

1 Corinthians

LESSON

1

■ A Study of 1 Corinthians 1

DAY ONE

Paul

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9, concentrating on verse 1.

As you read this passage from 1 Corinthians, open your heart and mind to God, and ask Him to speak to you in a personal way. The words on the page may not be what you need to hear today, but His Holy Spirit can speak to your heart to let you know what God wants to say to you for today. He loves you so much and longs to communicate with you.

Paul's letters to the church in Corinth are as timely for us today as they were for the Corinthians in A.D. 55. We study His Word because it is important to know what the Bible said to its original readers, the people to whom it was originally addressed. But it is equally important to apply the ancient message to our lives today. If the Bible is a living revelation of God to us, as we believe it is, then we must do more than decipher its ancient history—we must seek to apply the principles discerned in that ancient history to our present life situations today. We find an up-to-date interpretation from the Corinthian letters into our world today.

With the heart of a shepherd caring for his flock, Paul discerns and identifies the basic moral, church, and doctrinal matters for the believers in Corinth.

1. In the scripture for our lesson today, how does Paul identify himself?

2. Who is Sosthenes (Acts 18:17)?

Paul was born in Tarsus, the capital of the Roman province of Silicia, located near the coast of the Mediterranean Sea in the southeast part of Asia Minor. (Having been born a Roman citizen became a significant fact in Paul's life when he was being persecuted in Rome [Acts 22:25, 28].)

3. Paul was a Pharisee Jew by birth and a Pharisee by his belief. From Acts 23:6, record Paul's statement in the Sanhedrin. (The Sanhedrin was the highest Jewish council in the first century. The council had 71 members and was presided over by the high priest.)

4. How did the beliefs of the Sadducees differ from the beliefs of the Pharisees (Acts 23:7-8)?

MEMORY CHALLENGE

1 Corinthians 13:4

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

5. As a Jewish boy, Paul would have had a strict religious training.
 - He would have been taught Scripture (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).
 - He would have been taught Jewish history (Deuteronomy 6:20-25).
 - He would have been taught a trade. What was Paul's trade (Acts 18:3)?
6. How does Paul describe his training under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3)?
7. Summarize Acts 8:3 with Acts 22:4, explaining Paul's persecution of Christian believers.
8. As Paul zealously attempted to eliminate the Christian faith by persecuting Christians, who else was suffering from Paul's violent acts? Read Acts 9:3-5. Record verse 5.
9. Paul, the persecutor, became a believer. We never tire of reading of Paul's miraculous conversion on the Damascus road when he received Jesus as the Messiah and believed He was greater than the Jewish Temple and Jewish law. As you read Acts 22:6-16,
 - Praise God for the life of Paul.
 - Pray for a loved one who rebels against the Christian faith today.
 - Ask God for a dramatic confrontation to cause him or her to seek Jesus as Savior.
 - Ask for an Ananias, a laborer in God's kingdom, to guide him or her in the Christian walk.
 - By faith believe for the answer by thanking God for His love for your loved one, which is greater than your love for him or her.
 - Record today's date and a statement of faith praising God for hearing and answering your request.

Paul's conversion brought a reversal in the direction of his life. With his conversion experience, he was given God's call to carry the gospel message to the Gentile world (Acts 9:15). From destroying the message of the gospel, Paul was called and motivated to travel throughout the Roman world to tell them that Jesus was the Messiah who had been foretold by the prophets. As Paul traveled to proclaim the message of salvation, he became the founder of the church in Corinth.

DAY TWO

Paul's Second Missionary Journey

Continue reading 1 Corinthians 1:1-9.

Paul's second missionary journey, which included Corinth, began approximately three years after his first journey ended. His missionary trips were not without hardships.

Summarize his hardships—

From his first journey (Acts 14:19):

From his second journey (Acts 16:22-24):

To have a greater understanding of Paul's ministry to Corinth, our lesson for today will be to trace his second missionary journey.

If you have the opportunity, you will enjoy reading the four chapters of Acts 15—18 as you trace Paul's travels. It was quite a journey.

