

OVERVIEW

Paul and Corinth

The guide is intended to lead a group through one lesson per week. However, feel free to split lessons if you want to discuss them more thoroughly. Or, omit some questions in a lesson if preparation or discussion time is limited. You can always return to this guide for personal study later. You will be able to discuss only a few questions at length, so choose some for discussion and others for background. Make time at each discussion for members to ask about anything they didn't understand.

Each lesson in the guide ends with a section called "For the group." These sections give advice on how to focus a discussion, how you might apply the lesson in your group, how you might shorten a lesson, and so on. The group leader should read each "For the group" at least a week ahead so that he or she can tell the group how to prepare for the next lesson.

Each member should prepare for a meeting by writing answers for all of the background and discussion questions to be covered. If the group decides not to take an hour per week for private preparation, then expect to take at least two meetings per lesson to work through the questions. Application will be very difficult, however, without private thought and prayer.

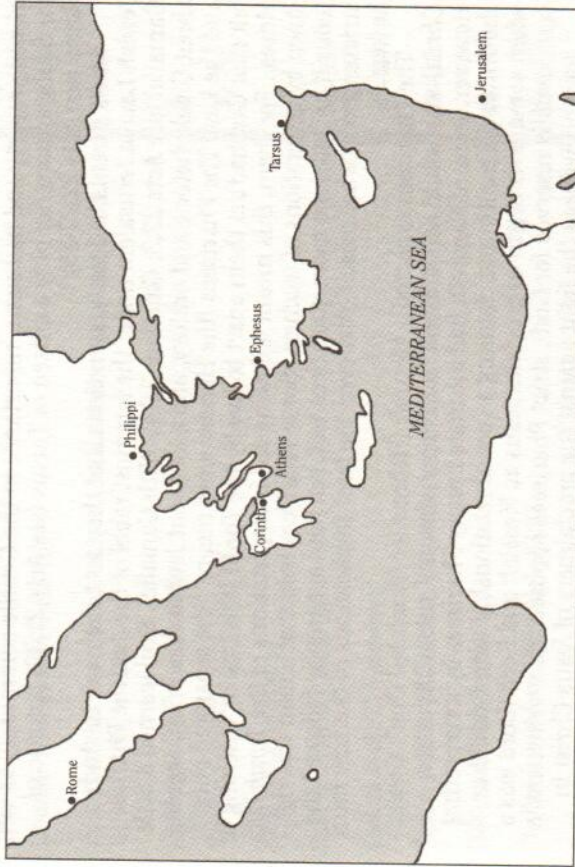
Two reasons for studying in a group are accountability and support. When each member commits in front of the rest to seek growth in an area of life, you can pray with one another, listen jointly for God's guidance, help one another to resist temptation, assure each other that the other's growth matters to you, use the group to practice spiritual principles, and so on. Pray about one another's commitments and needs at most meetings. Spend the first few minutes of each meeting sharing any results from applications prompted by previous lessons. Then discuss new applications toward the end of the meeting. Follow such sharing with prayer for these and other needs.

If you write down each other's applications and prayer requests, you are more likely to remember to pray for them during the week, ask about them at the next meeting, and notice answered prayers. You might want to get a notebook for prayer requests and discussion notes.

Notes taken during discussion will help you to remember, follow up on ideas, stay on the subject, and clarify a total view of an issue. But don't let note-taking keep you from participating. Some groups choose one member at each meeting to take notes. Then someone copies the notes and distributes them at the next meeting. Rotating these tasks can help include people. Some groups have someone take notes on a large pad of paper or erasable marker board so that everyone can see what has been recorded.

Pages 167-168 list some good sources of counsel for leading group studies.

Map for 1 Corinthians



Founding the church in Corinth had been no easy matter for Paul, and maintaining it was proving to be just as challenging. He had planted the faith in the pagan soil of a bustling port city, and weeds persistently threatened to choke it. From Paul's correspondence with the Corinthian believers, we see how he applied the gospel to a host of issues, including sex, intellectualism, public worship, and gifts of the Spirit.

