? How?



Investigating

Read Acts 18:1-17, 24-19:1... A New Church

1. How does Acts 18 describe Paul's experience in planting the church in Corinth?
2. Who else preached in Corinth? How does Acts 18:24-9:1 describe him?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9... A Holy People

After all the events of Acts 18-19, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. Yet, a lot has changed in the church of Corinth...

1. What are some of the problems in the Church of Corinth?
 - 1 Cor. 1:10-11
 - 1 Cor. 5:1
 - 1 Cor. 6:7-8, 16
2. How does Paul describe their identity in v. 2? (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19-20)
 - How does their lives compare to their identity in Jesus?
3. Notice that Paul “*always thanks God*” for the Corinthian Church. What reasons does Paul give in (vv. 4-7)?

4. What is surprising about these reasons when we consider that...
- They formed factions around the people God has blessed them with (cf. 1 Cor. 3:3-4, 21) and neglected the poor among them (11:17-22)
 - They used their “gifts” as an opportunity to argue who is the best (cf. 1 Cor. 12:1, 20-23 ;14:20)
5. Why does Paul remain thankful to God for them, even though their lives seem disconnected from their new identity in Jesus? (vv. 8-9)



Thinking & Living

1. How does Paul’s prayer of thanksgiving correspond with the following passages?

JOHN 10:27-30	ROMANS 8:28-30	PHILIPPIANS 1:4-6
<p><i>“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”</i></p>	<p><i>“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”</i></p>	<p><i>“In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”</i></p>

In many ways, we also experience disconnect between our lives and our new identity in Jesus...

<p>How do you view yourself in comparison to Jesus?</p>	<p>How does God view you and other Christians in Jesus? (1 Cor. 1:2)</p>	<p>What is our hope for becoming more like Jesus?</p>
<p>How have you viewed other Christians when you compared them to Jesus?</p>		

God has placed you (with all your gifts) at St. Peters exactly for the purpose of making you and those around you more like Jesus (progressively connecting our lives to the Gospel and identity of Jesus) ...

2. Paul gives two major reason why you would want to connect your life and help those around you connect their lives to the Gospel of Jesus...
 - What is the first reason: 1 Cor. 6:19-20 (cf. 10:31)?
 - What is the second reason: 1 Cor. 8:1; 14:1; 16:14?

3. What will prevent you from falling into despair if you see your life and other people’s lives being disconnected from the Gospel? (cf. 1 Cor. 1:8-9)

“He (God) will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course, on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing Less”
 (C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, Counting the Cost).

Seeing one another as God sees us...



Sometimes one of the greatest discouragements we experience in ourselves and one another is our own brokenness. We read the incredible words of our identity in Jesus, *“if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”* (2 Cor. 5:17). We hear the call to *“be imitators of God”* (Eph. 5:1). Yet, when we look in the mirror, we conclude, *“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Rom. 3:23). We can easily conclude there is very little hope for change (in ourselves and one another).

And we are masters at picking out the faults in one another. As one author put it, it is like we have a built in *“fault-o-matic”*. And once we detect a fault, we deem these *“faults”* as irredeemable or unchangeable. *“People don’t change”*, we say and conclude we will always stay the same.

Yet, in moments when we are tempted to do this, we should always remember that this is not how God sees us in Jesus. Every person who is *“in Christ”* (who believes in and follows Jesus) is not a hopeless case. God is in the business of change and God will make sure that every person in Jesus will be restored to be like Jesus (in every way). He planned this, He has empowered us to become this, and He will perfectly execute His plan.

This is how Paul viewed the churches he ministered to. When Paul considered the church in Philippi (warts and all, cf. Phil. 4:2-3), he confidently writes, *“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ”* (Phil. 1:6). When Paul wrote to the church in Rome (divided among ethnic lines; cf. Rom. 14-15), he confidently writes that God will use everything to make them like Jesus, *“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers”* (Rom. 8:28-29). Notice, the past tense, it is a done deal. God will do this. We will be *“glorified”* (Rom. 8:30).

So, look at yourself, look at those around you in our church family, and realize these words...

*“I see all your flaws, imperfections, weaknesses, dependencies.
But underneath them all I see growing the person God wants you to be...
The goal is to see something absolutely ravishing that
God is making of the beloved. You see even now flashes of glory...
Jesus died not because we were lovely, but to make us lovely”*
(Tim Keller)

And God is using you and those around you to make this happen...

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Factions!

