



Bible Study

1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 1

The church at Corinth was vibrant, active and moving in spiritual gifts but it was also facing a number of moral challenges. It seems that some people may have come from Corinth to visit Paul and they had informed him that there were divisions within the church. The church had also written to Paul for advice on a number of doctrinal matters. This letter was intended to address these issues and answer their questions.

Introduction

Paul is writing to those who have been set aside in Christ, showing how, as God's people, they should be different to others in the world.

Thankfulness

Paul thanks God for these people, who know His grace through the Lord Jesus Christ. They move freely in spiritual gifts, they wait for the Lord's second coming and Paul assures them of the faithfulness of God and God's ability to keep them strong to the very end.

Division

It seems that there was considerable division in the church at Corinth and there were quarrels which seemed to centre around different personalities, including Paul himself, Apollos and Cephas. Some people were following these different personalities and others were claiming simply to follow Christ. However, we can see that their attitudes were spiritually bankrupt, because they were causing division. We understand that leaders have different personalities but it is foolish to choose one over another. Christ is not divided. He raises up leaders to share their gifts to build the body of Christ, rather than to split the church. Paul teaches that we should focus upon the gospel, which is the message of Christ crucified. He suffered in our place and, even though he was God, he gave himself fully for us!

Christ Crucified

Jesus gave himself for us because of the wisdom of God. God saw that surrendering His Son to crucifixion and death, would destroy the power of the devil and defeat the proud and stubborn hearts of men. Jesus was sent, not to crush rebellion in a military fashion but, rather, to destroy the roots of sin through his humble, selfless sacrifice. To the world, the cross appears to be a sign of defeat but, in the heavenly realm, it stands for the demolition of Satan and all of his kingdom! It seems foolish to come and be slaughtered like a lamb but Christ's suffering has destroyed Satan's kingdom and made a way for men and women to be reconciled to God. We can only be humbled and rejoice at God's wonderful plan!

Our Status Before God

Paul reminds the Corinthians that, in the eyes of the world, many of them did not have high standing and appeared to have little influence or power. However, the church of Jesus confounds the ways of the world. In particular, Jesus builds his church with those that the world despises, those who are weak and those who are considered foolish. In Christ, we have been lifted up and we have become sons and daughters of God. We discover that we are valued and precious to the Lord and that we are now viewed very differently by God, who is the one that matters. Nevertheless, although we enjoy our wonderful new position in Christ, it is very important that we should always remain humble and dependent upon him.

What Christ Has Done

Christ is our understanding. He has brought true wisdom into our lives, which gives us a true and accurate perception of how things really are.

Christ is our righteousness. He has shown us the way to live and has covered our sins, so that we are acceptable to a Holy God.

Christ is our holiness. He has made us unique and precious and we are now dedicated to serve the living God and to put him first in every area of our lives.

Christ is our redemption. He paid the price that set us free from Satan, we are no longer under his control and we belong to God.

Christ is our assurance. In ourselves, we have nothing to boast about but we have much to boast about in Christ!

Points to Consider:

1. It is important to remember the good things that are happening in people's lives, not just the problems. How ready are we to do that, when we pray for the body of Christ?
2. How can we overcome the problem of people following a personality rather than Christ? Are we treating people in the body of Christ equally or do we have favourites? Do we rely on our personality to attract God's people or are we consciously pointing people to Christ?
3. How do we keep the message of Christ crucified central in our lives and ministry? Do we proclaim the great cost of our salvation as a challenge to our pride and selfishness?
4. When we reflect upon ourselves and the body of Christ, do we appreciate the difference that Christ has made for us? Are we aware that, in ourselves, we are nobody? It is only in Christ that we are a special and valued people.
5. In verse 30, Paul makes it clear to the Corinthians what Christ is for them. Do we appreciate that, for us, this same Christ is the one that we can confidently boast about?

1 Corinthians 2

Paul, writing to the Corinthians, is aware that they are facing a number of problems and issues and is, therefore, seeking to be wise and focused in writing to the church. He knows that human wisdom will not address the issues and, therefore, looks to God for His help.

The Necessity of the Cross

Paul emphasises the importance of Jesus and his death on the cross. The fact that Jesus died was obviously important but the way that he died was also very significant. Death on the cross was a very public and lengthy event. The shame and the pain of crucifixion is incredibly humbling for us, challenging all of the pride and selfishness that exists in the human heart. He died for us! He died for me!

Paul's Preaching Style

Paul is very conscious of his own weaknesses and inadequacies and, so, he does not try to persuade people with eloquence or a great use of words. He simply proclaims Jesus. As he proclaims Jesus, he demonstrates God's power, which calls people to repentance and also witnesses to the saving work of Jesus. People are healed in their bodies and delivered from demons, when Paul boldly proclaims Christ and God blesses Paul's ministry, because it is Christ-centred.

Wisdom from God

The way that Paul proclaims Christ, reveals a wisdom that is not otherwise found in our world. The revelation and explanation of who Christ is, shows that God truly understands the extent of our problem and He has dealt with it in the most remarkable way. Jesus, dying in our place, is miraculous in itself, because he is truly God. Our salvation is not just for this life but, in fact, is opening a door for something beyond this life, that we can never fully understand until we are with him.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

God's Holy Spirit is able to reveal to us, our true nature but also the reality and the nature of God. We are able to understand spiritual truth, because the Holy Spirit brings our spirit to life and teaches us the ways of God. God's ways are very different to our natural way of thinking!

The Spiritual Person

As spiritual people, we have learnt to understand and perceive God, not through the flesh or our own efforts, but through the revelation that God gives. When we resort to our natural understanding, we will be confused and troubled. However, when we learn to put Jesus first and to focus upon him, we develop the mind of Christ. Part of our maturing in God, is to put to death our old life and to develop our thinking and acting to be just as Christ thought and acted.

Points to Consider:

1. What is your priority in your preaching? Is your preaching Christ-centred or self-centred?
2. How frequently is the message of the cross presented in our words and preaching?
3. Are we resorting to problem solving with our natural instincts or are we consciously looking to Christ?
4. Do we take time to meditate upon what God has prepared for us in the immediate future as well as in heaven?
5. How do you demonstrate, in practical ways, that you have the mind of Christ?