Saul the Pharisee

Some knowledge of Paul's background helps us understand his views on the issues being debated in Corinth. He was born in the first decade AD in Tarsus, a prosperous city on the trade route from Syria to Asia Minor. Tarsus was known for its schools of philosophy and liberal arts, and some scholars believe that Paul must have had some contact with these. Like most cities in the Roman Empire, Tarsus probably contained synagogues of Greek-speaking Jews who were often as devout as their Hebrew-speaking brethren.¹

However, Paul called himself "a Hebrew of Hebrews" (Philippians 3:5), which probably means that his parents spoke Hebrew and raised him in a strict Jewish home, isolated as much as possible from the pagan city around them.² They named their boy "Saul" after Israel's first king, the most glorious member of the tribe of Benjamin, to which Saul's parents traced their ancestry (see Philippians 3:5). It was a rare Jew outside Palestine who could trace a pure lineage back to the ancient days of Israel, and fellow Jews would have envied the pedigree. Furthermore, Saul's family must have owned property and had some importance in the Gentile community as well, for Saul was born not only a citizen of Tarsus (see Acts 21:39) but also of Rome (see Acts 22:27-28).³

Saul's parents had such aspirations that they sent their son to study Jewish Law in Jerusalem under the foremost rabbi of the day, the Pharisee Gamaliel (see Acts 22:3; Galatians 1:14). With Gamaliel, Saul learned a little about Greek rhetoric and oratory, and a lot about Jewish reasoning, arguing, and the Law. The Pharisees (the Hebrew word means "the separated ones") felt that God had set them apart to live by the *Torah* (the Law or Teaching of Moses). For them, this meant following the interpretations of the *Torah* laid down by generations of teachers. Some Pharisees held that a man was righteous if he had done more good than bad, but Saul apparently followed the stricter group who insisted that even the least implications of the Law must be kept.⁴

The Pharisees expected a *Messiah* (Hebrew for "Anointed One"; Greek: *Christ*) who would deliver them from oppression and rule with justice. However, Jesus of Nazareth had infuriated many Pharisees by interpreting the *Torah* differently and claiming a special relationship with God. Thus, when some Jews began to proclaim Jesus as Messiah and Lord (Lord was a term usually reserved for God), strict Pharisees opposed them vehemently.

Saul helped lead the fight against the proclaimers of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem (see Acts 7:58-8:3; Galatians 1:13). When some followers of Christ were driven out, Saul obtained permission to pursue them to Damascus. But on the way there, Jesus confronted Saul in a blinding encounter (see Acts 9:1-19), revealing to Saul that he was persecuting the very God he professed to worship. From then on, Saul's understanding of God and the *Torah* began to change dramatically. He joined those Jews who were urging other Jews to believe in Jesus, and after some years God called him to proclaim Jesus as Savior to the Gentiles also. Saul took the Greek name "Paul" when he turned to work among Gentiles.

Timeline of Paul's Ministry

(All dates are approximate, based on F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, page 475.)

Public ministry of Jesus	AD 28-30
Conversion of Paul (Acts 9:1-19)	33
Paul visits Jerusalem to see Peter (Galatians 1:18)	35
Paul in Cilicia and Syria (Acts 9:30; Galatians 1:21)	35-46
Paul visits Jerusalem to clarify the mission to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:1-10)	46
Paul and Barnabas in Cyprus and Galatia (Acts 13-14)	47-48
<i>Letter to the Galatians</i>	48?
Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15)	49
Paul and Silas travel from Antioch to Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Achaia (Acts 16-17)	49-50
<i>Letters to the Thessalonians</i>	50
Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:1-18)	50-52
Paul visits Jerusalem	52
Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19)	52-55
<i>Letters to the Corinthians</i>	55-56
Paul travels to Macedonia, Dalmatia, and Achaia (Acts 20)	55-57
<i>Letter to the Romans</i>	early 57
Paul to Jerusalem (Acts 21:1-23:22)	May 57
Paul imprisoned in Caesarea (Acts 23:23-26:32)	57-59
Paul sent to house arrest in Rome (Acts 27:1-28:31)	59-62
<i>Letters to Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon</i>	60?-62
<i>Letters to Timothy and Titus</i>	?
Paul executed in Rome	65?

