

Introduction

Lesson 1

I Corinthians 1:1-17

Background

Corinth

- A. A major harbor and commercial center at the tip of the Greek mainland.
- B. Religion consisted of worship to various gods, with the sea-deities (i.e. Poseidon) and Aphrodite being the major influences.
- C. Julius Caesar made it a Roman colony in 46 B.C. and it came to be one of the prominent centers of Greece.
- D. Jews were abundant in this trade center (Acts 18:1-18).
- E. The population in the first century was approximately 600,000 - 700,000, most of whom were slaves.

Paul's First Trip to Corinth

- A. Paul came alone directly from Athens on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1), around 50 A.D., with the intent of preaching Christ (I Cor. 2:1-3).
- B. Paul immediately went to work and converted his co-workers Aquilla and Priscilla (Acts 18:2-3).
- C. Paul, as was his custom upon entering a city, reasoned in the synagogue, persuading Jews and Greeks (Acts 18:4-5). He was eventually rejected and lived next door to the synagogue with Justus (Acts 18:6-7).
- D. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, and many of the Corinthians were converted, most likely forming the nucleus of the church established at Corinth (Acts 18:8, I Cor. 1:14-16).
- E. Paul was brought up on charges before Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, by the Jews (Acts 18:12-16). Gallio refused to judge accusations based on Jewish law, with the result that Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, was beaten.
- F. Paul was in Corinth for a year and a half (Acts 18:11, 18). When he departed (around 52 A.D.), he sailed for Syria, taking Aquilla and Priscilla.
- G. It appears that the church was primarily made up of people from the lower class (I Cor. 1:26, 7:21).
- H. Because he had brought the gospel to them, Paul looked upon the Corinthians as his beloved children (I Cor. 4:14-15).

The Epistle to Corinth

- A. The epistle was written around 55 A.D., from Ephesus while Paul was on his third missionary journey (Acts 19:1, I Cor. 16:8).
- B. Motivations for writing the letter:
 - vReports from the household of Chloe (I Cor. 1:11).
 - vReports from Apollos (I Cor. 3:5-6, 16:12).
 - vReports from Corinthians (I Cor. 16:17-18).
 - vGreat concern over immorality (I Cor. 5:9).
 - vTheir letters to Paul (I Cor. 7:1).

Questions

1. How does Paul describe the church at Corinth (vs. 2)?
2. How had the Corinthians been enriched in Christ?
3. What did he beseech them to do?
4. How does he describe the contentions that existed among them?
5. Whom had Paul baptized? Why was he glad that he had not baptized others? What was Paul's mission?

Wisdom of God

Lesson 2

I Corinthians 1:18 - 2:16

Introduction

Paul notes some of the problems facing the church at Corinth in vs. 13-17. Before he discusses any of these problems in detail, he compares the wisdom of the world to the wisdom of God.

In this section, Paul lays a good foundation for the epistle by stressing that the things of God can be known by man only when God chooses to make them known. Accordingly, Paul argues that his knowledge of God came by direct revelation. This being true, it would follow that the epistle was not merely a collection of Paul's opinions, but an inspired message. In addition, this section serves as a good introduction by urging the Corinthians to rely on the wisdom of God, rather than their own understanding. As we shall see, their reliance on personal wisdom in many cases led to their sinful lack of unity and harmony.

The Foolishness of the Cross - 1:18-31

1. Note the contrast immediately established in vs. 18-20, i.e. the reaction of men to the cross as foolishness or the power of God.
2. Why did God choose something the world views as foolish in order to save the world (cf. vs. 29)?
3. Based on the things for which the Jews and Gentiles were looking (vs. 22) explain why a crucified messiah was to them, respectively, a stumblingblock and foolishness (cf. Deuteronomy 21:22, 23).
4. Describe those to whom the calling of God had little appeal.
5. Why should we glory in the Lord?

Manner of Paul's Speech - 2:1-5

1. Based on 1:18-31, why would excellency of speech and wisdom be out of place in Paul's teaching?

2. Be prepared to explain briefly what Paul taught if he knew only Jesus Christ and him crucified.
3. Explain vs. 3 by using Acts 18:1-12.
4. Based on your knowledge of Acts give an example of Paul using a demonstration of the Spirit and of power.
5. Use vs. 5 as part of your answer in question 2 of the previous section.