1 Corinthians 3

Paul demonstrates that he is very aware of the needs of the church at Corinth and writes with authority, yet, humility to them. This is part of the apostolic role to assess and then fill any gaps that come to light in a church's situation.

Milk, not Solid Food

The spiritual milk of the Word is not to be despised, as Peter tells us in his letter (1 Peter 2:2). However, if a baby has grown into childhood and its only diet is milk, that is a problem. Paul's definition of a spiritual infant is a Christian who is still very worldly. Quarrelling and jealousy demonstrate worldliness and spiritual immaturity. Essentially, being selfish and wanting our own way, rather than seeking God's way.

Paul and Apollos

Paul has talked about division in Chapter 1 and here again, he expresses his disappointment that, in peoples estimation, personalities and individuals are rated more highly than what that person's ministry contributes to the body of Christ.

First of all, a minister is a servant and not a celebrity. We do not minister for position or prestige but, rather, to bless and encourage God's people.

Secondly, in ministry we play a part in God's work and He values every part played and every person's contribution. So, some plant, some water and some reap. All of these things contribute helpfully but whatever someone does in the body of Christ, it is Christ alone who should be honoured and praised.

Co-Workers

We work with our Lord, submitting to him, and we perceive the helpful picture of a farmer. We plough the ground, we sow the seed, we water the crop, and we reap a harvest. However, it is God's field (the World) that we work in and it is God's kingdom that we are building. Doing our own thing and then asking God to bless our plans, will not bear fruit. Learning God's ways, strategies and plans and then doing them, is vital!

Laying a Foundation

Paul's ministry was successful, because the foundation of everything he did was the Lord Jesus Christ. Having Jesus as the base and root of all we do and the reason we exist, is a great beginning. However, repenting of our sin and receiving Christ as our personal Saviour and Lord, is only the start. We need to make choices and decisions that reflect that great beginning.

The Fire of God's Judgement

Paul introduces a very important subject, which is the judgement of all believers. The judgement which decides our eternal future is another matter. When we receive Jesus as our Saviour, we are rescued from hell and put on a road to heaven. We are forgiven and have been made God's children. However, we must still be responsible in our Christian lives and we are accountable to God. The judgement of a believer implies rewards for those who serve faithfully and a time when the Lord will express his appreciation for faithful service.

We are immensely grateful that Jesus has taken the punishment we deserve but we also long to hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" We know that if and when, by God's grace, he speaks such words to us, we will rejoice and give him all the glory!

God's Temple

We are a special people, set aside exclusively for the Lord. We have the Spirit of God. We must not bring problems upon ourselves and we know that God will protect us from those who might seek to destroy us. Humility is vital, understanding that our human wisdom falls far short of what the Lord requires. We must set aside worldly rating of leaders and follow Christ, who invests himself into all sorts of personalities and types to build his church. We are Christ's and Christ is God. Let our boasting be in Christ. Hallelujah!

Points to Consider:

1. Consider your spiritual diet. Are you truly seeking a deeper walk with God?
2. How influenced are you by personalities? How careful are you to value different ministries from different personalities?
3. Are you a co-worker or do you take over from the Lord in your ministry?
4. How prepared are you to face judgement as a believer? Gold or straw - how will your work withstand the test of God's fire?
5. Are you aware that you can be rewarded for faithful Christian living? How careful are you to protect your body, which is a temple of the Holy Spirit?

1 Corinthians 4

One of the challenges that Paul faces with the Corinthian Church is that some of them question his apostolic role. He handles this with dignity, because his main desire is to bless the church rather than to exalt himself.

Servants of Christ

Paul is not committed to titles but sees himself as a servant. His joy is that God has revealed mysteries and wonderful truth, which he considers a privilege, and he looks for wisdom as to how to reveal and share what has been made known to him.

Faithfulness

Paul's desire is to be faithful to the call that God has placed upon his life. He knows that people will try to judge him but his only concern is the Lord's assessment of him. Paul wants his hearers to wait for God's verdict, rather than prematurely make their human assessments of him. God is the righteous judge!

Paul and Apollos

It would seem that Paul wanted the fellow workers that came alongside him, to also hold to the values that he had been taught. The way that people treat friends like Apollos should be the same way they treat Paul. People should not choose between him and Apollos but, rather, should see them both as servants, working together for the benefit of the church.

The Cost of Apostolic Ministry

There is no need to envy apostolic ministry. It requires great sacrifice and could even mean death. An apostle may appear a fool to the world but, in fact, their ministry brings the wisdom of God. Pioneering and planting new churches will often bring strong opposition. Materially, there can be many challenges. We know that, sometimes, Paul had no support at all and had to make tents to provide for his physical needs. Peoples' treatment of Paul and the other apostles were sometimes very destructive. Paul says to some, we are treated as scum and garbage.

Fathers in Christ

Paul humbly declares that, through his ministry, many have been saved and have come to know the reality of the gospel. His preaching and testimony as well as his way of life, has been a powerful witness to those who do not know Christ.

Timothy

Paul was committed to raising up 'Timothys' - people who would share his conviction of Christ and the word of God, who would primarily witness to the gospel but who would also honour him. Paul was always keen to visit the churches himself but, when that was not possible, people like Timothy and Titus were valuable members of his team.

Paul's Hope to Go Back to Corinth

Paul desires to go back to see the church in Corinth. He believes in a gospel which is not just words but power! He wants to visit in love and with a gentle spirit but, if discipline is necessary he will bring it!

Points to Consider:

1. Are we slaves to titles and position or do we have servant hearts towards God and His people?
2. How can we avoid quick assessments and develop patience to see what is happening in peoples' lives, knowing that God is the judge?
3. How committed are we to raising up others ('Timothys'), who share our heart and love of the gospel?
4. Are we aware that true ministry in the gospel will often result in difficulty and persecution or do we deceive ourselves that there will never be problems living out our lives for Christ?
5. In what ways can we be spiritual fathers and how can we be cautious to avoid unhelpful relationships with those that we serve?
6. We prefer to avoid confrontation but are we willing to bring correction when it is necessary?

1 Corinthians 5

Paul continues to address issues that are brought to his attention by concerned believers in Corinth. It would appear that, despite some very good things happening in the church, there are things which are being overlooked and to leave them unchallenged would be very detrimental to the body of Christ.