STUDY 2

“Have a regard to preserve unity... Labour together with one another; strive in company together; run together; suffer together... as the stewards, and associates, and servants of God.” (Ignatius, Letter to Polycarp, 1st Century)

1. Have you ever experienced disunity (whether in church, business or family)? How did it impact you and those around you?



Investigating

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-17... Factions!

Keep in mind that Paul reminded the church in Corinth that they are one with, “all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – their Lord and ours...” (1 Cor. 1:2). This is what the Gospel brings (unity), but the Corinthian church seems completely disconnected from this reality.

1. How does Paul compare to Apollos (the two most prominent leaders in the church of Corinth)? (look at 1 Cor. 2:1 and Acts 18:24-25)
2. Positively and negatively, what does Paul “*appeal*” the church in Corinth to do? (v. 10)
3. Why is Paul commanding this? (v. 11-12)
4. How would you summarize Paul’s argument against their disunity in vv. 13-17?
5. What is the Corinthian Church indirectly saying by forming different factions around their favorite leaders or personalities? (vv. 13-17)
6. Around whom should they unite? (vv. 2, 10, 13)



Thinking & Living

1. How does Paul's command in v. 10 correspond with these passages?

JOHN 17:20-21	EPHESIANS 4:3-6
<i>My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.</i>	<i>Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.</i>

2. How have you seen people (or yourself) form groups around certain leaders and personalities?
3. What has been the result when people (or you) start punting leaders and personalities rather than Jesus? How did it impact the church?
4. How could the “*digital age*” possibly facilitate the danger of factionalism (for example, listening to podcasts, streaming videos etc.)?
5. Are you aware of any factions at St. Peters? Discuss...
6. How can we foster unity as a church family at St. Peters Church?

“Within the fellowship of those who are bound together by personal loyalty to Jesus Christ, the relationship of love reaches an intimacy and intensity unknown elsewhere. Friendship between the friends of Jesus of Nazareth is unlike any other friendship. This ought to be normal experience within the Christian Community”
(Stephen C. Neill, Christian Faith Today, 1955:74)



The Shame of the Cross

Living in the 21st Century, the Cross has become quite a popular symbol. The Cross shape is often used in jewellery (rings, necklaces, bracelets etc.), tattoos and logos (churches, hospitals, organizations, fashion etc.). Yet, 1st Century society would find this incredibly odd, since the Cross was a symbol of oppression and shame.

Seneca (a contemporary of the Apostle Paul), describes the cross as a brutal instrument of death, *“I see before me crosses not all alike, but differently made by different peoples: some hang a man head downwards, some force a stick upwards through his groin, some stretch out his arms on a forked gibbet. I see cords, scourges, and instruments of torture for each limb and each joint: but I see Death also”* (Ad Marciam de Consolatione; 20:3). In Greek culture, *“Go to the Cross”* is slang for *“Go to hell”* (Pseudolus, Line 331); it was an insult. Even the word, *“crux”* was harsh to say (Augustine, De Dialectica, 6).

For the Jews, it was a symbol of the brutal oppression of Rome. For example, Jewish historian Josephus records that after the death of Herod (mentioned in Matthew 2:19), the Jews revolted against Roman rule. Rome crushed the revolt and to demonstrate their power, *“Varus sent a part of his army into the country, to seek out those who had been the authors of the revolt; and when they were found, he punished some of them that were most guilty, and some he dismissed; now the number of those who were crucified on this account were two thousand”* (Antiquities of the Jews, 17:295). Jesus would have been a boy when this happened.

The Cross was the *“electric chair”* of the 1st Century (yet far more brutal and shameful). No one would have dreamed of using it as a symbol. Yet, the central message of Christianity is this: *“Christ Crucified”* (1 Cor. 1:23). It is the equivalent of saying *“fried ice”* (Fee, 1 Corinthians, 2014:78). It makes no sense. It should be shameful to even speak of it. Yet, as the Apostle Paul writes, *“I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified”* (1 Cor. 2:2). A very strange sales pitch, yet this message is at the heart of the Gospel. It would take a miracle for anyone to believe this shameful and foolish message.

And that is the point, as we will discover in 1 Corinthians 1-4...

1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5

The Folly of God vs. the Wisdom of Man

STUDY 3

“The religion of Christians is insane, in that they worship a crucified man, and even the instrument of his punishment itself”
 (Minucius Felix citing Fronto, Octavius, 9)

1. How do people today also echo the words of Fronto?



Investigating

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5... A Foolish Message, People and Messenger

Paul commands the Church in Corinth to be united in Jesus and not form camps/factions around certain personalities (1:10-12). Paul makes the point that it is Jesus who saved them, not any person they might admire (1:13-17) ...