Source of Paul's Teaching - 2:6-16

1. Define the word mystery using vs. 7.
2. Why would Christ not have been crucified if the mystery had been known? Why did God not prevent the crucifixion by revealing the mystery?
3. Describe how the things prepared for those that love God were made known. How could you be sure that Paul's message came from God?
4. How does vs. 15 help to explain why the wise of the world tend to reject Christ (1:26-28)?

Spiritual vs. Carnal

Lesson 3

I Corinthians 3:1 - 23

Introduction

Paul develops the idea expressed in chapters one and two regarding the foolishness of depending on human wisdom by applying it to the Corinthians. He accuses them of being carnal, walking after the manner of men in dividing up in parties. After explaining the true role of a minister, he again concludes by declaring the wisdom of God to be above any reasonings of men.

Worldly Divisions - 3:1-8

1. Read Hebrews 5:12-14 and explain why the Corinthians needed milk.
2. What are jealousy and strife (vs. 3) according to Galatians 5:20-21?
3. What was the proof of their carnality (worldliness) according to vs. 4? Why?
4. What were the roles of Paul, Apollos and God? Who was the greater, the planter or the waterer?

The Work of Ministers - 3:9-15

1. These verses are frequently misunderstood to teach that a person once converted can never be lost. It is true that the man discussed here will be saved regardless of what happens to his works (vs. 14, 15). The key is to determine who the man is and what the works are.
2. Who is the foundation (vs. 11)? What is typically built on a foundation? Who were the building (vs. 9)?
3. Who was working in vs. 5,6? If these were the workers of vs. 13, and the "works" were the building of vs. 9, what is the meaning of vs. 13-15?
4. Read Galatians 6:1-5.

Foolishness of the World - 3:16-23

1. Who is the temple of God?

2. In what way should you be a fool in order to be wise?
3. Read Job 5:13. How does the Lord take the wise in their craftiness?
4. How do Christians possess Paul, Apollos, Cephas, the world, life and death?
5. To whom do we belong?

Puffed Up

Lesson 4

I Corinthians 4:1 - 5:13

Introduction

In this section the apostle Paul makes a personal appeal for the Corinthians to avoid the sin of being puffed up. We see their sin being manifested in several ways: 1.) toward Paul as some were apparently both judging him and complaining that he had not come to them as promised, 2.) toward each other (4:6,7) and 3.) regarding a fornicating brother in their midst.

Paul gives them reasons why each form of being puffed up was wrong and specifically explains what actions they should take. We might add this sin to that of reliance on human wisdom as another cause of so many of their problems.

Paul the Steward - 4:1-5

1. What did Paul want to be seen as?
2. Why was Paul unconcerned about the Corinthians judging him?
3. Use vs. 4 to explain why a conscience frequently is not a good guide. How did Paul know this from personal experience?
4. What will the Lord do when He returns?

The Sin of being Puffed Up - 4:6-21

1. What lesson did Paul say he was teaching in 4:1-5?
2. Why should they not glory?
3. How did the apostles appear to the world? Read II Corinthians 11:23-27.
4. What was the purpose of Paul's writing to the Corinthians?
5. How had some reacted to Paul's failure to return to Corinth? Why had Paul not returned? If Paul had come what would have been his spirit?

The Sinful Brother - 5:1-13

1. Paul addresses this issue both for the specific case and in general.
2. What was the man's sin? What was particularly heinous about it?
3. Why and how was Paul able to judge the man?
4. What was the danger to the Corinthians?
5. What had Paul written them before?
6. Why were they to be less concerned about the sinners of the world? Who would judge the world?

Lawsuits and Former Lives

Lesson 5

I Corinthians 6:1 - 20

Introduction

Paul continues to become more specific in his indictments against their sins. He is horrified that they would carry their disagreements before those who are outside the body of Christ. As with other sins mentioned in the epistle, he lists several reasons why this type of action is contrary to God's will. He urges them to go beyond their former lives stating that they have been washed. Apparently, many of them saw fornication as only an incidental action, for Paul spends considerable time here arguing as to its severity.

Lawsuits among Brethren - 6:1-8

1. State specifically the sin Paul accuses them of in vs. 1?
2. List the reasons from vs. 2-4 as to why this action was wrong:
3. How will Christians judge the world?
4. Read John 17:18-23. What might be one reason why these lawsuits were so damaging?
5. What did Paul desire they do in cases of dispute among themselves?

Former Lives - 6:9-11

1. Be prepared to explain (define) each of the terms used in vs. 9, 10 to describe their former behavior.
2. Read Ephesians 2:1-7. Note how this passage explains the process of the Corinthians' sanctification.
3. What does this passage teach about the types of people making up the church in Corinth?