The Problem

Paul has heard about sexual immorality in the church and will address that later in his letter but, at this point, he addresses a particular matter. He points out that, although pagans can often be immoral, even they would draw a line at a man sleeping with his father's mother, probably his stepmother. Paul accuses them of pride in this behaviour, which seems unbelievable, but we can be sure that Paul has good reason to accuse them of this.

Lack of Discipline

Paul states that the man responsible for this sin should have been put out of the fellowship. Someone behaving in this way needs to learn how serious the matter is and should not be allowed to influence others or spoil the atmosphere of worship to our Lord Jesus. Putting someone out of the church is never an easy thing to do but, if someone is sinning, our primary concern must be for the spiritual well-being and reputation of the wider Body of Christ.

Handing Someone Over to Satan

This is a very dramatic and powerful comment. Satan is the one who first sinned, when pride led him to resist God and his consequent, futile attempts to take over from God. He is determined to spoil all of the good things that God has made. Sexuality, expressed exclusively in marriage is good, but fornication, adultery and incest are not. So, the offender is handed over to the one who is the originator of sin, with the desire that there should be repentance and a turning back to Christ for deliverance from sin.

Failing to Deal with Sin in the Body of Christ

Paul says that sin which is not confronted and dealt with, has the effect of influencing and spreading in the Body, to others. Christ, our Passover Lamb, calls us to give ourselves to him. We are to be pure and undivided in our allegiance to Christ. We all stumble and fail as we struggle with our worldly imperfections and scripture exhorts us to teach and encourage one another. However, we appreciate the enormity of Christ's sacrifice on our behalf and we must not tolerate those who openly sin.

Fellowship in the Body of Christ

Paul's strong warnings come to the Body of Christ, regarding close and intimate relationships with those doing sinful things. He is aware that some unbelievers still have good moral standards but he is especially concerned with those who give an impression of being believers but whose lifestyle totally contradicts a genuine faith in Christ. We seek to be salt and light in this dark world and certainly do our best to present Christ and kingdom values but, in the Church, we have an awesome responsibility to bring correction and discipline lovingly, always remembering that we too are sinners saved by grace!

Points to Consider:

1. Are there issues with sin in our own lives, which we are failing to address?
2. How concerned are we about the health of the Body of Christ?
3. Are we willing to confront and challenge sinful behaviour in the Body of Christ?
4. Do we take seriously, our responsibility to challenge and discipline others?
5. How can we guard against a lack of compassion and being insensitive in handling discipline issues?

1 Corinthians 6

Paul is dealing with problems that existed in the church in Corinth. These problems remain issues for many in the church today.

Handling Disputes

Paul is very troubled that Christians are, all too easily, seeking to settle matters in the secular courts, instead of resolving issues between themselves. Going to the courts, often wastes valuable resources, which could be used for other purposes in God's work. It also gives unbelievers the impression that Christians, who should know better, cannot solve their own problems.

Judging the World

There will be a day of final judgement, which God will declare to His world. Here, Paul tells us an amazing truth - that God's redeemed people will play a part in that final judgement, including the judgement of angels. For now, God has made man to be in authority and to exercise rule in the world that He has made. However, we see in this chapter, that God's people will exercise authority and judgement over matters far more important than the trivial issues we face today!

Righteousness

If you go to court against a fellow believer, it suggests that you are incapable of reaching a righteous agreement. You need to be willing to forgive, even if this means losing an issue, because this will be a greater witness to those outside of Christ. Issues of immorality, theft, drunkenness, slander and swindlers, need to be handled with an understanding that, before many of us came to Christ, these things were part of our lifestyle. Despite our sins, when we repented, God forgave us and made us righteous in His sight, so we must always help others to do likewise. This does not mean that we tolerate sin but, even as God has shown mercy to us, we desire to show mercy to others. However, those who do not repent of their sins will receive judgement from God.

Sexual Immorality

In terms of our attitude towards our sexuality, the Bible always argues for purity, self-control and faithfulness. Here, Paul reminds us that our bodies are members of Christ himself and temples of the Holy Spirit. They belong to God and He wants us to be responsible and pure in the way that we care for them. What we eat and how we look after ourselves, directly affects how we are able to serve God in this body, which is a gift from Him. When we misuse our bodies through immorality, adultery, sex outside of marriage or

excessive eating and drinking, we not only endanger healthy relationships with others but we also invite disease and sickness - which then means that we are unable to serve God anyway! Paul refers to the phrase, "The two will become one flesh", which relates not only to a physical union but a much deeper bonding that happens as a result of a sexual relationship. We have been called to be united with Christ. Our deepest bonding needs to be with him and, as a result, we can reach out with the Gospel to others, with integrity and righteousness.

Bought at a Price

In order that we might be delivered from sin and brought into a relationship with God, an enormous price had to be paid. This body of flesh has been redeemed and set free from Satan's power, because Jesus shed his blood. We have been born again, when we receive Jesus as our Saviour. We have eternal life, God's spirit lives in us and we have a relationship with God. Therefore, we must always resist the vulnerability that exists in these bodies of flesh in which we live. Jesus said, "The Spirit is willing, but the body is weak." However, if we truly believe that Jesus bore our sin in his body and that he was crucified for us then, when we receive him as our Saviour, we will no longer want to do the things that caused him to pay such an enormous price to rescue us.

Points to Consider:

1. Do we resort to the world's ways of resolving disputes or are we prepared to seek to resolve things prayerfully and with humility before God?
2. Reflect on the matter that you and I will be instruments in God's judgement. What impact should that make upon how we live and how we treat others now?
3. How could we improve our care for these bodies that God has given us?
4. There is a direct link between our physical well-being and our spiritual well-being? Do we properly understand this?
5. Consider again the terrible price that Jesus paid to rescue us from our sin. How should we respond?

1 Corinthians 7

Paul continues to address the sexual area of life. He has spoken very clearly about immorality and inappropriate sexual behaviour but now he tackles the subjects of sex in marriage, faithfulness in marriage, the benefits of singleness and guidance for those considering marriage. The text indicates that this teaching is a result of questions that Paul has been asked to address. Consequently, it is most unfair to suggest that Paul might be obsessed by these matters. Rather, we see that he has the courage to face up to these issues and address them.