Paul the missionary

Paul spent ten years in the Roman provinces of Cilicia and Syria (see Galatians 1:21), probably preaching Jesus along with Greek-speaking Jewish Christians. Then a believer named Barnabas called him to Syrian Antioch, where by this time rapid conversions had made the church more Gentile than Jewish.⁵ After a while, the church in Antioch commissioned Paul and Barnabas to evangelize the provinces of Cyprus and Galatia. The two men succeeded in founding churches in several cities. Indeed, the mission to the Gentiles was so successful that the apostles in Jerusalem invited Paul and Barnabas to a council to clarify exactly what God expected of Gentile believers (see Acts 15). Paul spent the eight years after the council in Jerusalem planting more churches. He went first to Macedonia, where he founded churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea (see Acts 16:1–17:15). Trouble from the Jews in Macedonia drove him south to Greece. He received a cold reception in Athens, so he traveled on to Corinth, the capital of the Roman province of Achaia (modern Greece).

Paul and his mission team spent a year and a half in Corinth to found a church firmly in that important city (see Acts 18:1–18). When things looked solid in Corinth, Paul sailed back east to Antioch and Jerusalem, then traveled west again to plant a church in Ephesus, the capital of the province of Asia (part of modern Turkey). Meanwhile, the church at Corinth received a great blessing in the person of another stellar Christian leader. A former Jew named Apollos arrived to teach the faith and debate Corinthian Jews who opposed Christianity (see Acts 18:24–28).

Toward the end of his three-year stay in Ephesus, Paul began to receive disturbing news from Corinth. He wrote a letter (now lost) instructing the Corinthian believers not to associate with church members who practiced illicit sex (see 1 Corinthians 5:9). Sometime later, members of the household of a believer named Chloe brought news that the Corinthian church was splitting into factions, each of which claimed some prominent leader as its authority (see 1 Corinthians 1:11). Then three members of the church brought Paul a letter from the whole body (see 1 Corinthians 7:1; 16:17). This letter was full of questions about various issues, but the messengers also reported scandalous information: incest, class snobbery, and other problems were infecting the church. In response to these ills, Paul dictated a long letter—the one we call 1 Corinthians.

Corinth

Paul spent more time in Corinth and Ephesus than in any other city he visited (besides Rome and Caesarea, where he was imprisoned), for as two of the most important trading centers in the Empire, they were promising hubs for evangelism. A strong church in Corinth could spread the gospel not only throughout Greece, but through trading connections all over the known world. Likewise, a fractured or heretical church in Corinth could either collapse the gospel or spread a false gospel throughout the world.

The Romans utterly demolished Corinth in 146 BC for resisting Roman domination, but Julius Caesar rebuilt it a century later as a Roman colony. As a colony, it was populated primarily with Roman citizens, but as a commercial center, it was soon full also of Greeks, Syrians, Asians, Egyptians, and a large community of Jews. It is estimated that in Paul's day 250,000 free persons and some 400,000 slaves inhabited Corinth, not to mention the thousands of tradesmen, sailors, and tourists who visited.⁶ Because of its cosmopolitan flavor, Corinth was considered the least Greek of the Greek cities and the least Roman of the Roman colonies.⁷

The source of Corinth's prosperity was commerce. The city sat astride the narrow isthmus that connected mainland Greece with the peninsula called the Peloponnese. Because weather and rocks made it hazardous to sail around the Peloponnese, it was far less costly for ships to go through Corinth. They would dock at the harbor of Cenchrea (east of Corinth on the Saronic Gulf). There, large ships would unload their cargo onto wagons, which would haul the cargo on a sort of wooden railway (the *diolkos*) to the harbor of Lechaeum (west of Corinth on the Corinthian Gulf). Smaller ships were hauled fully loaded across the three and a half miles of the *diolkos*. Thus, the most sensible way to get anything to Rome from Ephesus, China, or Egypt was through Corinth.

Corinth's prosperity led to luxury and licentiousness. Indeed, in polite Greek, the word "to Corinthianize" meant "to practice sexual immorality" or "to debauch." The most notorious of Corinth's dozen temples was dedicated to Aphrodite, the goddess of love. About a thousand female slaves staffed the temple to practice ritual prostitution with worshippers (including sailors and tourists). This was a profitable attraction and contributed both to Corinth's prosperity and her reputation.⁸ Yet Corinth also had prestige. In Greek jargon, a person who spoke "Corinthian words" had pretensions to philosophy and learning. The Isthmian Games, which were second in importance only to the Olympic Games, were celebrated every other year under Corinth's governance.⁹ And Corinth was both the capital of Achaia and its richest city. In short, wealth, loose morals, and intellectual pride were the Corinthian hallmarks.