Sin of Fornication - 6:12-20

1. What does it mean to say that all things are lawful? Does this mean that nothing is a sin?
2. Read I Corinthians 8:8-11. How does this passage help to explain Paul's point in 6:12?
3. Paul mentions meats and the belly, and fornication and the body to show that they have entirely different relationships to each other. What are the relationships?
4. What is fornication? List the reasons Paul gives for it being a sin:
5. How is every sin outside the body?
6. Contrast vs. 19, 20 to 3:21-23.

Questions of Marriage

Lesson 6

I Corinthians 7:1-40

Introduction

As we discussed before, this epistle was not the first correspondence between Paul and the Corinthians. Not only had he written them before (5:9), but they had written him, apparently with a series of questions. Here Paul addresses issues regarding marriage, particularly questions about the value of marriage now that they had become Christians. It seems clear from the previous chapter that many were confused as to what needed to be changed in their lives. Paul explains that in many ways they were to remain as they were before, and he clarifies the role of marriage given the "present distress".

Corinthian Questions - 7:1-7

1. It is hard to tell from vs. 1 if this is Paul's statement or part of the Corinthians' question. From the full chapter be prepared to explain this statement.
2. Why is it good to be married? Is this the only reason?
3. What do you give up in a marriage?
4. Under what situations can the marriage partners "defraud" each other? Were they required or permitted to do this? Was this arrangement ever meant to be permanent?
5. Why should not all be like Paul?

Remain as You Are - 7:8-24

1. What charge did the Lord give to the married? Read Matthew 19:9.
2. Why were they to stay with an unbelieving mate? What was their responsibility if the mate left?

3. What other circumstances does Paul address in this section? What is his conclusion in each case?
4. How are Christians bondservants? How are they free?
5. How can we be bondservants of men (vs. 23)?

Questions Regarding Virginity - 7:25-40

1. Is Paul expressing a command or his opinion (vs. 25)?
2. What reason did Paul give for advising against marriage? What does he say to those who are already married?
3. How might a good marriage be affected by the present distress?
4. What options did Paul give the fathers of virgins?

Regard for Others

Lesson 7

I Corinthians 8:1 - 9:27

Introduction

In chapter seven, Paul began answering questions raised by the Corinthians in their letter. In chapter eight, Paul appears to shift his attention to another area of their questions, meats sacrificed to idols. Paul points out the non-existence of other gods, and that God does not judge a person by what he eats. However, he encourages them not to use their right to eat to the detriment of their weak brethren.

This subject of foregoing rights in order to help our brethren is the center focus of chapter nine as well. Paul notes that he could have taken wages from them but chose not to in order to avoid hindering the gospel of Christ (9:12). Paul concludes the section by indicating he has applied this principle in becoming all things to all men.

Meats Sacrificed to Idols - 8:1-13

1. What is the danger of knowledge? What did knowledge cause some of them to do that was wrong?
2. Read Acts 17:22-31. Be prepared to explain Paul's views regarding idolatry and the one true God.
3. Read Mark 7:14-23. Use this passage to explain why food does not commend us to God.
4. How could the strong cause the weak to stumble? Be specific.
5. What was Paul's conclusion regarding eating?

Paul's Rights - 9:1-18

1. What does Paul say demonstrated he was an apostle?
2. What are the rights Paul says he has in vs. 4-6?
3. Paul spends much time discussing the right to accept wages as an apostle or minister of God. What does he use to show he had this right?

4. Why did Paul not collect wages from the Corinthians? How did he survive?
5. What reward did Paul seek from preaching the gospel?

All Things to All Men - 9:19-27

1. What groups did Paul say he became like? Why did he do this? Give examples for each group of what he might have actually done.
2. Why did Paul do things for the gospel's sake?
3. What essential quality is necessary to win the race Paul describes?
4. Why did Paul strive so hard to bring his body into bondage? What lesson should we gain from this?

Lessons from History

Lesson 8

I Corinthians 10:1 - 33

Introduction

Previously, Paul rebuked them for their various sins and urged them not to use their freedom to the point of discouraging their brethren. Perhaps, though, he felt they were still puffed up and would not make the necessary changes, for in this chapter he calls upon examples from the Old Testament to admonish them. Note the emphasis in vs. 1-4 on all. All, he says, underwent the same experiences, yet God was displeased with most of them. He lists several sins that led to their downfall ending with the warning to take heed, if they thought that they stood.