Sex in Marriage

Paul realises the power of sexual attraction and makes it clear that marriage is an appropriate way of expressing and fulfilling these desires. He explains that those who can resist these desires and not be controlled by them, are in the best place but marriage provides a legitimate outlet for these desires. As a married man, the husband has a responsibility to meet his wife's sexual needs. Likewise, the wife has a responsibility to meet her husband's sexual needs. Paul urges that neither husband nor wife should deprive each other but should understand that a key part of marriage is to channel and fulfil the sexual desires of each other. The sad reality is that, when this does not happen, one of the partners may look to someone outside of the marriage to meet those needs which are not satisfied within the marriage.

Paul suggests that a Christian couple may choose to abstain from sexual relations in order to spend more time in prayer. However, the unselfish attitude of giving oneself to one another must resume, because the devil is always looking for an opportunity to destroy a marriage with the temptations of lust and selfishness.

The Unmarried, Widows and Those with Unbelieving Partners

Paul encourages the unmarried and widows to abstain from a sexual life and hints that this is his own status. Perhaps Paul never married or, maybe, he was a widower. However, he instructs that, if they find the pressure is too great, it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

For those who are married to unbelieving partners, Paul encourages a man or woman to remain true to an unbelieving partner if that partner is willing to live together with the believer. Marriage promises must be kept. The believing partner who is faithful, sanctifies the marriage partner and the children if they have any. Perhaps some were looking for a way out of their marriages with unbelieving partners but Paul clearly exhorts that the sanctity of marriage comes first. However, if the unbeliever leaves, then that is solely their responsibility before God.

Our Calling

Paul points out that when Christ found us, we were in different situations - some were circumcised, some were slaves, some were married to unbelievers - and we should be content to remain in the situation to which God has called us. What matters is that Jesus found you, he loves you and he wants you to keep his commandments, always remembering the price that he paid to save you.

Singleness and Marriage

Paul's exhortation is that people should not feel forced to marry but, rather, enjoy the benefits of being single without the responsibilities that marriage brings. You can be wholly devoted to the Lord if you have no need to be concerned for a husband or a wife. However, if a man and woman have mutual feelings and desires, it is good to marry and express those desires in marriage. Nevertheless, Paul speaks about controlling our emotions and not being driven by a sense of obligation. Rather, we should make prayerful, considered choices before God.

Marriage is for life but, when widowed, a woman is free to marry again, provided that it is to a believer. However, Paul says that another marriage should not be seen as a necessity and, in fact, advises that the widow will be happier if she remains a widow.

Points to Consider:

1. How well do we apply the teaching of this chapter to preparing couples for marriage?
2. The sexual side of marriage is clearly important. How do we encourage a healthy view of sex and a healthy spiritual life, where honouring the Lord is seen to be first and foremost.
3. How does this chapter help us to support believers who have unsaved partners?
4. How should we support and counsel widows who have questions in their hearts about the advisability of marrying again?
5. How well do we encourage people to understand that being single is completely acceptable before God?

1 Corinthians 8

This chapter looks at the issue of eating food sacrificed to idols. This, like other problems mentioned in the letter, seems to have arisen from questions which were put to Paul.

The Problem

In the world that the Corinthians were living in, much of the meat that could be purchased in the market, would have been sacrificed upon an altar dedicated to idols. For some Christians, this was a highly sensitive matter; so much so, that they would feel contaminated and compromised by eating this meat. Other believers did not see it as an issue at all, so Paul was asked for his advice.

Knowledge

It seems that some of the Corinthians were boastful about their knowledge and insight. But Paul challenges whether knowledge is the only basis for making a good decision. He argues that our decisions should be based upon love and that when we truly love people, we will want to respond to their problems with compassion and sensitivity. Some people do have insights about issues but they will not necessarily be universally agreed. The Bible teaches that there is only one God, who has made Himself known through the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, idols and other so-called 'gods' are false and of no consequence. However, although that is true, people's minds and consciousness can be affected, even by things that are totally false and we need to understand this.

Conscience

The Bible reminds us that we have a conscience and that, before we were saved, there were a number of things that developed our conscience. Parents, culture, experience and knowledge, all affect how our conscience works. When we become a Christian, our conscience needs to go through a process of learning to understand right and wrong as defined by the Word of God. For some this might take a long time, because old habits and ways of thinking can be very deeply established, especially for those who find Christ in their later years.

Considering Others

It is obviously important, to build our own personal walk and relationship with God. We want to learn what pleases God and what offends Him. We will discover what draws us close to God and what forms a barrier between us and the Lord. All of this will affect our behaviour as Christians. But the Bible also teaches that our behaviour will influence others in the body of Christ. We learn from each other and we must be sensitive to and aware of

each other. We are responsible for our own decisions but our choices must not cause others to stumble and fall. Therefore, for the sake of others, we should abstain from actions which are not a problem to us but which we know to be a very big problem to someone else.

We do need wisdom to discern issues that are a matter of conscience from issues where Bible teaching is perfectly clear about what is right or wrong. Paul talks about those who have a weak conscience who, even though their understanding may be incorrect, will still fall into sin if they do something believing it to be wrong. We must avoid a superior attitude about this and understand that causing our brother or sister to fall into sin is a far more serious concern than our opinion about a certain matter. Paul concludes that, even though he would have no problem with eating meat that has been offered to idols, he would rather abstain than cause a brother or sister to fall.

Points to Consider:

1. How much are we motivated by love, when seeking to address an issue in the life of the church or in the life of a particular brother or sister in Christ?
2. Consider your conscience. How much is it affected by your upbringing and how much more is it now guided by the word of God?
3. How sensitive are we to the weaknesses of others in the body of Christ?
4. For the sake of others, are we prepared to abstain from things that do not offend us but which we know will offend them?
5. When facing conscience issues, how much do we pray and seek God to avoid the danger of speaking unhelpfully?

1 Corinthians 9

Paul often seems impervious to criticism and just gets on with preaching the gospel. However, in this chapter, he conducts a defence for his apostolic role and the lifestyle he has adopted in his ministry. The chapter concludes with his humble recognition of the need to keep on track with his relationship with God, so as to avoid missing out on the rewards that God has promised to those who faithfully serve Him.

His Apostolic Role

Paul was not one of the 12 apostles but he did see Jesus on the Damascus road. People had been won for Christ through his testimony and their conversion verified his ministry.