1. What responses does the message of the Cross evoke? (v. 18)
2. Notice, Paul gives a number of reasons why this is the case in vv. 19-25...

Why did God choose to reveal His wisdom and power through the Cross? (vv. 19-21)	Why are the “Wise” rejecting the Cross? (vv. 22-23)	How is the Cross a display of God’s wisdom and power? (vv. 24-25)
	<p>For Jews: Think Psalm 2 & Deut. 21:23</p> <p>For Greco-Romans: <i>“But the executioner, the veiling of heads, and the very word ‘cross,’ let them all be far removed from not only the bodies of Roman citizens but even from their thoughts, their eyes, and their ears... the expectation, the mere mention of them even, is unworthy of a Roman citizen and of a free man”</i></p> <p>(Cicero, 106-43BC, Pro Rabirio Perduellionis Reo, 16)</p>	<p>*Read 1 Cor. 15:3, 56-57</p>

3. How does Paul describe the Corinthians who have “believed” in the message of the Cross? (1:26)
4. Why did God choose them? (1:27-31)
5. How does Paul describe his ministry? (2:1-3)
6. Why did Paul proclaim the “message of the Cross” this way? (2:4-5)



Thinking & Living

7. How does Paul’s argument rebuke the Corinthian church’s desire to form camps/factions around certain Christian leaders? (1:11-12)
8. How does Paul’s argument agree with the following passages ...

JEREMIAH 9:23-24	MATTHEW 11:25-26	JOHN 1:12-13
<p><i>This is what the Lord says: “Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the Lord.</i></p>	<p><i>I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.</i></p>	<p><i>Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”</i></p>

“The same standards for popularity – wisdom, power and money – remain in our culture. These determine who receives adulation from their peers in our schools. They form the heart of the lure of most advertising campaigns”
(Blomberg, 1 Corinthians, 1994:60).

9. How have you possibly given in to the Corinthian mindset of valuing “*wisdom, power and money*”? How does the Cross of Jesus rebuke and correct that mindset?
10. All of us heard and believed the Gospel because someone shared the message with us. How does 1 Cor. 1:18-25 help us ...
 - Not to idolize those who shared the Good News of Jesus with us?
 - Not to think we are better than others because we understood and believed the Gospel?
11. Knowing it is God who saves, not us (our cleverness, wisdom or ability to persuade). How has this passage encouraged you to ...



1 Corinthians 2:6-3:4

The Wisdom of God and the Spirit of God

STUDY 4

1. How did you come to faith in Jesus? Who was involved and what happened? Write it down...



Investigating

Read 1 Corinthians 2:6-10... The Hidden Wisdom of God

Keep in mind that Paul has dismissed the wisdom of the world which God has purposed to bring to destroy (1:17-2:5). Now, Paul will talk about “*a message of wisdom among the mature*” (2:6)

1. What is the end of human wisdom and the end God’s wisdom (vv. 6-7)?
2. How does one receive or know “*God’s secret wisdom*” (vv. 8-10)?

Read 1 Corinthians 2:10-16... Revealed by the Spirit of God

3. What are the “*deep things of God*” (v. 10)? (cf. 1:23-24)
4. Why is the Spirit uniquely qualified to “*reveal*” this to us (v. 11)?
5. Where did the Apostles’ receive their message and why did the Corinthian Church believe (vv. 12-13, vv. 15-16)?
6. What are differences between the two groups of people described in vv. 14-16?

Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-4... A denial of the Gospel Reality

Paul described the Corinthian Church as “*enriched in every way*” by God in spiritual gifts and knowledge (1:4-7). Yet, in the light of Paul’s argument in 2:1-16...

1. Why does Paul call the Corinthian Church “*mere infants*”, “*worldly*”, and “*mere men*” (vv. 1-4)?
2. How is the Corinthian Church undermining the wisdom of God in their thinking and actions?
3. What disconnect is the Corinthian Church experiencing between their faith and life (vv. 3-4)? Why is this? (vv. 1-2)



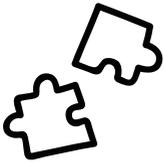
Thinking & Living

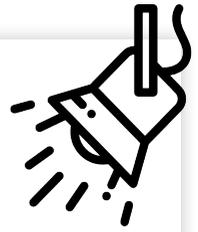
1. How does 1 Corinthians 2:1-16’s teaching on the Spirit of God correspond with the following passages...

