

REIMAGINING
CHURCH

STUDIES IN 1 CORINTHIANS 1-10

It belongs to God. He bought it at enormous cost. It is more precious to Him than you can possibly imagine. He takes it very seriously when we disregard it.

It's our church.

In this set of studies on 1 Corinthians 1-10, we'll begin delving into what makes our "togetherness" as a church so special to God. As we learn more about how God views us, we will grow in our appreciation of what it means to belong together as God's church. Prepare to reimagine church.

As with any study, you'll get the most out of them if you're able to read the relevant passage and answer the questions before your group meets. That will also equip you to best encourage the others in your group with what you say. However, if some weeks you don't get to prepare, please don't use that as an excuse to not go along. Just being there is a great way of showing the group that they're important to you. Plus, the studies are designed to be useful even if you're thinking about them for the first time at your group.

Each study firstly works through the verses (section by section) so as to help build an understanding of what the overall passage means. The study then ends with a "Think it over" section in which practical applications are considered for us as individual Christians, as well as for us as a church family.

1 Corinthians 1:1-2:5

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

1) Who is this letter written from and to whom? How are they each described in v1-2?

2) List out all the things that God has done for the Corinthian church (v4-9)

3) To what extent do you think these things are true of every church?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-12

4) What problem does Paul describe here?

5) How do you think this problem may have arisen?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:13-17

6) What seems to be Paul's main point in these verses?

7) What effect do you think this should have on the divisions and quarrelling in the church?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5

8) According to 1:17-19 what is it that saves people?

9) What other thing did the Jews and Greeks of Paul's time add to the gospel to try and make it seem more impressive? (v22-25)

10) In what way did Paul's own behaviour testify to the fact that it's the message of the cross which saves people (2:1-5)

11) When Paul says that his message and preaching were done with "a demonstration of the spirit's power," what sort of power does he have mind? (look back at 1:17-18)

12) Paul has been pressing the point that it is the the message of the cross which alone saves people. What effect do you think this should have on the divisions and quarrelling in the church?

Think it over

- The Corinthian church had fallen victim to a bit of "hero worship." Cliques had developed around personalities. Do you think that still happens? How does this passage help us to avoid it?

- In this passage we read that Jews were impressed by miracles and the Greeks were impressive by gifted speakers. Do you think those sorts of things are still popular? What other things do people add to the gospel to try and make it seem more impressive?

- "When we tell someone about Jesus we don't need to be clever, just clear." In what way is this a good summary of what we've discovered in this study? In what way should this be a encouragement in our personal outreach?

- In future studies we will discover that the Corinthian church in fact had lots of problems. Why do you think Paul may have chosen this particular problem to tackle first?

9) When it comes to understanding God's wisdom, how does the person without the Spirit contrast with the spiritual person? (v14-16)

10) What do you think v15-16 mean? What implications does this have concerning the factions that exist in the Corinthian church?

Think it over

- Some people (Jehovah's Witnesses for example) like to describe the Holy Spirit as a "force." Is this correct? Why or why not? Does this passage help in answering this issue? How would you describe the Holy Spirit?

- If we have "the mind of Christ" (v16) why is life still so hard and confusing at times?

- What implications does this study have concerning the importance of prayer?

- Can you think of a specific time when the Spirit has worked in your life in the way described in this passage?

1 Corinthians 3

Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-4

1) How does Paul describe the Corinthians in these verses?

2) On what basis does he describe them like this?

3) How does the world think about leadership? In what ways can this cause "jealousy and quarrelling?"

Read 1 Corinthians 3:5

4) What image does Paul use here to describe Christian leadership?

5) What seems to be the main lesson from this image?

Read 1 Corinthians 3:6-9

6) What image does Paul use here to describe Christian leadership?

7) What seems to be the main lesson from this image?

Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

8) What image does Paul use here to describe Christian leadership?

9) What seems to be the main lesson from this image?

Read 1 Corinthians 3:16-23

10) How does Paul describe the church? (see also v9)

11) What does this mean in terms of how precious God's church is? (v17)

12) What affect should this have on "boasting about men?" (v19) Why?

Think it over

- How does this chapter affect your view of your own ministry at BPC?