He also warns them in this chapter that idolatry cannot be maintained while we serve God, for it provokes Him to jealousy. Finally, here he returns to the subject of meats sacrificed to idols and gives some practical advice.

Israelite Examples - 10:1-13

1. Five times Paul uses the word all in vs. 1-4. What did they all have in common?
2. What does it mean to say they were overthrown in the wilderness?
3. Beginning in vs. 6 and for five verses he mentions one sin per verse that they were to avoid. Try to find the historical event noted with each sin.
4. How are we to use these events? What specific lesson was Paul teaching?
5. Be prepared to explain why vs. 13 is encouraging to you.

Flee Idolatry - 10:14-22

1. Where and with what other sin was the commandment flee used?
2. To what does bread and blood refer?
3. By Paul's warning what does it appear the Corinthians were trying to do? Why was this impossible?

4. Read Deuteronomy 32:21 and Hosea 8:11-13; 13:1-3.

Practical Advice - 10:23-33

1. Review chapter 8 for Paul's teaching on meats sacrificed to idols.
2. What should we seek?
3. Read I Timothy 4:3-5. What can we conclude about food?
4. Why should they not eat when they knew the meat was sacrificed to idols?
5. What is to be our overriding goal? What should we carefully avoid?

Men and Women, Lord's Supper

Lesson 9

I Corinthians 11:1 - 34

Introduction

In this chapter, Paul delivers some of his most severe criticism of the practices of the Corinthians. They were not holding fast certain of the traditions given to them by Paul (vs.2). The men and women were failing to recognize their roles and duties while praying and prophesying (vs. 4,5). Even worse was the behavior of many as they came together for the Lord's Supper; some were making a common meal of it.

Paul addresses these problems by emphasizing spiritual facts: the heads of men, women and Christ to explain the proper roles of men and women; and the origin of the Lord's Supper to explain its proper observance.

Proper Behavior of Men and Women - 11:1-16

1. Note that many positions are held regarding this section but most can be summarized in the following four groups:
 - A. The covering of women was related to the exercise of spiritual gifts
 - B. The wearing of a covering was merely a custom of the time.
 - C. The covering is a binding requirement today.
 - D. The covering is the hair.
2. To what does Paul compare a woman praying or prophesying without a covering?
3. Why was a man's head not to be covered?
4. Use vs. 11 and 12 and Galatians 3:28 to explain how men and women are equal yet have different roles.
5. Explain what type of hair men and women are to have. What is long hair to each?
6. What custom were they not to have?

Lord's Supper - 11:17-34

1. What had Paul heard existed among them?
2. What would factions demonstrate?
3. Describe their behavior when they gathered to eat the Lord's Supper.
4. Read Luke 22:14-23. Where had Paul obtained his knowledge regarding this Supper?
5. Name at least two things which should be accomplished in the partaking of the supper.
6. What results from improper partaking?
7. Where were their meals to be eaten?

Spiritual Gifts

Lesson 10

I Corinthians 12:1 - 13:13

Introduction

Paul begins in chapter 12 and continues through chapter 14 to deal almost exclusively with spiritual gifts. He stresses that the various gifts they possessed were the result of one Spirit. Similarly, he points out that the Corinthians formed one body, albeit a body with various parts, each performing a different function. This basic understanding would not only solve many problems regarding spiritual gifts (cf. ch. 14), but also would prevent their problems of factions and divisions.

Despite the value of spiritual gifts, Paul insists that love is a more important and lasting possession. Just as knowledge without love was worthless (8:1-3) so, too, a spiritual gift without love was without value.

Many Gifts, One Spirit - 12:1-11

1. What types of idols led the Gentiles?
2. How could the Corinthians use the knowledge of vs. 3?
3. Note the similarities in the sentences of vs. 4-6. What does vs. 6 teach about the Godhead?
4. According to vs. 7 what is the purpose of each spiritual gift?
5. List the gifts the Spirit provided.

Many Gifts, One Body - 12:12-31

1. What common introduction did we all have into the body?

2. How can the one body be many members? It is very important to decide what is a member of the body.
3. Explain why the parts of our body are all important.
4. Upon what less honorable parts do we bestow more honor?
5. What is the purpose of the various members of the body (vs. 25,26)?
6. Use vs. 27-30 to answer question 2 above.

Love, The Greater Gift - 13:1-13

1. Compare vs. 1-3 to 8:1-3. Why are both true?
2. Be prepared to discuss each quality of love listed in vs. 4-7.
3. What will happen to spiritual gifts? When? Can you cite other passages that corroborate your belief?
4. What three things now exist? How and when will two of them cease to exist?