JOHN 14:26; 16:13-15 - JESUS TO HIS DISCIPLES	EPHESIANS 3:16-19 - FOR US THE CHURCH
<p><i>“But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you...But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.”</i></p>	<p><i>“I pray that out of his (the Father’s) glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”</i></p>

2. How would you add to your answer in the beginning (intro question)?
3. In what ways is 1 Corinthians 2:6-16...
 - Comforting to you?
 - Challenging to you?
4. How does this passage undermine any notion that ...
 - a) We can know God by just applying logic?
 - b) We only need to argue someone into believing in Jesus?
 - c) A person's faith is ultimately dependent on their Christian leaders?
5. Close your time together using this passage as a prayer for one another and for those you know who might not believe in Jesus.

“The Knowledge of God does not come by human discovery but by divine revelation. The living Jesus Christ does speak to us with life-transforming impact through the Bible, but this does not happen naturally or automatically – only through the revealing work of the Holy Spirit”
(Ivan Satyavrata, The Holy Spirit, 2009:96)





Turning on the Lights

In many ways, the message of “*Christ crucified*” would be unpalatable to most 1st Century hearers and readers. Yet, the movement of this message grew rapidly. At Pentecost, the followers of Jesus grew to “*three thousand*” (Acts 2:41) and continually “*the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly*” (Acts 6:7). Even spreading to the Gentiles (Acts 13:1ff). How can this be the case? The message of “*Christ crucified*” is offensive and shameful.

The answer is found in Acts 1:8, “*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you*”. Ultimately, the fact that people believed is because of the empowering presence of God the Holy Spirit enabling them to see and believe the truth of “*Christ crucified*”. And this remains the same today. The only reason we see the truth of Jesus, believe and follow Him is because the Holy Spirit has enabled us to do so.

And the Bible uses three ideas/pictures to convey this idea of the Spirit’s empowering presence helping us to see.

- a) **God removed a veil from our eyes.** In 2 Corinthians 3:1-18, Paul argues that without the Holy Spirit, when people read the Bible it is like “*a veil covers their hearts*” (3:14-15). The Bible is a window for us to see God, but the curtains are closed. It is only by the Spirit that “*the veil is taken away*” and we can finally “*behold the Lord’s glory*” (3:16-18). We can finally see the light shining through the window.
- b) **God turned on the lights.** In Ephesians 1:17-18, Paul prays for the Ephesians Church that God the Holy Spirit would “*have the eyes of your hearts enlightened*” (literally: shine light so that you can see). Before the indwelling presence of the Spirit, it was like we were in a permanent state of load-shedding. We couldn’t see the truth of Jesus. It is only through the Spirit enlightening our hearts that we can see.
- c) **God gave us strength to grasp.** In Ephesians 3:14-19, Paul prays that God the Father, “*may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being*”. It is only through His power that we “*may have the strength*” to comprehend God’s love in “*Christ crucified*”. By ourselves, we are too weak to see.

The term we use for this is “*illumination*”. So, realize, when someone grasps something about the Gospel they never did before; when someone believes in the truth of Jesus; when the words of the Bible become real to them (like the air we breathe)... that is God the Holy Spirit working in His empowering presence in the heart of that person. You are witnessing a miracle.

1 Corinthians 3:5-4:21

Connecting the Wisdom of God to Ministry

STUDY 5

“I love serving God’s people at St. Peters; because ...”

1. How would you complete that sentence?



Investigating

Read 1 Corinthians 3:5-23... Ministry, Church and God

Paul uses the illustrations of farming and building to explain how we need to understand the ministry of proclaiming “Christ Crucified” (1:23-24) ...

1. How does Paul describe himself and Apollos? (vv. 5-15)
 - What are their roles and how do they complement one another? (vv. 5-6, 10-11)
 - Who makes their work succeed? (vv. 6-7) (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18, 23-24; 2:4-5, 10-16)
 - On what foundation do they build? What will happen to their work if they don’t build on that foundation? (vv. 11, 12-15) (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-20; 2:6, 19-20)
 - Why are they in ministry? (vv. 8, 12-14)

The Corinthian Church was aiming to build factions on the principles of human wisdom, power and strength (cf. 1:26-29) on certain personalities (1:12; 3:1-4, 21)

2. What should the church realize about themselves and what warning does Paul give those who break-down the church through factionalism? (vv. 16-17)
3. Why should they become “fools” and abandon human wisdom? (vv. 18-23; cf. 1 Cor. 1:18-25)

Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-21... The Cross and the Apostolic Ministry

The factionalism in the Corinthian Church was not just about picking favourites (1:12; 3:4, 21), but also about judging their leaders (to the point of rejecting some leaders, like the Apostle Paul) ...