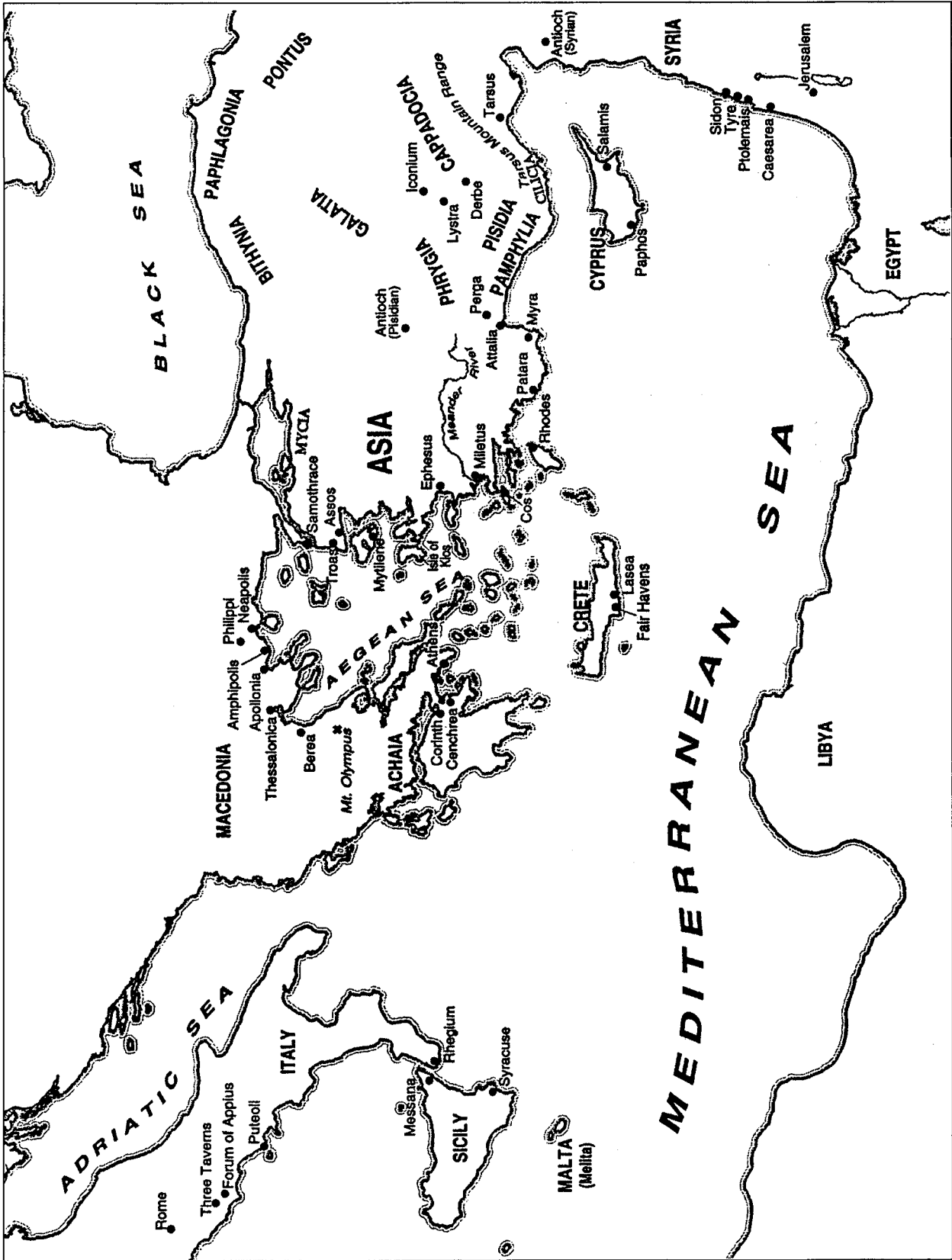
As you read the following passages, trace Paul's journey on the map:

- Acts 15:36, 40-41
- Acts 16:1-2, 4, 6-12
- Acts 17:1, 10, 14-15
- Acts 18:1-22 (This passage describes Paul's time in Corinth. Verse 22 explains that Paul ended his second journey when he landed at Caesarea and gave a report of his trip to the church in Jerusalem.)

MEMORY CHALLENGE

Love is _____, love is _____.

1 Corinthians 13:4



DAY THREE

Corinth

Continue reading 1 Corinthians 1:1-9.

Today we will learn about the city of Corinth and the environment of the community where Paul established a church.