- Paul has described Christians as being unbelievably blessed (v21-22). Why then, do we so often feel discontent in our lives then?

- This is now the third chapter in which Paul has been addressing the problem of quarrelling and boasting about men. Why do you think he gives this problem so much attention?

- Have another look at v13-14. How does this way of evaluating our lives apply not only to Christian leadership but to all aspects of our lives: relationships, occupation, community involvement etc? How much of your average week do you think will survive the "fire?"

1 Corinthians 4

Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-2

1) In what ways does verse 1 summarise some of Paul's main points from Chapters 2 & 3.

2) Who do you think are the "we" that Paul is referring to in v1?

3) What does God require of those whom He entrusts with a duty? (v2)

Read 1 Corinthians 4:3-7

4) According to v3-5 whose opinion matters most? Why?

5) In what sense did Paul and Apollos exemplify "Do not go beyond what is written" (v6)?

6) In what sense were the Corinthians guilty of going "beyond what is written" (v7) How is this shown in the way they are behaving towards each other? (v7)

Read 1 Corinthians 4:8-21

7) What words does Paul use to describe the Corinthians in v8-13? What words does he use to describe himself in this same section? In the eyes of the world which of the two (Paul or the Corinthians) would be judged to be more successful?

8) Why does Paul say that he makes this comparison? (v14-15)

9) What does Paul want the Corinthians to do? What is he going to do to help them achieve this? (v16-17)

10) What is Paul hoping to avoid? Why? (v18-21)

Think it over

- When is it hardest to be faithful to God? How can we help each other at these times?

- Why do you think we love judging each other and find it so hard to leave it up to Lord?

- "Often we seem to care more about how other people think of us than about how God thinks of us" Do you agree? Why or why not?

- With this chapter Paul comes to the end of addressing the problem of quarrelling and boasting within the Corinthian church. Look back through the previous studies and list some of the comforts and challenges that God has been raising with you personally by his Word and Spirit.

1 Corinthians 5:1-6:8

Read 1 Corinthians 5:1-5.

1) What new issue does Paul now address? What specific incident has prompted Paul to raise this issue?

2) What has been the church's reaction so far? How does Paul feel about this?

3) What does Paul want the church to do?

Verse 5 is a difficult one. What does it mean to hand someone over to Satan? The context of verse 2 suggests this is probably referring to being publicly expelled from the church. In the New Testament, the world outside the church is seen as the realm of Satan. To be expelled from Christ's household is to be delivered over into the region where Satan roams and holds sway. Paul offers three reasons for taking this drastic step.

Reread 1 Corinthians 5:5

4) What reason does Paul give in v5 for expelling this man from the church?

5) Public discipline is always a very serious matter. However in what way can this be actually be seen as a loving act?

Read 1 Corinthians 5:6-11

6) What new reason does Paul now give for expelling this man?

1 Corinthians 6:9-20

Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

1) In verses 9-10 Paul mentions the kinds of people who will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Why do you think he warns against being deceived about this (v9)?

2) How had the Corinthians changed since becoming Christians?

3) Why had the Corinthians changed since becoming Christians?

Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

4) "Everything is permissible for me" was probably a quote from some Corinthians who felt they were above moral rules and that their bodies had nothing to do with their spiritual lives. Using your own words, fill in the following sentences to discover the ways in which Paul refutes this idea.

Verse 12a - "Everything is permissible for me"– BUT

Verse 12b - "Everything is permissible for me"– BUT.

5) "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food" may also be a quote from some Corinthians who considered that since God is going to destroy the physical world then what we do physically doesn't matter. What two reasons does Paul give to show that the relationship between food and the stomach is different to the relationship between our bodies and sexual immorality.

Reason 1 (v13) -

Reason 2 (v14) -

6) What does Paul mean by the statement that "your bodies are members of Christ himself?" (hint: have a sneak look forward at 1 Cor 12:27)

7) What implication does being "members of Christ himself" have regarding sexual immorality (v15-17)

8) In what sense is sexual immorality different to other sins?

9) How is this section a suitable conclusion to the problem which Paul first raised in 1 Corinthians 5:1?