- 4. Whose judgment is Paul concerned with? Why? (vv. 1-5)
- 5. What attitude should the Corinthian Church adopt? (vv. 6-7)
- 6. Paul makes a contrast between how some in the Corinthian Church viewed themselves and how Paul’s ministry is as an Apostle. How do they differ?

THE CORINTHIANS	THE APOSTLE PAUL
Vv. 7-8	Vv. 9-13
<i>How does their attitude mirror the world?</i>	<i>How does their attitude mirror the world?</i> <i>How does Paul’s ministry mirror “Christ Crucified”?</i>

- 7. Why is Paul so concerned about them, having such a long discussion about their factionalism? (vv. 14-21)



Thinking & Living

“My greatest heartbreaks have been people who, failing to see that it is the Word that brings out the true flavour of personality, wanted to absorb the preacher’s personality but not the Word – wanted the fruit but not the root, like people want the ethic without the Cross”
(William Still, The Work of the Pastor, pages 33-34)

1. How would you complete the sentence from the introduction, “I love serving God’s people at St. Peters; because ...”?
2. How does this passage correct/challenge the following attitudes in churches and ministry ...
 - Picking, comparing and judging leaders and pastors on the basis of their gifts and personality
 - Tendency of church splits around certain personalities
 - Seeking people’s praise and approval in ministry
 - The expectation that ministry is about self-gratification or should be comfortable
 - The success of ministry is dependent on my ability to make it happen
3. Anyone long enough in any ministry will at some point feel like a “fool” or discouraged. Yet, how has this passage also served as an encouragement...
 - Now while you are serving Jesus in the ministries you are involved in?
 - In the future as you keep running the race of serving Jesus?

“It is a lifelong commitment to following Jesus Christ, wherever He leads... In his well-known parable of the talents Jesus promises rewards for those who invest their gifts in the kingdom and look for Gospel growth. He is scathing about those who play it safe and do not engage in Gospel enterprise...”

There is no greater calamity than a wasted life”
(Paul Mallard, Staying Fresh, pp. 202-203)



Is Paul anti-rational?

In 1 Corinthians Paul continually contrasts “*human wisdom*” with the “*wisdom of God*”. Continually, Paul describes the Gospel as being “*foolishness*” or “*folly*” (1 Cor. 1:18-25; 2:14). In salvation, God chose the “*foolish*” (1 Cor. 1:27). To believe the Gospel you need to become a “*fool*” (1 Cor. 3:18).

Now, some have interpreted this as Paul arguing for anti-rationalism. Christians shouldn’t think, but just believe (like a blind faith). Or Christianity is anti-intellectual and just a matter of the “*heart*” (what I feel). Some have tied this with Jesus’ words of being like a child (simple thinking, simple acceptance). Yet, ironically, Jesus was not talking about being anti-rational, but dependence (like a child).

To interpret Paul this way is to miss the point of the argument. Firstly, realize that 1 Corinthians is a long discourse (a strong, passionate argument). Paul is applying some serious rational thinking in 1 Corinthians. So, it wouldn’t make sense that Paul is advocating for anti-rationalism if he is using reason to do it. For example, 1 Corinthians 15 Paul sets forth a strong scriptural (“*according to the Scriptures*”; 1 Cor. 15:3-4), historical (“*he appeared*”; 1 Cor. 15:5-11) and rational argument (notice all the logic, “*For*”, “*If... then*”, “*therefore*” etc.) for the resurrection of Jesus. The last thing Paul is arguing for is leaving your brain behind.

Secondly, Paul’s evangelism strategy was to reason with people about Jesus. There are numerous examples of this in Acts. For example, “*he reasoned with them from the Scriptures*” (Acts 17:2); “*he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons*” (Acts 17:17); “*he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks*” (Acts 18:4) (cf. Acts 18:19; 24:25). Paul was rigorous in his logic in sharing the Good News of Jesus. Similarly, we are called “*to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect*” (1 Pet. 3:15).