Ministry Rights

Paul was not lazy and, as one who served tirelessly, he had the right to food and drink. To expect people to minister and give up their time for nothing is unreasonable.

If someone is married then they may take their wife with them on their travels. To support her basic needs is also reasonable. Many of the apostles were married and particular reference is made to Peter, whose mother-in-law was healed by Jesus. The principle of hospitality is for all ministers of the gospel and no one should be exempt from that basic care. Soldiers, farmers and shepherds, all receive some reward for their work. Equally, it is appropriate for ministers of the gospel to receive practical support. Spiritual seed sown into people's lives produces a good harvest, so providing material reward to those who preach is a responsible thing to do. The temple in the Old Testament was served by Levites, who were able to give their time fully to this task because they were supported out of the tithes given by God's people.

"Those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel."

Paul is stating a principle here but, clearly, there must be wisdom exercised. Key questions must be prayerfully considered, regarding how much support a local church is able to provide and to what extent?

Paul's Position on His Rights

Paul has argued well but now makes it very clear that he, personally, will not be demanding anything from anyone. His passion is to preach Christ and if people bless him, that's good. But if they do not, he will still preach the gospel of Christ. Paul's commitment to the gospel means that he will be very adaptable in order to present Christ. He will aim to reach both the Jew and the Gentile. He will not compromise the truth of the gospel but he will do

everything to gain entry into people's lives with the gospel. His personal comfort and needs come second.

Discipline

Paul is far from complacent. He uses a familiar illustration of the athlete. To win the prize, the athlete must train hard and obey the rules. An athlete is focused and his mind does not wander. He concentrates on the task in hand. Paul had needs, as we all do, but he longs for people to come to a saving knowledge of Christ, more than any personal gain. In this life, there will always be a battle between our physical comfort and God's Spirit within us.

The Prize

It is not easy to be clear about what the prize is but the mention of rewards is there in scripture and there is a judgement for believers (2 Corinthians 5:10). This judgement is not to do with heaven or hell, because Christ has dealt with hell for us by his wonderful sacrifice on the cross. However, we will give an account to God for how we have lived as believers (Romans 14:12). Paul greatly desires that Christ will be pleased with his life of service and, at his end, speaks confidently of having fought the good fight, finished the race and kept the faith (2 Timothy 4:6-7). Jesus spoke of, 'Well done, good and faithful servant!' (Matthew 25:21). May God help us to hear the same!

Points to Consider:

1. Are we aware of circumstances where we need to stand up and declare Biblical principles?
2. Do we consider it a privilege to receive support from God's people or do we take it for granted?
3. Are we conscious of families when we support ministry or only the minister?
4. Are we willing to make sacrifices to reach people with the gospel or do we only witness when it is convenient?
5. Are we enthusiastic in our work for the Lord, without regard for personal gain?
6. Are we alert to the fact that we will give an account to God as believers for our lives?

1 Corinthians 10

Paul has been handling many issues which have arisen in the church at Corinth and he mentions some important lessons from history, to help the church take their lifestyle before God more seriously. In Chapter 11, he will teach about how to behave at the Lord's Table but here, he offers some preliminary thoughts. He also adds to an earlier theme about conscience with regard to food purchased at the market. Living as Christians in an ungodly world is never easy, whatever time of history we live in.

Lessons from History

God's people had powerful experiences of Him, receiving remarkable guidance and protection when they left Egypt. They were led by the cloud, they walked through the Red Sea and they knew extraordinary provision, as manna and quail were supplied to them in the wilderness. However, despite everything that God had done for them through these special and amazing experiences, they were idolatrous, they indulged in sexual immorality, they tested the Lord and they grumbled. Their disobedience and hardness of heart led to God's judgement and they did not enter the Promised Land.

These lessons challenge us to keep close to the Lord. Having experienced the wonderful grace of God, we would be very foolish to persist in a life of sin and disobedience and expect no consequences! God is a holy God. We must revere and respect Him.

Temptation

We are all tempted and temptation is not sin. Sin occurs when we give in to temptation and if we think we are standing firm, we need to be extra careful not to fall. However, God is faithful. He does not want us to sin, so, in the trial and heat of temptation, He will always provide a way out, so that we can resist and overcome that temptation.

Flee from Idolatry

As members of the body of Christ, we must have nothing to do with idolatry. Although idols are nothing, the sacrifices offered to them are actually offered to demons and we cannot be part of that. Of course, Christ has wonderfully freed us from the punishment that our sins deserve but abusing that freedom by continuing to participate in idolatry is very unwise. We belong to the Lord and idolatry should have no place in our lives.

Seeking the Good of Others

Paul uses as an example, the issue of meat sold in the market place, which may have been offered to idols. He has previously taught that eating such meat was a matter of conscience for a believer but that he would rather abstain than cause a brother or sister to fall. Here,

however, he addresses the issue with regard to unbelievers. They, of course, would have no problem with eating meat offered to idols. Paul teaches that, if an unbeliever invites us to a meal and we would like to accept, then we can enjoy it without any question of conscience. Everything belongs to God and we give thanks to Him. Nevertheless, if someone else raises a matter of conscience about what is being provided, then we should refuse it for the sake and conscience of the person who has raised the matter.

Seeking the good of others, enables us to bring blessing and encouragement to them. Believers can be strengthened in their faith and unbelievers can be drawn towards the path that leads to salvation. Our lifestyles should always reflect our faith, our love for God and our love for others and whatever we do, it should all be for the glory of God, the good of the Church and the salvation of unbelievers!

Points to Consider:

1. Are we willing to learn and apply the lessons of history to our lives?
2. How do we handle areas of temptation? Are we finding God's escape routes or wading deeper into the mire of sin?
3. Do we have any idols in our lives? Are there areas of our life and behaviour that we should, in fact, be concerned about?
4. How sensitive are we, to the issues of conscience that may arise for other believers?
5. Do we have issues of conscience about the actions of other believers and, if so, how can this be resolved within the body of Christ?
6. Do we truly live our lives seeking the good of others and acting with their best interests in mind?

1 Corinthians 11

Paul writes very boldly, urging believers to follow his example as he follows the example of Christ. Remember that most of the issues in 1 Corinthians are answers from Paul to questions from concerned believers, who are asking for his wisdom and guidance. Paul has been talking about many issues in this letter and he wants to demonstrate clear principles for a lifestyle that sets a good example to both believers and unbelievers.

