**1 Corinthians Bible Group Outline**

Background: Corinth was a city of commerce—a trade city on the narrow isthmus between Greece proper and the Peloponnesian Peninsula. It was as Roman, not a Greek city. The city (and the church to some extent) had a reputation for sinfulness. It was “sin city” like Las Vegas.

The church in Corinth had a LOT of problems:

a. Wordliness tied to its pagan roots.

b. A lot of (unhealthy?) interest in the miraculous gifts

Q: What would this tend to produce in a church?

1 Cor 1:1-9 An unusually long intro to a letter

Q: Why so long an introduction?

Q: What do you see here that foreshadows what will be discussed in the letter?

1 Cor 1:10-17 A very emotional passage

v. 10 Could we as a church or as a Bible group become like them?

On the positive side, could we be “perfectly united in mind and thought?”

Q: What would this look like?

Q: How might we achieve this?

v. 11-12 Describe the situation in modern terms. (cliques based on spheres or persons of influence)

Q: What kind of cliques could we have? (the “intellectual” like Apollos, the evangelistic like Paul, those into benevolence, the legalistic/Jewish like)

Q: How do you think this situation developed?

v. 13-17 Paul’s response: He roundly rebukes them!

1 Cor 1:18-19 What is Paul’s solution to the problem of division?

Focus on the cross.

Q: Why is this a solution to the problem of lining up with people? All are equal at the foot of the cross.

Q: Why is the cross “foolishness” to the world? Does the world see the cross to be powerful?

(aside: Apparently, some of the Corinthians were into power politics in the church otherwise, some were into miracles (Jews) and others were into intellectual stuff (Greeks))

1 Cor 1:20-25 Q: Why did God choose “foolish” things in order to save us?

Q: Why can’t the “wise” believe the gospel?

Q: Are you “wise” (ie do you ask the gospel to appeal to your sense of what is reasonable in human terms)

Q: Why do Jews demand sings? (it appeals to their sense or to their desire for things to be exciting. They want a great show)

Q: How could we be like this?

Q: Why do “Greeks demand wisdom? (appeals to their intellectual pride)

Q: How could we be like this?

v. 23 Q: Why is the cross a “stumbling block to the Jews.”?

v. 24-25 Q: What is the foolishness of God? Is it really foolish?

Q: What is the weakness of God? Is it really weakness?

1 Cor 1:26-31. Did we have spiritual pride when we were young Christians (probably not)? So, how does this happen to us?

1 Cor 2:1-5 Q: Why did Paul avoid using eloquence when he preached? (surely he knew how to be eloquent) Q: How did he demonstrate the Spirit’s power when he preached? (by talking about what God had done—by using testimonies?)

1 Cor 2:6-16 Apparently, Paul was not above deep teaching/preaching, but how was his deep teaching different from that the Greek philosophers would teach?

Q: Why was it a mystery? Why were the “rulers of this age” unable to discern it?

Q: Why did God keep it a mystery? Is he trying to hide the truth from us?

v. 9-11 So, how are these truths obtained?

Q: Can you think of a time when the Spirit revealed something to you? What was this like?

1 Cor 3:1-4 Q: Who are these infants and worldly people he is talking about? (Christians in Corinth!). Q: Why does he feel that they are mere infants?

Q: Are you guilty of any jealousy and quarreling? What about gossip? What about lining up behind certain leaders in the church?

1 Cor 3:5-9 Apparently, what had these worldly Christians forgotten?

Surely, this could never happen to us! Q: What might it look like in our case?

Q: Do you really, honestly, see yourself as merely a servant, and a tool in God’s hands?

The result: No cliques, God’s church will work as intended, and we will become mature.

1 Cor 3:10-15 Q: Which is more important in building a physical building—the foundation layer or the tower builder? (In one sense, the foundation-builder is more important, as it sets the pattern, but in another both are equal, as the point is to create a building and there is no building without both!)

Q: What does it mean to you, practically, that Jesus is the foundation?

Illustration: The three little pigs.

v. 12-15 Apparently, although there is one Church (capital C), there are different churches (small c) Q: What is the difference between the churches?

This applies to us individually as well.

There is one Christian life, but there are different Christian lives.

Q: What is a Christian life like which is made of wood, hay and straw (as opposed to one built of gold and silver)?

v. 15 Q: What is the ultimate fate of both?

