

SESSION ONE

The Word of the Cross

Lesson Summary

What impresses you? What do you admire? How do you want people to think of you? Whether we think about these questions or not, we all have answers for them, and those answers tell us what we really value in life. Early Christians living in Corinth also had answers to those questions, but in his letter to them, the apostle Paul confronts them and says that what they naturally value and admire must be overturned in the light of the cross. The old wisdom that dictated their lives must be thrown out and replaced with a new wisdom and a new way of life.

Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **1 Corinthians 1:10-30**. What is Paul concerned about in this passage? Re-read verses 26-29. What does Paul mean when he talks about “foolish and wise” or “weak and strong”? What sort of things might he have in mind? Why is he reminding the Corinthians of this truth?

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. Based on what was said about ancient Corinth in the lesson, how would you compare the culture and values of Corinth to the culture and values of your own city today?
3. Why do you think the Corinthians were dividing themselves into factions? What does their behavior say about the way they think about themselves or those around them?
4. Paul summarizes his point to them at the end of chapter 1 by saying that the reason that God chose to redeem us the way He did is “so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.” He then exhorts us: “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” What are some things in which we might be tempted to boast? How can we avoid that temptation?
5. Who is one person that you think embodies the humility that the apostle Paul is trying to encourage? How do you see evidence of their humility? What is one way we could all learn from their example?

Group Prayer & Assigned Reading

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. For the next session, please ask group members to read **1 Corinthians 3-4**.

SESSION TWO

God Gives the Growth

Lesson Summary

In 1 Corinthians chapter 3, Paul uses three different metaphors to describe the church: a field, a building, and a temple. Each of these metaphors offer a different way of thinking about what it means to be the church, but each of them also affirm the central truth that it is God and God alone who gives life and growth to his people. In this session, we discuss what Paul has to say about the church and how his message conflicts with our common tendency to rely on our own strategies and techniques.

Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **1 Corinthians 3:1-17**. What stands out to you about the three metaphors that Paul uses to describe the church in this passage (field, building, temple)? What is Paul concerned about in this passage? What is he trying to communicate to the Corinthians?

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. Churches and church leaders today are frequently interested in the latest and best techniques or "strategies" for church growth. Can you think of any examples of this? Why do you think that we have such an affinity for strategies and techniques?
3. In verse 3, Paul says that the jealousy and strife of church members in Corinth provides evidence that their minds and hearts have not yet fully been converted. They are still thinking and behaving in worldly ways. Why would Paul think that these attitudes and behavior conflict with the gospel? What do you think he would want to say to us today?
4. In what way is Jesus Christ the "foundation" of the church (1 Cor 3:11)? Paul thinks that some people might try to build the church on a foundation other than this one. What might he have in mind?
5. Discuss the following quote by Martin Luther. What would it look like to embrace the truth of this quote in practice? *"I simply taught, preached, and wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philipp and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything."*

Group Prayer & Assigned Reading

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. For the next session, please ask group members to read **1 Corinthians 5-6**.

SESSION THREE

Liberty or License?

Lesson Summary

Christians often argue over how they ought to live and what rules they should (or should not) follow. This is nothing new. Christians have been having such arguments since the church began. But how do you know when something is up for debate and when it is not? And how should we respond when members of the church engage in flagrantly immoral behavior? These are the sort of questions that we tackle in this session as we discuss 1 Corinthians 5-6.

Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **1 Corinthians 5:1-13**. What do you think about Paul's intolerant attitude in this chapter? Why does he react so strongly against the more permissive approach that the Corinthians have taken toward someone in public sin?

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. What do you think of the adage that the Corinthians had taken up—"All things are lawful for me," or as the NIV puts it, "I have the right to do anything?" How would you compare this with the attitude of our broader culture? How frequently do you experience this attitude within the church?
3. Why do you think Paul was so concerned about Christians defrauding one another (1 Cor. 6:1-8)? How might we apply his emphasis on just and fair treatment of one another today?
4. How do we distinguish between things that Christians are "free" to decide for themselves and things that they must simply avoid? How can we follow Paul's admonition to flee immorality in our own lives and still have grace toward one another?
5. The video suggests that the misbehaviors Paul lists in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 are not arbitrary but are actually related to biblical laws. What does this suggest about the importance of Bible study? How does the Bible play a role in your own life, as you think about what to do and what to avoid?