First Corinthians

Predictably, wealth, loose morals, and intellectual pride lay at the root of the troubles in the Corinthian church. There were divisions between those members who liked Paul's simple style and those who preferred a more sophisticated and philosophical approach to religion. There was strife between those who thought freedom in Christ meant liberation from "outworn" taboos about sex and food, those who felt that Jewish and other rules must be kept strictly, and those who believed something in between. There was jealousy between those who possessed the kind of flashy gifts of the Spirit that suggested true enlightenment and those who did not. And there was bitterness between the rich and the poor. All this Paul addressed in his letter, at the same time dispatching his aide Timothy to help sort things out in person.

First Corinthians is not a doctrinal treatise but a pastor's response to problems, yet it is the source of some of our most helpful information about Christian faith and practice.

First impressions

It is much easier to study a book passage by passage if you have first examined it as a whole. An overview is especially necessary if you have never studied the book before. Below are some suggestions for an overview of 1 Corinthians. Look over questions 1 through 5 before you begin.

Study Skill—Interpreting Epistles

The hardest thing about understanding biblical letters is that we have only half of the correspondence. That is, we know what Paul said, but we don't know anything else about the situations he was responding to, the people he was writing to, or the questions they were asking. It is a little like listening to one end of a telephone conversation and trying to figure out what is being said on the other end. Often—with matters ranging from the Cephas party (who were they, and what did they believe?) in 1:12 to "baptized for the dead" (what on earth is this?) in 15:29—we can only guess. In order to make educated guesses rather than wild speculations, we need to be careful detectives observing every clue.

As you read 1 Corinthians for the first time, don't try to answer every question about what is going on. Don't try to absorb every detail. Look for the main ideas, the threads that tie paragraphs together, and the questions you want to answer for yourself later. This broad overview is essential preparation for the close detective work later on.

1. What if you could have been one of the Corinthian Christians who just received this letter from Paul? Read it through once for the overall message, just as you might read any letter. Don't stop to unravel difficult pieces; just try to follow the big ideas.
As you read, keep a list of repeated words, phrases, and ideas that seem important to Paul's message. (For example, you'll notice that words like *proud*, *arrogant*, and *puffed up* appear often.) This list will help you notice the main issues Paul is addressing and the main ideas he wants to get across. It will also suggest questions you will want to answer when you study further.

2. Jot here any questions that came up during your first reading—any terms or passages you'd like clarified, for example. You can also write down any questions prompted by the introduction.

Study Skill—Broad Outline

It is often easier to see the big picture of a long book like 1 Corinthians if you make a broad outline during your overview. The best way to do this on your own is to make up a title for each chapter then try to group the chapters together. As you go along, you'll find that the chapter divisions are not always the best places to break but they are a place to start. (The chapters of the New Testament were devised several centuries after the books were written. They aid us in finding passages, but they are not inspired by God in the way that the books themselves are.)

3. Below, we've suggested some ways in which you might group the sections of 1 Corinthians. Go back through the book and write down titles that you think express what each smaller section is about. Then write titles for each of the larger sections. (You can change any of the divisions if you like.)

1:1-9 _____

1:10-4:21 _____

1:10-17 _____

1:18-3:4 _____

3:5-4:5 _____
 4:6-21 _____
 5:1-6:20 _____
 5:1-13 _____
 6:1-11 _____
 6:12-20 _____
 7:1-40 _____
 8:1-11:1 _____
 8:1-13 _____
 9:1-27 _____
 10:1-13 _____
 10:14-22 _____
 10:23-11:1 _____
 11:2-14:40 _____
 11:2-16 _____
 11:17-34 _____
 12:1-14:40 _____
 15:1-58 _____
 16:1-24 _____

Study Skill—Application

When we observe and interpret what a biblical book says and means, we often have to think about its human author and first-century readers. It is important to understand what God was saying to them in their situation before we decide what He is saying to us in ours. Nevertheless, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us that "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." James 1:22 urges us to do what the Word says, not merely hear it. Therefore, the last step of Bible study should always be to ask yourself, "What difference should this passage make to my life? How should it make me want to think or act?" Application will require time, thought, prayer, and perhaps even discussion with another person.