So, what is going on here? What is going on in 1 Corinthians is a clash of worldviews. The worldview of the Cross was in direct conflict with the worldviews of the Greeks and the Jews (their thinking, ethics and values). The death and resurrection of Jesus made no sense from a Greek or Jewish worldview at the time. From their perspective the Gospel is foolish. Paul is explaining that the only way you transition from the one worldview (of the Greeks and the Jews) to the other (of the Gospel) is the work of the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 5:1-6:20

Disconnected or Reconnecting?

STUDY 6

Jesus has set us free, so *“everything is permissible”*. I am free to do what I want now...

1. Discuss what you think about this ...

Investigating

Read 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, 12-20... Sex, the Gospel and Church Discipline

Paul has already highlighted the arrogance prevalent in some of the Corinthian Church (4:19-21). Yet, their arrogance is not just shown in their judgment of leaders, but also in how they live the Christian life...

1. Paul addresses the issue of sexual sin in the Church of Corinth...

WHAT IS HAPPENING?	HOW ARE THEY RESPONDING?	WHAT ARE THEY THINKING?	WHAT ABOUT THE GOSPEL ARE THEY NOT APPLYING/ REALIZING?
5:1	5:2		5:6-8
6:16		6:12-13	6:13-17, 19-20

2. How should they respond in the light of the Gospel?
 - To the man committing incest (5:4-5, 11) - Why this?
 - To those having sex outside of marriage (5:18-19) - Why this?

Read 1 Corinthians 6:1-11... When a brother sins against a brother...

1. What's going on in the Church of Corinth here? (6:1, 7-8)
2. What about the Gospel is the Corinthian Church not applying to the offended person? (6:2-6 – notice the irony, cf. 4:10)
3. What about the Gospel is Paul reminding the offender about? (6:9-10)
4. What hope does Paul have that the Church in Corinth will change? (6:11; consider 1:8-9)



Thinking & Living

“There is only one genuine cure for legalism. It is the same medicine the Gospel prescribes for antinomianism (anti-law): understanding and tasting union with Jesus Christ himself. This leads to a new love for and obedience to the law of God, which He now mediates to us in the Gospel!”

(Sinclair Ferguson, *The Whole Christ*, p. 157).

1. Notice, Paul speaks of the Gospel in past, present and future tense in this section. So...

WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN THE GOSPEL?	WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE GOSPEL?	WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN THE GOSPEL?
5:7; 6:11	6:15-17, 19	6:2-3, 14

2. How should these Gospel realities change how we live?
What are we saying if there is no change?

This section has a lot to say about church discipline and as a church family we have to apply these principles as well. Consequently, the following steps represent the kind of procedure we would seek to implement at St. Peters. The details of every situation are different so these stages may be adapted as necessary.

In each and every situation: We would hope to do this in an attitude of prayerful, humble and loving service. The ultimate aim is to lovingly restore people and carefully protect the church.

Step 1: If you think a person is guilty of unrepentant sin (as described in 1 Cor. 5-6) those who know this should personally speak to the person and seek to clarify and verify what has happened. Always approach this with an attitude of humility, keeping Jesus' words in mind about looking at the "log that is in your own eye" (Matt. 7:3).

Step 2: If this is unsuccessful, the matter should be raised with our different leadership structures (cf. Matt. 18:10-35): A) Fellowship Group Leaders, B) Community Leaders and C) Pastors.

Step 3: Assuming there really is gross and unrepentant sin, the priority would then be for the person to receive loving Biblical counsel from within these structures, in the hope that they repent and recommit to the Gospel. If the issue is also a civil offense (fraud, sexual harassment/abuse etc.) the church would also have to notify relevant civil authorities (cf. Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17).

Step 4: Depending on the nature of the offense, the person may be a) taken from all forms of leadership and service, b) excluded from participating in the Lord's Supper and c) if needed asked to refrain from being in a Fellowship Group. The purpose is for restoration and reconciliation (cf. 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 2:5-11; 7:8-13; 1 Tim. 1:20; Matthew 18:10-35); yet also emphasizing the seriousness of perpetual/unrepentant sin. We don't believe in cheap grace, but transforming grace. Consequently, the person will be treated as someone to evangelize and demonstrate Christ's love in reaching out.

Step 5: After a period of observation and engagement by the leadership, if the person has truly repented (and reconciliation has been achieved as far as we can see), then the person is to be restored into fellowship.

3. How does 1 Corinthians 5-6 help us see why this procedure is so important?
 - How is it beneficial for the person who is sinning?
 - How is it beneficial for the church as a whole?
4. Pray that we would be a community of believers who continually live transformed lives connected to the Gospel (past, present and future).