Paul reached Corinth in the autumn of A.D. 50 as he traveled through the Roman provinces on his second missionary journey. His stay of 18 months (Acts 18:11) was longer than his usual visits, but he had direct instruction from the Lord.

1. What were the Lord's instructions to Paul (Acts 18:9-10)?

"Corinth was the capital and the most important city in Achaia. It was a wealthy commercial center, located on the southwest end of the narrow isthmus that connected the southern part of the Greek peninsula with the mainland to the north. . . . Corinth was a maritime city located between two important seaports: the port of Lechaion about two miles to the north and the port of Cenchreae about six miles east of Corinth. An overland ship-road across the isthmus connected the ports of Lechaion and Cenchreae. Cargo from large ships was unloaded, transported across the isthmus, and reloaded on other ships. Small ships were moved across on a system of rollers. Ships were able, then, to avoid 200 miles of stormy travel around the southern part of the Greek peninsula.

"The city of Corinth as Paul found it was a cosmopolitan city composed of people from varying cultural backgrounds. Being near the site of the Isthmian games held every two years (similar to the Olympic games of today), the Corinthians enjoyed both the pleasures of these games and the wealth that the visitors brought to the city. While their ships were being carried across the isthmus, sailors came to the city to spend their money on the pleasures of Corinth. Even in the age of sexual immorality, Corinth was known for its licentious lifestyle."¹

"The Christians in Corinth were struggling with their environment. Surrounded by corruption and every conceivable sin, they felt the pressure to adapt. They knew they were free in Christ, but what did this freedom mean? How should they view idols or sexuality? What should they do about marriage, women in the church, and the gifts of the Spirit? These were more than theoretical questions—the church was being undermined by immorality and spiritual immaturity. The believers' faith was being tried in the crucible of immoral Corinth, and some of them were failing the test."²

The church was new, and it was hard for the Christians there not to act like their neighbors. There were some Jews in its membership, but it was predominantly Gentile and ex-pagan in character. Many members had been rescued from the very dregs of society.

2. Summarize 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

3. Personalize and summarize 1 Corinthians 1:7-9.

We have seen today that God can make the vilest sinners clean. We can be tempted by Satan to believe that God will not forgive us because of our failures and sins, but that is another lie of Satan. We must not be deceived. It is a very simple step to be free from Satan's bondage and control. We can become a free person in Christ. We must acknowledge that we are sinners, confess and ask forgiveness for our sins, believe that God through Jesus has forgiven us of our sins, and thank Him that we are new people. As we begin to let Him have control of our lives, we will be filled with peace that passes all understanding. There will be bumps and temptations along the way. Satan isn't dead; but God, His Word, and most of all His Holy Spirit, who now lives in us, will be our Guide and Counselor.

4. Record 1 Corinthians 2:12.

MEMORY CHALLENGE

[Love] does not _____, it does not _____,
it is not _____.

1 Corinthians 13:4

DAY FOUR

Paul Calls for Unity

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-17.

After greeting the Corinthian church (verses 1-3) and expressing his thanksgiving for them (verses 4-9), Paul begins to discuss the problems of the congregation.

1. Summarize:

John 15:17

1 Corinthians 1:10

Galatians 3:26-28

The believers in the Corinthian church were *all one in Christ Jesus* (Galatians 3:28), but they were suffering division. Why? For the Corinthians, as well as for members of our churches today, until we mature in our Christian walk, the calling we have in Christ can be temporarily forgotten when we strongly disagree with policies and decisions that do not meet our interpretations, beliefs, and expectations. Division is one of Satan's greatest tools to defeat us.

"In this large and diverse Corinthian church, the believers favored different preachers. Because there was no written New Testament at this time, the believers depended heavily on preaching and teaching for spiritual insight into the meaning of the Old Testament. Some followed Paul, who had founded their church; some who had heard Peter (Cephas) in Jerusalem followed him; others listened only to Apollos, an eloquent and popular preacher who had a dynamic ministry in Corinth (Acts 18:24; 19:1). Although these three preachers were united in their message, their personalities attracted different people. At this time the church was in danger of dividing. By mentioning Jesus Christ 10 times in the first 10 verses, Paul makes it clear

who it is all preachers and teachers should emphasize. God's message is much more important than any human messenger."¹

2. Paul was disheartened and appalled that there could be disunity among the believers of the Corinthian church. List the three crucial questions that he asked in 1 Corinthians 1:13.