At times you may find it most productive to concentrate on one specific application, giving it careful thought and prayer. At other times you may want to list many implications a passage of Scripture has for your life, meditating on them all for several days before you choose one for concentrated prayer and action. Use whatever method helps you take to heart and act on what the passage says.

4. What do you observe about Paul as a person from his letter to the Corinthians? (Is he proud, humble, intelligent, slow of mind, passionate, cool...?)

5. How would you summarize what this letter as a whole is about? What are its main themes? What is Paul's overall purpose for writing it?

6. How is the overall message of 1 Corinthians relevant to your life? What actions or matters for prayer and thought does your first reading of this book encourage you to pursue?

For the group

This "For the group" section and the ones in later lessons are intended to suggest ways of structuring your discussions. Feel free to select what suits your group and ignore the rest. The main goals of this lesson are to get to know 1 Corinthians as a whole and the people with whom you are going to study it.

Worship. Some groups like to begin with prayer and/or singing. Some share requests for prayer at the beginning, but leave the actual prayer until after the study. Others prefer just to chat and have refreshments for a while and then move to the study, leaving worship until the end. It is a good idea to start with at least a brief prayer for the Holy Spirit's guidance and some silence to help everyone change focus from the day's busyness to the Scripture.

Warm-up. The beginning of a new study is a good time to lay a foundation for honest sharing of ideas, to get comfortable with each other, and to encourage a sense of common purpose. One way to establish common ground is to talk about what each group member hopes to get out of your group—out of your study of 1 Corinthians, and out of any prayer, singing, sharing, outreach, or anything else you might do together. Why do you want to study the Bible, and 1 Corinthians in particular? If you have someone write down each member's hopes and expectations, then you can look back at these goals later to see if they are being met. Allow about fifteen minutes for this discussion so that it does not degenerate into vague chatting.

How to use this study. If the group has never used a LIFECHANGE study guide before, you might take a whole meeting to get acquainted, discuss your goals, and go over the "How to Use This Study" section. Then you can take a second meeting to discuss the overview. This will assure that everyone understands the study and will give you more time to read all of 1 Corinthians and answer the overview questions.

Go over the parts of the "How to Use This Study" section that you think the group should especially notice. For example, point out the optional questions in the margins. These are available as group discussion questions, ideas for application, and suggestions for further study. It is unlikely that anyone will have the time or desire to answer all the optional questions. A person might do one "Optional Application" for any given lesson. You might choose one or two "For Thought and Discussion" questions for your group discussion, or you might spend all your time on the numbered questions. If someone wants to write answers to the optional questions suggest that he or she use a separate notebook. It will also be helpful for discussion notes, prayer requests, answers to prayers, application plans, and so on.

Invite everyone to ask questions about how to use the study guide and how your discussions will go.

Reading. It is often helpful to refresh everyone's memory by reading the passage aloud before discussing the questions. Reading all of 1 Corinthians is probably out of the question, but you might ask someone to read 1:1-17,

using the tone of voice he or she thinks Paul would have used in speaking these words. Try to make the chapter sound like a living person talking to a real group of people he knows.

Introduction. Ask a few questions about the background material, such as, "What do you think are the important things we should know about Paul? About the city of Corinth? About the church in Corinth?" Group members don't need to memorize all of the information, but that material should help them understand the people and situations that lie behind 1 Corinthians. The more real the people and circumstances are to you, the easier it will be for you to interpret the letter.

First impressions. Give everyone a chance to answer questions 1, 2, 4, and 5. Make a master list of all the repeated words, phrases, and ideas that everyone observed. Make another list of everyone's questions. You probably won't want to answer those questions now, but you should keep them handy and return to them at appropriate points in your study.

Next, compare your outlines (question 3). You might also want to compare them to outlines you find in study Bibles or commentaries. If you do, observe both what all the outlines have in common and how they differ. Which approaches do you find most helpful?

Let everyone respond to question 6. If some group members are unfamiliar with applying Scripture to their lives, plan to take time at your next meeting to discuss how to do this and to brainstorm some possible applications. The Study Skills on pages 25–26 in lesson 2 may be of help.

Wrap-up. The group leader should have read lesson 2 and its "For the group" section. At this point, he or she might give a short summary of what members can expect in that lesson and the coming meeting. This is a chance to whet everyone's appetite, assign any optional questions, omit any numbered questions, or forewarn members of possible difficulties.