God's Created Order

Paul shares that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man. This is God's created order. God made man first and then made woman for man. However, man is born of woman and there is nothing here suggesting that man is superior to woman or that woman is less loved than man. God had a reason for doing things this way and we must respect the created order that He has established.

Appearance

Paul contends that if men dress or have behaviour patterns that confuse gender, this is disrespectful of God's created order. Men need to be men and women to be women. So, the reference to hair demonstrates a key principle that a man's appearance should not create a diversion from the purpose for which God's people have met. Equally, women should present themselves modestly and with humility. Note that the source of contention being dealt with is not a woman's prayers or her prophesying; that is accepted. The issue is to do with respect and avoiding distraction in the house of God. Clearly, what is inappropriate in one culture may be acceptable in another and this needs to be recognised in applying this teaching.

Marriage

In Ephesians 5, Paul teaches that, in marriage, the head of a woman is her husband, just as Christ is the head of the church. A wife's acceptance of this honours her husband and gives him dignity. The way that she behaves will pave a way for her husband to develop and grow but Paul also makes it clear that a husband is to love his wife as Christ loves the church - unselfishly and sacrificially. In some cultures, a woman's appearance could suggest that she is single and available. Therefore, as a married woman, she must think about her appearance carefully, to create the right impression.

Prayer

Prayer is practised by many faiths and some clothing or covering can suggest heathen beliefs, so we need to be wise that we do not thoughtlessly offend. Paul refers to a code of practice in the churches so, from these teachings, we can be confident that there was an attempt to encourage believers in all the churches to have common standards and, especially, that we are seen to be different to the world.

Church Meetings

Paul comments that church meetings in Corinth needed attention. He contends that their meetings were doing more harm than good, which was very sad. He also talks about division within the church. Whilst we may have differences about certain matters, division is not acceptable and it greatly spoils our testimony of Christ.

The Lord's Supper

This particular meeting comes in for some very strong criticism. The idea of having a meal and then breaking bread and sharing a cup was good but, sadly, selfishness and drunkenness had taken over and totally spoilt the purpose of the meeting. Paul reminds the believers of the real reasons for gathering. It is to remember that we are now in a new covenant with God, through the shed blood of Jesus. Jesus and his sacrifice are to be our focus, not our own self-indulgence.

Judgement had come in, so that some believers were weak, some were sick and some had even died. Paul encourages the Corinthian believers to be self-controlled and to respect one another, so that they can enjoy the benefits of Christ's death, rather than incur God's wrath.

Paul urges all believers to examine their hearts and warns that careless disrespect of our Lord Jesus invites the judgement of God. We are called to make Jesus central and recognise that, one day, we will not need to take the bread and wine because Jesus will come again, in all of his power!

Points to Consider:

1. Consider how your life appears to others. Can you say, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."?
2. Do we show respect for God's created order and does it truly affect the way that we live?
3. How should Paul's teaching about marriage be reflected in our marriages today?
4. Are we careful to avoid a lifestyle that might suggest links to witchcraft or other beliefs?
5. How can we ensure that our differences do not lead to division within the church?
6. Are we getting the right balance of self-examination, mutual respect and reverence in our communion services?

1 Corinthians 12

Paul continues to answer questions put to him regarding the church in Corinth. This chapter is primarily about spiritual gifts and the importance of being the body of Christ.

Awareness

Paul's objective is to provide clear insight and understanding about the variety of spiritual gifts that are available in the body of Christ. Paul is aware that pagans can be very muddled and unclear and is concerned that the body of Christ should be wise and discerning.

The Key Test

When seeking to discern truth from lies, the way that people refer to Christ is vital. Anyone offering the slightest tone which dishonours Jesus, cannot be from God and anyone who is truly lifting up Jesus for who he really is, our Lord and only Saviour, is from God. Our attitude to Jesus is a crucial and distinctive characteristic of our faith. The gifts that Paul will go on to describe, must all ring with honour for Jesus if they truly are coming from the Spirit of God. The work of the Holy Spirit in us, is always to lift up Jesus.

Spiritual Gifts, Service and Working

In the body of Christ, there is a great variety in how we exercise spiritual gifts, the way we serve one another and how we work for the Lord. However, it is the same God, Lord and Holy Spirit who is inspiring and motivating each one of us. If all that we do is truly inspired by Him, then there will be harmony and blessing.

Manifestation of the Spirit

The list of spiritual gifts which follow is not exhaustive, because other scriptures mention other gifts. However, the Corinthian list is probably picking up the gifts that the church needed most guidance about, because the misuse of some of these gifts was causing problems in the church.

These are the gifts:

The message of wisdom	Miraculous powers
The message of knowledge	Prophecy
Faith	Distinguishing between spirits
Gifts of healing	Speaking in different kinds of tongues
	Interpretation of tongues

These are described as gifts of the Spirit and he distributes them for the common good, as he sees fit. In this chapter, they are mentioned equally and, if a church is exercising all of these gifts, it will be strong and balanced. However, over-emphasis of some gifts and disdain for others, often causes harmful spiritual pride and competitiveness.

The Body of Christ

Our bodies have many parts but we only have one body. In the same way, the body of Christ has many parts but we are one body. There is one Holy Spirit and he has brought us together to be one body in Christ. Whatever our cultural background, it is the life-giving Spirit of God who makes us united in Christ. Every member of the body has to be valued and loved and we all need each other to function properly. Some members are very public and some are not. But God values every one of us equally. If one member rejoices, we all rejoice and if one member suffers, we all suffer; we are all affected.

Paul tells us that there are different roles in the body of Christ. He specifies apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. He points out that not all people have all of these gifts but he exhorts that if, with a pure motive, we desire spiritual gifts that are lacking in the body of Christ, that is a good thing.

Points to Consider:

1. How well informed are we regarding God's word and spiritual gifts? Are our opinions drawn from a careful study of Scripture or are they based upon our own prejudice and insecurity?
2. We see nine spiritual gifts recorded in this chapter. Which do you perceive as particularly lacking in your church?
3. Do we simply assess people according to their personality and influence or do we diligently look for Christ-likeness in their lives and ministry?
4. How much of Jesus is seen in me?
5. Do we value every member of our church equally? Does that truly include those working faithfully behind the scenes or only those whose spiritual gifts are visible and apparent to all?