Group Prayer & Assigned Reading

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. For the next session, please ask group members to read **1 Corinthians 7-8**.

SESSION FOUR

Making Wise Decisions

Lesson Summary

How do we make good decisions? How do we know what we ought to do? Those are questions that we have to answer every single day, but which we rarely think about. And sometimes we don't need to. Because sometimes it's clear what is right and what is wrong. But what do you do when things aren't so clear? In 1 Corinthians 7 and 8, the apostle Paul helps the Corinthians to answer this question for themselves by teaching them how to reflect on what is true and how to deliberate on what to do.

Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **1 Corinthians 7:25-40**. What does Paul mean in verse 25 when he says that he has no "command" from the Lord and is giving his "judgment"? How often do you have to use judgment about things where there is no explicit command from God? What do you notice about the advice Paul gives in this passage? What makes it wise?

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. Talk about the difference between *reflection* and *deliberation*. What is the difference between these two ways of thinking? Why are they both important?
3. Consider the following scenario: *A young man in your church comes to you for advice. He just graduated college and has been preparing to move to Japan to serve as a Christian missionary. But he also has a girlfriend that he adores and he wonders whether he should stay in the States and get a job and get married.* Keeping in mind what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7, how would you go about advising him? What truths should you remind him of (about God, about his calling as a Christian, about life, etc.)? What specific questions would you want to ask him as he deliberates about what to do? As you discuss this scenario, keep in mind that there isn't a right and wrong answer. The goal is simply to think about how we make decisions.
4. In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul addresses a topic about which Christians in good conscience were in disagreement. Can you think of a similar topic that we face as Christians today? How might Paul's response help us as we navigate moral issues upon which Christians disagree?
5. If you could write a letter to the apostle Paul asking for his advice on one difficult moral question, what would it be? How do you think he might respond?

Group Prayer & Assigned Reading

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. For the next session, please ask group members to read **1 Corinthians 9-10**.

SESSION FIVE Know Your Story

Lesson Summary

You can't answer the question, *What ought I to do?* until you can first answer the question, *Of what story do I find myself a part?* At least that's what the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre says. But he's not the only one to think that you need to know your story to know how you ought to act. The apostle Paul thinks the same and demonstrates it in 1 Corinthians chapters 9 and 10 as he reflects on the story of his own calling and the broader story of which the Christians in Corinth are now a part.

Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **1 Corinthians 9:15-23**. How would you describe the apostle Paul's sense of his own calling in this passage? How does his calling influence the way he thinks about his life? How would you compare this to your own life, to the calling you've been given and the way it influences what you do?

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. How does your family history influence the way you think about yourself? Talk about something from your personal past that continues to shape your sense of who you are and what your purpose is.
3. Discuss the following quote from Alasdair MacIntyre: "*I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'*"
4. How would you relate this to yourself? In what way(s) does the story of Jesus shape the story of your life? How does it help you answer the question 'What am I to do?'
5. In 1 Corinthians 9:25-27, Paul compares his dedication to the gospel to the dedication of an athlete to their training. What do you think of this athletic analogy? How might the single-minded focus of athletes be an example to us, in our own calling as Christians?
6. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul encourages the Corinthians to think of the Israelites as an example for themselves. What moments in the story of Israel do you relate to? How can we apply what Paul is saying in this passage?

Group Prayer & Assigned Reading

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. For the next session, please ask group members to read **1 Corinthians 11-12**.

SESSION SIX

Discerning the Body

Lesson Summary

"For anyone who eats without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself" (1 Corinthians 11:29). Sounds serious, doesn't it? But what does Paul mean when says that we must "discern the body"? And how does this relate to his broader argument about how we should live as a Christian community? Those are the questions which we'll explore in this session.

Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **1 Corinthians 12:12-26**. How does Paul's description of the church—that it is the "body" of Christ—impact the way you think about your participation in the church community? What gifts has God given you that might contribute to others? What gifts do others have that have contributed to you?