Encourage any members who found the overview especially difficult. Some people are better at seeing the big picture than others. Some are best at analyzing a particular verse or paragraph, while others are strongest at seeing how a passage applies to their lives. Urge members to give thanks for their own and others' strengths, and to give and request help when needed. The group is a place to learn from each other. Later lessons will draw on the gifts of close analyzers as well as overviewers and appliers, practical as well as theoretical thinkers.

Worship. Many groups like to end with singing and/or prayer. This can include songs and prayers that respond to what you've learned in 1 Corinthians or prayers for specific needs of group members.

Some people are shy about sharing personal needs or praying aloud in groups, especially before they know the other people well. If this is true of your group, then a song and/or some silent prayer and a short closing prayer spoken by the leader might be an appropriate end. You could also share requests and pray in pairs.

1. A. T. Robertson, "Paul, the Apostle," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), 2276.
2. F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 41-43.
3. Bruce, 32-40.
4. Bruce, 50-52.
5. Bruce, 127-133.
6. Kenneth Barker, ed., *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985), 1732.
7. Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1958), 16.
8. F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 18-19.
9. Morris, 16; F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 89.

LESSON TWO

1 CORINTHIANS

1:1-9

To the Called

The news from Chloe's people and the letter brought by Stephanas and the rest have spurred Paul to dictate an urgent letter. But he is not abrupt, as is customary in Greek letters; he begins by politely identifying himself and the letter's recipients, and he continues with a few kind words before the meat of the message. Yet Paul never wastes words. Features that are mere polite nothings in the average Greek letter are all given Christian flavor and made to introduce the themes of the epistle.

Read 1:1-9 carefully, preferably in more than one translation. (A second version can illuminate different facets by using different words.) Watch for words and ideas Paul repeats and for themes that are echoed later in the letter. Ask God to open your mind and heart to observe and understand.

Greeting (1:1-3)

Apostle (1:1). Literally, "one who is sent"—a messenger proxy, ambassador. In Jewish Law, the *aposifos* (Greek) or *shaliach* (Aramaic) was a person acting with full authority for another in a business or legal transaction.¹

The New Testament apostle is not just a delivery service, but an authoritative messenger of God (see John 20:21). The church recognized certain men who had seen the risen

Jesus as apostles, the leaders with the highest authority regarding doctrine and policy.

Sosthenes (1:1). Possibly the ruler of the Corinthian synagogue (see Acts 18:17). If so, he became a Christian either during or after Paul's ministry there, and he was at Ephesus with Paul when this letter was written. However, the name is not uncommon, so it may be a different man.

Holy (1:2). "Saints" in NASB, meaning "set apart ones." Likewise, **sanctified** means "set apart for God" or "made holy." Paul stresses his readers' identity as holy ones twice in this verse.

Grace (1:3). The normal Greek greeting was *chaitrein*, meaning "greetings" or "favor from me to you." Paul preferred a related word, *charis*, which means God's favor bestowed on people. Grace includes both the gift of salvation and God's daily empowering presence, which He bestows on His people to be and do what He has called them to be and do.

Peace (1:3). This was the common Jewish greeting. It meant wholeness and well-being in all aspects of life—health, harmony between people, a flourishing earth, and so on. To wish someone peace was to wish him or her a foretaste of the Messianic Age foretold by the prophets, a taste of God's presence and the fulfillment that flows from that presence.²

1. Paul chooses his words carefully in identifying himself and his readers. In light of the topics he will discuss later on, why do you think he . . .

describes himself as "called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" (1:1)? (Consider 1:10-12; 3:4-5; 4:1-6; 9:1-6; 11:1.)

names his readers "those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people" (1:2)? (See, for example, 3:14; 5:1-2,6-8; 6:9-20.)

Thanksgiving (1:4-9)

Blameless (1:8). Not faultless in the sense of never having erred, but "unimpeachable"—no one will be able to bring a charge against those whom God has chosen (see Romans 8:33).³

The day of our Lord Jesus Christ (1:8). In the writings of the Old Testament prophets, "the day of the Lord" was the day when God would intervene in history to show Himself Lord of the earth, bringing justice to the righteous and the wicked (see Isaiah 2:11,17,20; Joel 2:1-11, 28-32; Amos 5:18-20). In the New Testament, that day is the one on which Christ will be **revealed** (1 Corinthians 1:7) as Lord of all at His second coming, and on which He will bring justice to the earth.