You are never alone...



Jesus taught His disciples to pray, *“Our Father in heaven”* (Matt. 6:9). He also told His disciples that He was going to return and be *“in my Father’s house”* (John 14:1-4). The Apostle John also sees the incredible vision of the Triune God (Father, the Son [the Lamb] and the Spirit [sevenfold Spirit]) enthroned in the Heavenly Throne room (Revelation 4-5). It is perfectly true, God’s presence is in heaven, ruling and reigning from His throne.

Even so, this is not the only reality Jesus revealed to us about the presence of God. Yes, God is enthroned in heaven, but He is also enthroned in the hearts of His people. By God the Holy Spirit, *“My Father will love him, and we will come to him (the one who loves Jesus) and make our home with him”* (John 14:23). Jesus has returned to the house of God the Father (Jn. 14:1-4) and He has made His home in us (Jn. 14:23). He is high and exalted, sitting at the right hand of God the Father in heaven and in our hearts.

Right now, we are *“a holy temple in the Lord... a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit”* (Ephesians 2:21-22). The reason Jesus died on the cross and rose to eternal life is so that we might enjoy the presence of God both now and forever, *“I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us... I in them and you in me”* (Jn. 17:20-24). Through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (who *“lives with you and will be in you”* [Jn. 14:17]) we are *“in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you”* (John 14:20). Heaven (being with God forever) is not just a future hope, but a present reality as well.

So, realize, if you believe and follow Jesus, there is never a moment when you are alone (cf. Heb. 13:5; Matt. 28:18-20). We are God’s house. His throne-room. His temple. Realize, whenever Christians meet (whether in small groups or Sundays), we are among and within God’s presence. Realize, we don’t sing and pray to gain or invoke God’s presence. In Jesus, we sing and pray because we already are in God’s presence. We don’t strive to live holy lives because we want to be “closer” to God. We strive to live holy lives because God is close (among us and within us).

And we will see in 1 Corinthians 5-14 how this reality (God among and within us) impacts every aspect of our lives...

1 Corinthians 7:1-40

Marriage, Sex and Singleness

STUDY 7

1. Share with one another different views you might have heard on marriage and singleness...



Investigating

Read 1 Corinthians 7:1-24... To the Married

Remember, we are called to “*glorify God with your body*”, since Jesus has redeemed us, and the Spirit of God indwells us (1 Cor. 6:18-20).

1 Corinthians 7 explains how we can “*flee sexual immorality*”, but also “*glorify God with your body*”.

1. What reason does Paul give for Christians to get married? (vv. 1-2, 9, 36)
2. How can married people “*glorify God with your body*” within marriage? (vv. 3-5)
3. Some within the Church of Corinth pushed singleness to the point of calling married people to divorce...
 - How should Christians view their marriage union? (vv. 10-11) (cf. Matt. 5:31-32)
 - How should a Christian view their marriage union to a non-Christian? (vv. 12-16)
 - What should be their general approach to their present situations (whether married or unmarried, circumcised or uncircumcised, bondservant or free)? (vv. 17, 24)

Read 1 Corinthians 7:25-40... To the Singles

Jesus (our “*Lord*”, cf. 1:2) did not necessarily command anything about singleness (there are some hints, cf. Matt. 19:10-12; 22:29-33), but Paul gives his judgment as one who is made “*trustworthy*” by the Lord Jesus (7:25) and inspired by the Holy Spirit (7:40).

1. What is Paul's judgment regarding people wondering whether they should remain single? (vv. 25-28, 36-40)
2. Paul gives us two major reasons why singleness is *"better"* in vv. 29-35...
 - What is reason no. 1 (vv. 29-31)? How should Christians view their lives? (cf. 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:51-53, 58)
 - What is reason no. 2 (vv. 32-35)? How can singles *"glorify God"* in their singleness?



Thinking & Living

A common view in historic Greek culture regarding sex and marriage can be summarized by this quote: *"Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of our persons, but wives to bear us legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of our households"* (Demosthenes, Oration 59:122).

1. How has 1 Corinthians 7's teaching on marriage ...

- Challenged the Greek or today's view of marriage and sex?
- Challenged your motives for getting married?
- Showed how you can glorify God in your marriage?
- Helped how you counsel those who are contemplating divorce?

2. How has 1 Corinthians 7's teaching on singleness ...

- Challenged today's views on singleness?
- Challenged your motives for being single?
- Showed how you can glorify God in your singleness?
- Helped how you can encourage those who are single?