1 Corinthians 13

This is probably the best known chapter in the letter. It is a passage often used at weddings but it is also very much a message to the Church. Paul is talking about Agape; the love that comes from God. And we know that this is a quality of love which is only possible through a relationship with God Himself.

The Most Excellent Way

Paul has been writing about spiritual gifts and he wants them to be used in a way that builds up the body of Christ. He considers these gifts to be of great value and refers to tongues, prophesy and faith. He also mentions sacrificial giving to the poor and even a willingness to die for the sake of the gospel. But what he says is that, without love, all of these gifts and actions are empty and meaningless. Pride, self-importance and arrogance should have no place in our lives. Everything that we do must flow from our love for others.

Love

Paul takes us through a number of qualities which demonstrate what love is and he also indicates what love is not. He makes no detailed explanation of these things but, when we read them, they are a considerable challenge to the way we behave towards others.

Love is patient and kind, it rejoices with the truth, it always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres and love never fails.

Love does not envy or boast, it is not proud, it is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs and love does not delight in evil.

Christian Love

Because love rejoices with the truth, Christian love always protects, trusts, hopes and perseveres and the body of Christ which faithfully demonstrates love towards one another, will be a very distinctive community within the world. Sadly, however, there is often a lack of Christian love, which causes much destruction in the body of Christ. In this letter, Paul has been concerned that there has been selfish behaviour in Corinth, which has not built up the Church but has actually caused division and a bad testimony.

The Love of Christ

When we look at the character of Jesus, we see so many of the qualities of love that Paul has described. The willingness of Jesus to seek the will of his Father and to go to the cross, despite its shame and great suffering, shows kindness, humility and a genuine love for mankind. Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, offers us protection and hope. He never

gives up, even when we fail him. He loves us and keeps on loving us. When he forgives us, the record is wiped out and he remembers our sin no more.

Eternal Love

Paul recognises that there will come a time when many of the spiritual gifts will no longer be needed because, when we are with Jesus, we will be in a place where there is no sin and no darkness. However, there will never be a cessation of his love. We will enjoy that love forever!

Points to Consider:

1. What do you think is the most excellent way that Paul refers to in this letter?
2. How can we encourage spiritual gifts but still make love the priority?
3. How does our love compare with the description of love in this chapter?
4. Consider the statement that love keeps no record of wrongs. How can we address this in the church where, sometimes, resentment and unforgiveness can remain, even after many years?
5. As leaders in the church, how can we practically protect God's people and encourage them to love even as Jesus loves?

1 Corinthians 14

In this chapter, Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to think about how they worship together. He realises that they are using many spiritual gifts but he is also aware that there is a lack of order. He wants to give them some guidance as to how their worship could be more focused and beneficial for strengthening the church.

The Value of Prophecy

Paul is concerned that there is too much emphasis on the gift of speaking in tongues. He has no problem with the gift but he is concerned that it should be seen as one of the gifts, not the only gift. Therefore, he chooses to emphasise the gift of prophecy. Paul shares that prophecy has the ability to strengthen, encourage and comfort God's people. Prophecy builds up the church and helps God's people to hear what He is saying to them at a particular time.

The Gift of Tongues

Paul teaches that the gift of tongues is a valuable gift, which is given primarily to strengthen and encourage a believer's personal walk of faith. However, it can be unhelpful to others, because the rest of the congregation cannot benefit from that person's gift, unless the tongue is interpreted. Of course, a message can be shared in a tongue and then interpreted but Paul suggests that it is often better for this gift to be exercised by the believer in silent prayer and worship to God.

The Body of Christ

In speaking about prophecy and tongues, Paul's main concern is for God's people to be strengthened in their faith and for their worship to convey a deep awareness of being drawn into the presence of God. He is also conscious of the impact of spiritual gifts upon unbelievers in the congregation. Unbelievers, hearing the gift of tongues, will have no understanding of what is happening. However, prophecy that is truly from God, has the ability to bring an intense awareness of sin and the presence of God. It lays bare the unbeliever's innermost secrets and can lead that person to seek God's forgiveness and find salvation in Christ!

Order in Worship

Paul values spiritual gifts and teaches that they are to be desired. However, they must be exercised in an orderly fashion, so that each contribution can be carefully considered and understood. Worship in Corinth was not to be dominated by one person. Believers were encouraged to bring a hymn, a song, a word of instruction, a revelation concerning some

truth, a tongue or an interpretation. Everyone should have the opportunity to share these gifts. Not just the minister or elders but every member of the body of Christ has their own walk with God and is able to contribute something to help people grow in their faith and knowledge of Jesus. Paul says that there is no point in bringing a tongue unless it can be interpreted. He suggests that no more than 2 or 3 messages in tongues should be brought and no more than 2 or 3 prophecies. Too many contributions would cloud or even lose God's message, through the sharing of many words. Paul again emphasises that the church has a responsibility to avoid chaos and should look to ensure a sense of order and peace in worship.

Paul has previously talked about God's created order and he sticks to this principle here, where he teaches that women should remain silent in church. This echoes what he has already said in Chapter 11, about Christ being the head of every man and man being the head of the woman. Paul has already confirmed the role of women in prayer and prophecy but this must always be within the framework of God's created order. A husband has a God-given responsibility to love and care for his wife and a wife respects and honours her husband by asking him for answers to her questions.

Paul's main aim is to encourage and provide space for wide participation and the development of spiritual gifts. However, Paul is truly committed to order and discipline, so that worship and the expression of God speaking, should be to the greatest benefit for all in the body of Christ.

Points to Consider:

1. How important are spiritual gifts in the body of Christ where you serve?
2. How much room do you give to allowing a wide participation in worship rather than confining it to just a few people?
3. How do you balance a sense of discipline and order against being oppressive and controlling?
4. How do we develop a healthy, balanced body of Christ and still allow individual giftings to grow?
5. God is a God of peace. How do we make sure that our worship invites the God of peace to come among us, rather than creating a selfish atmosphere of rivalry and competition?

1 Corinthians 15

Paul has been asked many questions concerning life in Corinth and now he addresses the question of the resurrection of the dead. It is amazing how soon after the resurrection of Jesus, that fundamental questions began to be asked.