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. Why would the Corinthian Christians replicate the values of their culture in their celebration of the Lord's Supper? How might our own cultural values be influencing what we do when we gather together?
3. How can we follow Paul's admonition to "discern" the body of Christ (i.e., recognize our unity with other Christians)? In what ways might we fail to discern our unity with one another, or fail to live out that unity?
4. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul talks about how each individual Christian is dependent on other Christians and their gifts. How have you witnessed or experienced your dependency on other Christians? How do you think others might depend upon you?
5. Discuss what St. Augustine says about Christians receiving the bread of the Lord's Supper: "*You are saying 'Amen' to what you are: your response is a personal signature, affirming your faith. When you hear 'The body of Christ,' you reply 'Amen.' Be a member of Christ's body, then, so that your 'Amen' may ring true!*"

Group Prayer & Assigned Reading

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. For the next session, please ask group members to read **1 Corinthians 13-14**.

SESSION SEVEN

In the End, Love

Lesson Summary

The thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians is a hymn to love and perhaps the closest that the Bible ever gets to a definition of love. “Love is patient, love is kind...” We all know and treasure Paul’s words on love, but why is it so difficult to love in the way that he describes? And how can Paul’s words help us to overcome the obstacles to love?

Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **1 Corinthians 13:1-13**. What stands out to you about the way that Paul describes love? How does it differ from the ways that we think of love today?

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week’s teaching that stood out to you?
2. 1 Corinthians chapter 13 is one of the most popular chapters in the Bible. Why do you think that is? What do you appreciate the most about what Paul says about love?
3. The video mentions a story from *The Brothers Karamazov*, where a man confesses his capacity for sacrificial acts “for humanity” but then says that he finds it almost impossible to love specific, individual people. Why is it easier to love an abstract group of people than specific individuals? How often do you struggle to love the people you encounter on a daily basis?
4. In 13:4-5a, Paul identifies several internal obstacles that keep us from loving others, especially envy and pride. How has envy kept you from loving others well? How might pride (or wounded pride) prevent us from being able to love?
5. In 13:5b-6, Paul talks about some of the external obstacles to love (e.g., our irritation or resentment at the behavior of other people). People have a tendency to irritate us, but how can we avoid being irritable? Likewise, how do you avoid feeling resentment at people who mistreat you?
6. This whole chapter is obviously an exhortation for Christians to love one another, but as Paul describes it, love is also in many ways a description of Jesus himself. Reread verses 4-7. How do these verses describe Jesus? How has Jesus shown patience and kindness to you? How did Jesus avoid envy and boasting, irritation and resentment? And how did he bear, hope, believe, and endure all things? How is Jesus a model for you?

Group Prayer & Assigned Reading

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer. For the next session, please ask group members to read **1 Corinthians 15-16**.

SESSION EIGHT

Resurrection of the Dead

Lesson Summary

"If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied." Throughout 1 Corinthians, Paul has talked about a lot of the practical issues we face on a day-to-day basis. But near the end of the letter, he wants to remind us that the Christian hope is not about making things better in this life. Christianity is focused on the future, the life to come, the resurrection of the dead.

Appointed Scripture

This week, read and discuss **1 Corinthians 15:1-11**. In verse 1 Paul says that he wants to "remind" the Corinthians of the gospel. Why would he need to remind them? Why might we need to be reminded today? What stands out to you about the way Paul summarizes the gospel? What things seem to be most important to him?

Group Discussion Questions

1. What was one point from this week's teaching that stood out to you?
2. In the 1830's, Alexis de Tocqueville observed that American Christians tend to focus their attention on finding happiness in this life. How do you see that tendency today? Why do we focus so much on our hopes for this life (rather than the life to come)? What might Paul say to us?
3. How often (or how rarely) do you think about the promise of resurrection? When you do think about it, how does it make you feel?
4. What would you say to a friend or neighbor who asked you why it matters whether Jesus rose from the dead? Why should it matter to them?
5. Discuss this quote by Wolfhart Pannenberg: "The evidence for Jesus's resurrection is so strong that nobody would question it except for two things: First, it is a very unusual event. And second, if you believe it happened, you have to change the way you live."
6. What is your biggest takeaway from this study of the book of 1 Corinthians? What makes this letter important for us today?

Group Prayer & Assigned Reading

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with one another and end in prayer.