It is Paul's continual habit to take Old Testament Scriptures and ideas that referred to "the Lord" (God) and apply them to Jesus Christ (see 1 Corinthians 2:16 for another example of this).

Fellowship (1:9). The Greek word *koινωνia* means communion, participation, partnership, fellowship. It denotes relationship and joint activity in a family or an enterprise. Fellowship with Jesus Christ is such an intimate, personal thing that Paul frequently speaks of believers as being "in" Christ (see 1:2,30)—united with this Person and so dependent upon and surrounded by Him that He is the very atmosphere we breathe.

For Thought and Discussion: What phrase does Paul repeat with slight variations nine times in 1:1-9? What does this persistent reiteration tell you about Paul's emphasis?

For Thought and Discussion: Why does Paul need to emphasize to the Corinthians that Christ will be revealed on the coming day of the Lord (see 1:6-8)? Think about 15:12-34.

For Thought and Discussion: How is the "testimony about Christ" confirmed in a person (1:6)? That is, how does a person become living confirmation that the gospel is true?

For Thought and Discussion: Does Paul mean that each Corinthian has every gift, or that the church as a whole lacks no gift (see 1:7)? Why do you think so?

2. It was Paul's custom to begin his letters by thanking God for the best traits of his readers. For what traits of the Corinthians does Paul thank God (see 1:49)?

3. How is this thanksgiving relevant to the rest of the letter? (Consider 4:7; 12:1,4-26.)

4. Circle the statements below that are true of you.

- "In him [Christ] you have been enriched in every way" (1:5).
- "Confirming our testimony about Christ among you" (1:6).
- "You do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus" (1:7).
- "He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless" (1:8).

5. What is one difference that these truths should make to your attitudes and actions?

Optional Application:

- a. What are the implications for your life of the fact that God is faithful about keeping you firm until the end (see 1:8-9)?
- b. In what other ways is God faithful to you? How should this affect your actions?

Study Skill—Observation

The simplest way to make detailed observations is sometimes just to make lists under various topics. You can even keep a running list throughout your study of a book. Some possible topics might be, "Truths About God," "Truths About Christ," "Truths About the Holy Spirit," "Truths About Our Identity in Christ," "Attitudes I Should Have," "Ways I Should Act," "Priorities I Should Have."

6. Make a list of all the truths about God that Paul affirms in 1:1-9.

7. Choose one of these truths and explain why it is personally important to you.

Study Skill—Application

It can be helpful to plan an application in several steps:

- 1. Record the verse or passage that contains the truth you want to apply to your life. If the passage is short enough, consider copying it word for word, as an aid to memory.

(continued on page 26)

(continued from page 25)

(Memorizing the passage is always a good idea, since you can then meditate on it anytime during the day.)

2. State the truth of the passage that impresses you. For instance, "*Christ will keep me firm to the end, so that I will be blameless on the day of the Lord* (see 1:8)."

3. Describe how you already see this truth at work positively in your life. (This is a chance to rejoice in what God is doing.) For example, "*With God's strengthening power, I've been able to resist the temptation to sweep my faith under the rug when I'm afraid people will think I'm weird and foolish.*"

4. Tell how you fall short in relation to this truth, or how you want the truth to affect your life. (Ask God to enable you to see yourself clearly.) For example, "*I still have a tendency to get wrapped up in acquiring possessions and succeeding materially. I'm still tempted to make my material goals more of a priority than loving, listening to, and obeying Christ. When I find myself slipping from obedience, I often panic and forget that Christ is the One who will keep me firm, if I trust Him. I try to keep myself firm by sheer willpower.*"

5. State precisely what you plan to do about having your life changed in this area. (Ask God what, if anything, you can do. Don't forget that transformation depends on His will, power, and timing, not on yours. Diligent prayer should always be part of your application.) For instance, "*I'm going to meditate on 1 Corinthians 1:8 daily this week, and memorize the verse. When I find myself tempted to fall short of what God expects of me, I'm going to remind myself of this verse. Instead of beating up on myself for my failures, I'm going to confess my sins to the Lord each day and thank Him that I can trust Him to keep me firm.*"

6. Plan a way to remind yourself to do what you've decided, such as putting a note on your refrigerator or in your office, or asking a friend to remind you.⁴

Your response

8. What truth from 1:1-9 would you like to take to heart this week?

9. How do you already see this truth affecting your life?

10. How do you fall short or want to grow in this area?

11. What can you do to cooperate with God in letting this growth happen?

Summarize. Take a quick glance at the forest before scrutinizing the trees. Ask someone to tell briefly what Paul says in 1:1-9.