The Gospel Preached by Paul

Paul was consistent in his preaching of the gospel and he urges the Corinthians to respond wholeheartedly to it. He states that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, Christ was buried according to the scriptures and Christ was raised according to the scriptures. These events in the life and ministry of Christ are crucial to our salvation. Paul adds that, after Jesus rose from the dead, there were several appearances to the disciples and he states that more than 500 people saw Jesus alive.

Paul also mentions that, last of all, Christ appeared to him. This encounter on the Damascus road was obviously life-changing for Paul. He preaches with confidence because he, like the other apostles, saw the Lord.

The Resurrection of the Dead

The reality of the risen Christ is fundamental to the belief that all the dead shall be raised. Because Christ was raised from the dead, so all the dead will be raised. This is for all people, not just believers! To believe that Jesus is alive today, is a crucial part of our testimony. We have hope to face and come through death, because our Saviour came through death. Death came into the world because of Adam's sin but eternal life becomes possible because of Christ's faithfulness. The literal resurrection of Christ is crucial to our hope. Jesus has destroyed the enemy of death and he has, therefore, defeated death itself. Even in times of persecution and suffering for Christians, the knowledge that we will be with Jesus after death, is very powerful!

It seems that there was a custom among some, for believers who had died but had not been baptised, for a baptism to take place on their behalf. The belief was that they would then share in the resurrection. In actual fact, the future of a believer, baptised or not, is unaffected, because the victory of Jesus is for all true believers.

The Resurrection Body

Scripture teaches that a time will come when all the dead will be raised. Believers to enjoy Christ's presence and unbelievers to face eternal judgement. So the question is asked, "What will be the nature of the body that is raised at the very last day?" Paul tells us that the body we were born with, will perish but the body that we are raised with, will last for

eternity. The body that we are raised with, will not grow old and, for believers, it will be like the body of Christ. The resurrected Jesus came in a body that was recognisable to the disciples but it had qualities that were different. The new body that we have will be like that of Jesus. We will inherit the Kingdom of God, because we have an imperishable body that will never die or experience pain or sickness.

The Mystery of the Resurrection

The time when Jesus returns and raises all the dead, will happen dramatically and suddenly. There will be a loud trumpet blast and, in an instant, all will be raised, death will be conquered, the sting of death will be taken away, the power of sin will be broken and we will be ready to dwell with God forever!

Paul is sharing these truths with us, because he wants believers to be full of confidence and to have no doubts regarding their eternal destiny. Remember that the early church faced great opposition and persecution. The suffering of some early Christians was immense. Even today, there are parts of our world where Christians are tortured and persecuted. Paul's clear affirmation that Christ has risen is an exhortation for us to stand firm, to not allow anything to distract us and to give ourselves to God's work. Our work for the Lord will not be in vain. He will reward those who are faithful, despite the most gruelling trials.

Points to Consider:

1. Does our gospel witness waver or are we constant in what we share with unbelievers?
2. The reality that Christ rose from the dead is very important. In what way does your testimony reveal the truth that Jesus has risen from the dead?
3. How important is Christ's resurrection to understanding our own resurrection and what will be different about our resurrected body?
4. Do we really understand the full extent of Jesus' conquest over death?
5. How can we practically encourage one another to keep going, even in the midst of trials and difficulties?

1 Corinthians 16

Paul has covered many topics in his letter to the Corinthians and in Chapter 16, he gives instructions about gifts for the poor and mentions some of the people that he works with in the ministry.

The Collection for the Poor

The early church had a concern for those among them who were poor and needy. This was a particular issue where there was famine and some of God's people were really suffering. Paul was now working with a number of churches, which included the Corinthian church. He had encouraged the churches to have special offerings, which we assume were additional to regular church offerings, to meet the needs of the poor. He suggests that they should put aside a sum of money each week. The amount was to be prayerfully considered and they should seek to be faithful in maintaining their weekly giving. Then, when Paul visited, he would receive the offering and send it to Jerusalem with people appointed by the local church. This encouraged accountability and would be organised so that Paul's visits could be ministry-centred, rather than focused upon raising money. In every generation, money is a sensitive subject that needs to be handled carefully.

Personal Requests

Paul had plans to visit the church in Corinth and was looking to God to have a visit which could give them some quality time. This was the heart of Paul. He did not want the visit to be so brief as to be of no good value. However, Paul indicates that he would remain for a while at Ephesus, where substantial ministry opportunity had opened up but there was also some strong opposition. Paul valued being with the Corinthians but needed them to be aware that there were many other churches requiring his time and attention.

Timothy

Paul had a special relationship with Timothy and has stated in other places that Timothy truly represents him, wherever he is sent. He appeals to the Corinthians to honour Timothy, to bless him and not to cause him any difficulty. Sadly, Paul needed to write this because some had been disrespectful and had not honoured the fact that Paul had sent Timothy.

Apollos

Paul had urged Apollos to go with some other brothers to Corinth but Apollos was not willing to go at this moment of time. This little comment reveals that Paul was not a dictator and that his team members were free to make their own decisions.

General Exhortations

Paul urges the Corinthians to be vigilant, faithful, brave and strong. They were to be true to the gospel and to minister out of love. Paul commends the household of Stephanas as good examples of being committed to ministry and who were generous in their support of Paul. Paul's ministry was supported in various ways; some were very generous and some made supporting Paul personally, a priority. Others did not support him as much, so Paul wanted those who did support him to be recognised.

Closing Greetings

Paul brings greetings from the Asian churches and, particularly, greetings from Aquila and Priscilla, who used to live in Corinth. Paul encourages greeting with a holy kiss. However, affection in the body of Christ must always be appropriate and genuine. Paul urges love for Christ and says that anyone who does not love Christ, is cursed and has no place in the body of Christ. Paul longs for Jesus to come and return in all his glory, when the people of God will be together in that place where there is no sin and no dissension. He desires God's grace to be among the Corinthians and declares his love for them in Christ.

Points to Consider:

1. Is our giving thoughtful and organised or do we fail to properly consider why and how we give?
2. What is our response to those in the body of Christ who have great material need?
3. How do we handle those who oppose us and how do we protect those who we send in our name or in the name of our church?
4. Do we give people in our team freedom to make their own choices or do we act like a dictator?
5. How well do we make people aware that they are part of a much wider church than just the local church to which they belong?
6. How would you define a holy kiss?