3. How does 1 Corinthians 7:17-24's teaching on contentment correct our consumeristic culture which motivates discontent in every area of life (work, income, housing, singleness, marriage partners, parenthood etc.)

*"Relationships based on family are temporary.
Relationships based on union with Christ are eternal"*
(John Piper, Desiring God, Single in Christ)

1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1

Love God, Flee idolatry

STUDY 8

“What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give. A counterfeit god is anything so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living”
(Tim Keller, Counterfeit Gods, xvii)

1. In Jesus we are “free”, yet what are possible “counterfeit gods” that could ensnare us today?



Investigating

Read 1 Corinthians 8:1-13... Love God in your freedom

In 1 Corinthians 6:18-20, we are called to “glorify God with your body”. Now, Paul will reiterate this in 1 Cor. 10:31, but now in relation to what we eat or drink or do...

1. What “knowledge” or “freedom” did some in the Corinthian Church have regarding idols? (vv. 1-6)
2. Paul argues that loving God is the most important (v. 3). In what way was the Church in Corinth not loving God in the application of their “freedom” or “knowledge” (vv. 9-13)?

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-11:1... Love God, Flee Idolatry

Paul uses the books of Exodus and Numbers as a warning regarding sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6:14-20) and idolatry (8:1-13).

1. What is Paul’s major concern for those who think they can join idol festivals due to their Christian freedom (9:24-27; 10:12)?
2. In their pride of “knowledge” (8:1-2), what are they “ignorant of” regarding those who practice sexual immorality and idolatry? (10:1-10)

3. Why should the church in Corinth not succumb to the temptation of idolatry and sexual immorality? (10:11-13)
4. What does the Corinthian Church fail to understand regarding ...
 - What the Lord' Supper points to (10:14-17)? How does this correspond with 1 Cor. 6:15-20?
 - The nature of idol feasts and why they are incompatible with our union with Jesus? (10:18-22)
5. How should they "love God" (8:3) concerning meat sacrificed to idols? (10:23-33)
6. How is Paul's Apostleship an example of this (11:1; cf. 9:19-22)?



Thinking & Living

1. How has 1 Corinthians 8-10 helped...
 - How you understand Christian "freedom"? What principles should govern how you apply your "freedom"?
 - How you understand our union with Jesus?
 - How you understand the nature of idol worship?
 - How you can love and glorify God in what you eat, drink and do?

"To contemporary people the word 'idolatry' conjures up pictures of primitive people bowing down before statues... Our contemporary society is not fundamentally different from these ancient ones. Each culture is dominated by its own set of idols... each one has its shrines – whether office towers, spas and gyms, studios, or stadiums... What are the gods of beauty, power and money, and achievement but these same things that have assumed mythic proportions in our individual lives and in our society?"

(Tim Keller, Counterfeit Gods, pp. xi-xii).

2. How does 1 Corinthians 10:1-10 serve as a warning against our contemporary idols?

We are called to follow Paul and Jesus' example; to *"become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some"* (9:22), trying to *"please everybody in every way... seeking the good of many, so that they may be saved"* (10:33)...

3. How would you approach the following scenarios?

- You are shopping or eating with a Muslim friend and you see meat that is "Halaal". Your friend buys it, and asks whether you would like to as well...
- You are invited to a braai. You know at the braai you have non-Christian and Christian friends who struggle with alcoholism. You are offered a beer by the host...

4. How do you think this Gospel principle will impact the following areas of your life?

- How you relate to non-Christian family and friends
- How you conduct yourself at Church on Sundays
- How you relate to your work colleagues



Personally, during the holidays or after the holidays...

Read 1 Corinthians 9:1-27... Paul's freedom as an Apostle

In the Corinthian Church's factionalism, they used their concept of wisdom to judge Paul as an Apostle (1 Cor. 4:1ff). Now, some in the Corinthian Church are using their view of freedom to "*sit in judgment*" of Paul (1 Cor. 9:1-3).

1. Paul lists three things to which he would have a right as an Apostle or preacher of the Gospel. What are they? (vv. 3-12)

2. Yet, Paul refuses to use his freedom to claim these rights (vv. 12-17). Paul gives two reasons why he does this...
 - What is Paul's first reason (v. 18)
 - What is Paul's second reason (vv. 19-23)
 - How is Paul following Jesus' example in these two reasons? (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 2:5-8; 2 Cor. 8:9)