Spiritual Gifts in Worship

Lesson 11

I Corinthians 14:1 - 40

Introduction

In this chapter Paul continues his discussion of spiritual gifts. He explained in chapter twelve, that their various gifts were the product of one Spirit. In the previous chapter, love is said to be superior to any spiritual gifts. But their confusion over spiritual gifts extended to their worship services. Perhaps as an expression of their factions and divisions, they were using their gifts in a disorganized and disruptive manner.

Paul gives them practical advice about using the gifts, noting that prophesying was better than the use of tongues. The overriding rule was to do all things decently and in order (vs. 40) and unto edifying (vs. 26).

Use of Tongues and Prophecies - 14:1-19

1. Note that even though Paul stressed love, he also urged them to desire spiritual gifts (vs. 1).
2. Whom is edified by tongues? prophecies?
3. What was needed in addition to the tongue? What examples does Paul give to show this?
4. Why should they seek spiritual gifts (vs. 12)?
5. Why would prayers, blessings, etc. be incomplete if without understanding?
6. What did Paul desire over ten thousand words in a tongue?

Spiritual Gifts to the Lost - 14:20-25

1. The Corinthians were to be in mind? in malice?
2. To whom are tongues and prophecies a sign?

3. What would be the effect on an unbeliever if he witnessed a church where prophecies occurred?

Guidelines for Worship - 14:26-40

1. What general rule does Paul give for their worship services? How can we apply this today?
2. What were the rules for using tongues? prophecies?
3. Did those that possessed spiritual gifts have control over them? How is this truth violated today?
4. Was Paul only giving his opinion in these matters?

Resurrection

Lesson 12

I Corinthians 15:1 - 58

Introduction

Some among the Corinthians had begun to say that there was no resurrection of the dead. (vs. 12). Paul knew that such teaching would destroy everything he had done among them, therefore, he painstakingly explained the full implication of this teaching. Not only would it mean that Christ was not raised, but their teaching and Paul's efforts would be in vain. Such an implication meant they were the most pitiable of men.

But Paul shows that a resurrection will occur as it had occurred with Christ. He reminds them of the witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus and scoffs at those who would mock the ability of God to give us a new body. Finally he concludes with one of the most encouraging passages in all the scriptures, describing our victory over death

Witnesses of Christ - 15:1-11

1. Describe the gospel Paul preached to them.
2. List all of those to whom Christ appeared.
3. Find an example of a witness of the resurrection in either Matthew, Mark, Luke or John and explain why they could not have been mistaken.
4. How does Paul describe himself? Why?

Implication of No Resurrection - 15:12-19

1. What is true if Christ was not raised?
2. If there was no resurrection was Paul a liar?
3. What would be true of their sins?
4. If there is no resurrection should we be Christians?

Affirmation of the Resurrection - 15:20-49

1. Compare Adam to Christ.
2. When shall the Son be subjected to the Father?
3. What does Paul say he did daily which indicated his faith?
4. What should we do if there is no resurrection?
5. What examples does Paul use to show we will receive a new body?
6. How is our body sown? How is it raised?

Victory over Death - 15:50-58

1. When will death be swallowed up in victory?
2. What is the sting of death? Why?
3. How does God give us the victory over death?
4. What should we do now?

Conclusion and Review

Lesson 13

I Corinthians 16:1 - 24

Introduction

Paul brings his letter to a close in a personal manner. He confirms that he would travel to Corinth, perhaps staying as long as the winter. He asked them to be ready for his coming by gathering a collection on the first day of every week to be used for needy saints in Jerusalem. Not only was Paul intending to visit them, but Apollos and Timothy were likely to come at some time as well. Paul ends the letter with a series of salutations including those in his own handwriting expressing his love for them.

Paul's Journey - 16:1-9

1. What was the order Paul gave to both the Galatians and the Corinthians?
2. Why was the collection to be gathered weekly?
3. Where was Paul intending to travel before he came to Corinth?
4. Read Acts 19:1-41 regarding Paul's stay at Ephesus.

Final Word's - 16:10-24

1. How were they to treat Timothy?
2. Explain why vs. 14 is a good summary of the entire epistle.
3. Why was Paul happy at the coming of those from Corinth?
4. Explain the meaning of the words anathema and maranatha.

Be prepared to discuss five things which you have learned from our study which you believe will be helpful to you on a personal basis.