3. Read Acts 4:10-12 and record verse 12.

Record 1 Timothy 2:5.

It is only through God's grace that any of us have been saved; this truth alone should humble us and encourage us to be diligent to love and be in agreement with one another as much as possible. There are times we must agree to disagree and go forward with the majority's decisions. There is a difference in having opposing viewpoints and being divisive. A group of people will not agree on every issue, but they can work together harmoniously if they agree on what truly matters—Jesus Christ is Lord and wants harmony.

Many of us have suffered with these same problems and can understand the fan club mentality of the Corinthians. Until we mature in our walk with the Lord, our own beliefs can become more important to us than harmony in the church. This appears to have been the problem in Corinth.

4. Read 1 Corinthians 1:11-12.

- Can you remember a time when you were wrongly following a human leader and developing a fan club mentality?
- How does the trauma of it still affect you today?

- Have you forgiven the leader and yourself for the failure to see the truth of the situation?
- If this is a problem for you now, prayerfully ask God's forgiveness and, as completely as you can, release this burden to the Lord. He will give you the power to live above the pain until He lifts the hurt from you as you fully give it to Him.

I found that it was hard not to revert back to dwelling on the pain of being used and deceived. As I asked God to forgive me and to help me overcome when I failed again and again, He was faithful to cooperate with me at my pace, and I eventually was delivered from this wound in my spirit. Now I am free at last! Praise His name! This is the most miraculous healing that has happened to me, and because of that I pray that anyone who is suffering in this way will trust Him for deliverance.

5. Personalize and summarize Psalm 34:17, 19.

If you are releasing to the Lord a painful and crushing wound in your heart, write a brief prayer of thanksgiving that He is your Deliverer.

MEMORY CHALLENGE

When is it not easy to be patient and kind?

DAY FIVE

Worldly Wisdom Versus God's Wisdom

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-25.

Paul teaches us that the world's wisdom is foolishness but that God's wisdom is the power of life.

1. Record 1 Corinthians 1:25.

Beginning in the Garden of Eden, people have always felt that their ways are better than God's ways.

2. Record Proverbs 14:12.

Paul is finding this same prideful attitude in the church at Corinth.

3. Record or summarize 1 Corinthians 2:14.

By depending on humanity's wisdom and not relying on God's direction, the Corinthian church was divided into cliques. Paul continued to be alarmed and worked diligently and boldly to bring the membership into harmony.

1 Corinthians 1:21 explains that worldly wisdom has never been able to find God. What we need to know about God cannot be discovered or reasoned in our minds; it is revealed only through His Word by His Holy Spirit.

4. Summarize 1 Corinthians 3:18-19 to give Paul's concept of worldly wisdom.

5. From your own life—spiritual, social, business, school, political, and so on—list some examples when worldly wisdom does not agree with God's Word:

God's message is ordinarily low key. He can act in spectacular ways, but in our day-to-day life He is frequently a still, small voice or the voiceless communication of His Holy Spirit to our spirit.

"How did God bring to us the greatest event history has known?

The incarnation of God in Christ came disguised as a helpless baby.

Where did He come?

To an obscure village in a tiny country.

To whom did He come?

To a peasant girl named Mary.

Who first heard about it?

Shepherds on a hillside.

What kind of people did Jesus associate with?

Princes and prostitutes—and all people in between.

Whom did He call as disciples?

Fishermen, tax collectors, and blue-collar workers.

What was His message?

Love one another.

How did He die?

Like a common criminal on a cross.

What about His resurrection?

It was miraculous, but only His closest friends saw Him afterwards.

What of His kingdom?

It is the rule of God's Spirit in the lives of ordinary people everywhere.

How is that Kingdom to grow?

Through people responding in faith to the 'foolishness' of the proclaimed Word (1:21-25)"

How wise is God to have left the responsibility of growth of His kingdom to us? What would your life be like today if someone had not responded in faith to the "foolishness" of the proclaimed Word and offered you the opportunity to become a child of God? How will you act on your responsibility to further His kingdom? God in His wisdom gave us this privilege and responsibility.

As you read of Paul's efforts to tell others of the plan of salvation, are you troubled that your life is not more effective in reaching out to the unsaved? Do you feel that you could be a better role model for your family and friends? As I study about Paul, I feel that God has revealed for me a way of becoming more of what I would like to be for Him.