Questions. This lesson emphasizes the connections between Paul's introductory words and the rest of the letter. Other themes are what he says about God and the Corinthians, and how these are relevant to you. You may not be able to cover all of the issues in a passage at equal depth; if not, choose those that you think are most significant for your group. There is nothing wrong with not getting to all the questions if you are digging deeply into the Scriptures.

Many groups like to allow about half of their discussion time to plan applications. This is possible if all of the participants have prepared the lesson ahead of time and understand the passage fairly well. You may find that you need more time just to discuss what a complicated passage means. However, do try to save at least ten minutes for everyone to share what he or she would like to do about what you have studied. If the idea of such purposeful application is new to your group, you might plan extra time to go over the Study Skill—Application on pages 25-26. Some group members may find this systematic approach helpful, while others may find it too structured for their temperaments. Try to help everyone find an approach to application that is effective and suits him or her.

At times you may want to discuss some of the word definitions. Use your judgment to determine which ones might require questions, such as, "What does Paul mean by 'blameless'? How is this different from what we might suppose he means?" It isn't necessary for everyone to absorb all of the material in the definitions; they are there simply to help you interpret the passage.

Summarize and wrap-up. Ask someone to summarize your discussion briefly. What is 1:1-9 about? How, in general, have group members said they want to apply it?

Prayer. Take time to pray for each other, asking God to work in your lives to accomplish the growth each of you has desired. Ask Him to continue to enrich each person in every way. Pray for any specific things that come up.

12. How can you make sure you will do what you have planned?

13. If you have any questions about 1:1-9 or the material in this lesson, record them here.

For the group

Worship.

Warm-up. It often takes time for a group to shift mental gears from the day's business to Bible study. A period of worship can help this transition, and so can a short question that connects the day's experience to the topic at hand. Such a warm-up question can also help you get to know each other better, so that group members will grow more comfortable sharing personal things such as applications. A possible warm-up for this lesson might be, "How have you experienced God's grace this week?"

Read aloud. Ask someone to read 1:1-9 aloud with meaning. Greek sentences are often long and complex, but they are easier to understand if read with pauses at logical places.

A good way to close a meeting is to use the passage at hand as a springboard to praise and thanksgiving. For example, thank God for calling you to be holy along with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thank Him for His grace and peace, for all the ways He has enriched you. Thank Him for confirming through your lives and experiences that the testimony about Christ is true. Thank Him for His promise that He will keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day when the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed. Thank Him for calling you into fellowship with His Son. Praise Him for His faithfulness to His calls and promises.

1. Erich von Eicken and Helgo Lindner, "Apostle," *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 1, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 126-129.
2. Hartmut Beck and Colin Brown, "Peace," *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 776-783.
3. Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1958), 37.
4. Adapted from "The Five-Point Application" in *The 2:7 Series, Course 3* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1988), 62-63.

LESSON THREE

1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-2:5

Foolishness

God (says Paul) has called you to be in fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ (see 1:9). This is no idle cliché. It has direct relevance to what is going on in the Corinthian church. Are the Corinthians living out the implications of fellowship with Jesus? Read 1:10-2:5, trying to follow Paul's train of thought.

Divisions (1:10-17)

Study Skill—Think Paragraphs

In order to grasp what the Holy Spirit is saying to us in a passage of Scripture, it is crucial to grasp the message of the whole passage, not just individual verses. In a letter, the author is usually following a train of thought. A paragraph is the basic unit of thought, and modern translations often mark them to help you follow the thought. So, when you read a passage, *think paragraphs*. Decide for yourself where a unit of thought starts and ends. Ask yourself two questions about each paragraph:

1. What is the author saying here?
 2. Why is he saying it here? What does it have to do with what comes before and after?
- For instance, 1:10-17 is a unit (the NIV makes it two paragraphs for easier reading; the NASB

(continued on page 32)