Think it over

- "God is a killjoy. He's just anti-sex." How would you respond to this sort of comment?

- What specific, practical things can we do to "flee from sexual immorality"?

- Verses 19-20 are sometimes quoted by people arguing that we should do exercise and eat properly. Do you think this is a fair use of these verses?

- How does this passage again show us that church is very precious to God?

1 Corinthians 7

Read 1 Corinthians 7:1

- 1) What issue does Paul now raise with the Corinthians?

- 2) How is this different to the other topics he has written about so far?

- 3) "Chapter 7 is like listening to one side of a telephone conversation." How does verse 1 confirm this statement and what care do we therefore need to have when we read these verses?

Read 1 Corinthians 7:1-16

- 4) In v2-9 what advantages does Paul give for being married? How is this linked to the previous topic of the letter in 1 Cor 6:18-20?

- 5) After speaking about sexual relations in marriage, why do you think Paul immediately goes on to talk about the permanency of marriage? (v10-11)

- 6) List all the situations in which Paul stresses the permanency of marriage. Why do think this emphasis is so important?

Read 1 Corinthians 7:17-24

- 7) What "rule" does Paul spell out in this section?

- 8) How does Paul illustrate this "rule?"

9) What relevance does this have to the question of whether or not to be married?

Read 1 Corinthians 7:25-40

8) What advantages does Paul see in being single?

9) What do you think Paul means by "the present crisis?" (v26)

10) What seems to be Paul's main point in v29-31?

Think it over

- Often we blame our circumstances for our problems. How is 1 Corinthians 7 a good corrective to this? Are there any life circumstances you are using as excuses for ungodliness in your life?
- Despite what Paul says about its benefits, singleness can be a lonely place. How can we help our brothers and sisters who are struggling with singleness? Be both specific and practical.
- Despite what Paul says about its benefits, marriage can be hard. How can we help our Christian brothers and sisters who are struggling in difficult marriages? Be both specific and practical.
- What aspects of this chapter did you find personally confronting and/or comforting?

1 Corinthians 8-9

Read 1 Corinthians 8

- 1) What particular issue are the Corinthians now wanting advice about? (v1) Why do you think this might have been a controversial issue?

- 2) According to Paul, what do mature Christians know about food sacrificed to idols (v4-6,8)?

- 3) What warning does Paul give about this kind of knowledge (v1-3)?

- 4) What does Paul say is more important than exercising the freedom that comes from knowledge? (v9-13)
What might this mean when it comes to eating food sacrificed to idols?

Read 1 Corinthians 9

- 5) What apostolic rights has Paul given up? (v4-5, 11-12, 14, 18-19)

- 6) How can benefiting financially from preaching sometimes hinder the gospel (v12)

- 7) What can and can't Paul boast in? Is Paul being arrogant here?(v15-18)

8) How and why has Paul given up the freedom to live whatever way he prefers (v19-23)

9) In giving up his apostolic rights, how is Paul like an athlete in training (v24-27)?

10) What do you think the "prize" is in v27?

11) In what ways does Paul exemplify the principle from 8:1 that "knowledge puffs up but love builds up."

Think it over

- Can you think of any contemporary situations where our "knowledge" and freedom in Christ might cause another Christian to stumble?

- Can you think of an example when someone has done what Paul has suggested in these chapters? What effect did it have?

- "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." (v22b) Can you think of some ways we in which we might have to become "all things to all men" so as to reach people we know?

- How does this passage again show us the importance of our "togetherness" in Christ.

Think it over

- Can you think of any practices that are “permissible” but possibly not beneficial or constructive?

- Look back at the specific sins attributed to Israel in v6-10? What ones of these are still relevant to us? How can we avoid them?

- What types of idolatry do you think are especially dangerous nowadays? How might we go about fleeing from them? (v14)

- “The Christian is a most free lord of all, subject to none. The Christian is a most submissive servant, subject to all.” (Martin Luther) In what ways does this statement capture the message of 1 Cor 10.

- We now leave Corinthians in this series of studies. (it’s a convenient place to stop because the next chapter will mark a substantial change of topic). Quickly skim back over these studies. In what ways have these chapters emphasised the importance of our “togetherness” as God’s people?