While watching the horrible devastation of lives on September 11, 2001, I wondered about the eternal destinies of those who died. I wanted to believe that all of them had been given the opportunity to accept Jesus as Savior. I wanted

to believe that they had seen Jesus in someone's life and had become Christians. As I grieved for those who died, I was challenged by two questions:

- If I knew that today would be the last day of my life on earth, how would I spend it?
- If my next encounter with each person in my life would be my last contact with him or her, what would I say, how would I act, how would I want to spend my last time with him or her?

I acknowledge that every day is a precious gift. Instead of dwelling in the past or always planning for the future, I must accept that the only moment in which I can make a difference is *now*.

In response to those questions, I am asking myself the following:

- If I leave my home and don't return today, how will I be remembered?
- Did they see Jesus in me?
- Is there anything in my life that draws someone to want to accept Jesus as his or her Savior?

We all know that our love for the Lord and our love shown to others are the only things that matter after we leave this earth. The largest house in the community, the most luxurious car, or the most prestigious title on earth won't be the most cherished memory of anyone.

I don't hear the question "What would Jesus do?" as often as I have in the past, but that is exactly how we should consider every decision and contact with others. We won't be the missionary that is recorded in the Book of Acts about Paul in his missionary journeys, but we can live our lives before others, being as Christlike in our everyday life as possible. None of us knows how much time is allotted to us, but we have the opportunity to make the most of every moment God gives us to fulfill the two commandments that are the most important—to love God and to love each other. We can be a missionary in our own hometown by treating every contact with others as the last one before one of us faces eternity. We have a great responsibility to show them Jesus.

MEMORY CHALLENGE

When are you tempted to envy, boast, or be proud?

DAY SIX

We Must Grow in Him

Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-31.

1. Personalize 1 Corinthians 1:30.

Humanity's wisdom had come into the Church, and it did not agree with the wisdom of God. In today's passage Paul makes it clear that neither humanity's wisdom nor its achievements can make people acceptable to God. God alone through Christ is the only source of our salvation.

2. What descriptive phrases described some of the socially despised members of the Corinthian church (1:26)?

Paul reminded the Corinthians of who they were and where they came from. Not many were rich and famous or powerful.

3. In verses 27-29 Paul emphasizes the low social status of most of the converts. Who are they, and why were they chosen?

God delights in taking those whom the world despises and raising them up. In this way, the world knows that what has been done was done by God.

God has chosen us—the foolish, the weak, and the lowly—to show the world His righteousness, His holiness, and His plan of salvation. *The Living Bible* says it so well: *It is from God alone that you have your life through Christ Jesus. He showed us God's plan of salvation; he was the one who made us acceptable to God; he made us pure and holy and gave himself to purchase our salvation* (verse 30).

It is not easy for us to think of ourselves as righteous, pure, holy, redeemed, and acceptable to God. We know ourselves too well. We know our weaknesses, temptations, mistakes, failures, and blunders. We know we do not deserve to be known as the righteousness of God, but we are grateful that God intervened and declared us righteous. It is true that our only boasting must be in the Lord.

4. *Righteousness.* The one who in faith gives himself or herself to the doing of God's will is righteous, doing righteousness, and is declared righteous by God. He or she has absolute faith in God and has made a total commitment to Him.

Summarize Romans 4:3 and Romans 4:23-24.

5. *Holiness.* Christians are called to holy living. They are saints who lead godly, righteous lives (Romans 8:27; Ephesians 1:18; 6:18). Being sanctified, or made holy, is the work of the Holy Spirit on the basis of Christ's atonement that calls for obedient submission from those who have been saved.¹

Record or summarize Hebrews 12:14.

6. *Redemption.* Christ gave His life to redeem us from the bondage of sin.

Summarize 1 Peter 1:18-19.

"There is nobody in all God's universe who is more orthodox than Satan—he knows all the truth, every bit of it. And you too can know the truth like that, and still not be a believer. The test of genuine faith in Christ is that there is submission to Him and growth into His likeness. The evidence that you are saved is—

- You begin to look with the eyes of Christ.
- You begin to love with the heart of Christ.
- You begin to think with the mind of Christ.
- Because the living Christ is in you, His character begins to express itself through you."²

Written by Marie Coody

MEMORY CHALLENGE

Quote 1 Corinthians 13:4.