Q: (a rhetorical one) Which would you prefer?

Q: Where was Corinth headed at this time? Why?

1 Cor 3:16-17 Q: Is Paul talking about the church in Corinth, or the Christians individually in Corinth?

Q: In what sense are we God’s temple? What does that mean to you?

Q: If you were in charge of the Taj Mahal or the White House or… How would you feel about that responsibility?

His point: As a church there in Corinth, to some extent you live or die, rise or fall together. If you think you can separate yourself from what is going on, you are wrong.

1 Cor 3:18-23 Paul returns to the wisdom/foolishness theme again. Q: Why does he return to this theme at this point?

v. 18 Q: What is Paul’s advice for how we can become (truly) wise?

Q: How do we do this?

v. 20-22 Conclusion: Stop boasting! Stop looking down on others.

1 Cor 4:1-13 There is a lot here, but what is the overall thrust of this passage we should bear in mind?

4:2 Q: What are some of the things God has trusted you with? What are you doing with these things? Are you being “faithful” with these things?

Paul’s point: It is God who has entrusted me with my ministry, not you guys. I am accountable to God, not to you, so I will not be intimidated by whether I win your approval.

Q: Do you get worried about whether others approve of you? Q: Why, in principle, is this a bad thing to do?

Another point: Paul, apparently, is open to the possibility that, although sincere, he might be wrong on some point. But what is his attitude about this kind of thing?

v. 6-7 Apparently, some of the Corinthians were basing their self-confidence on their (spiritual) accomplishments. Isn’t this only natural? Q: Why is this highly problematic?

v. 8-13. Some of the leaders in Corinth were “rich.” Q: In what sense were they rich?

Paul, on the other hand was extremely “poor.” Q: In what sense was he poor?

Q: Why would anyone want to be like Paul and follow his example?

Q: Are you willing to be considered “scum of the earth” and “garbage”? Perhaps even to some relatively worldly Christians?

Clearly, Paul is using hyperbole here to make a point. He is trying to shock them into their senses.

1 Cor 4:14-21 Paul finishes this section before going on to the next subject. He ends with a very emotional appeal. Q: What does he appeal to? How is he able to appeal to this? Q: Application? (we should lay a foundation of deep love and affection which may come in handy when people are doing really badly spiritually)

1 Cor 5:1-13 Read the whole section.

Q: What has been going on in Corinth? Are you shocked? Could this happen in one of our modern churches?

Q: Why are they “proud”? (they are proud of their tolerance and liberal, non-judgmental spirit)

Q: Why does Paul advise what can only be seen as a “harsh” form of discipline?

(because a little leaven works through the whole loaf)

Point: Paul tells us that it is not our place to judge those who have not made the commitment of a disciple, but as a family, if we have agreed to the terms of agreement in our family then we have a right and even a duty to enforce what we have formally agreed to.

1 Cor 6:1-8 Q: How do you think it came down to this?

Q: What is the concept being taught here? (that we should a “spun” version of the church to the world? Not!)

Q: Which is Paul more concerned with—that the church would look bad to outsiders, or that the church has reached this point?

1 Cor 6:9-11 Q: The point here? You were made new. Do not bring the world into the church!

Q: How might the world creep into the church in our case?

1 Cor 6:12-20 “Everything is permissible to me.”

Q: What is going on here? (Paul is sarcastically quoting some of the Corinthians)

They were proud of their “liberal” attitude toward sin.

Q: How did Paul (does God) feel about their liberal attitude toward sin in the church?

The key verse is 6:18 Stay away from grey areas.

1 Cor 7:1-7 “For the matters you wrote about.” Q: What, apparently, were these matters? (whether or not a Christian ought to pursue becoming married)

My opinion: On the one hand, there were some who were proud of their liberal attitude, but on the other hand, there were some who were proud of how “spiritual” they were because they were not getting married or having sex with their wives if married.

1 Cor 7:8-39 As we read this passage, ask yourself what Paul general attitude is toward marriage. Is he negative about marriage?

The details of the doctrine (not our main lesson as we are singles here)

1. Marriage is holy and sex between marriage partners is from God.

2. If a Christian has a non-Christian spouse and he/she pursues divorce, you may accept this and you are free to remarry, but only a fellow Christian (v. 39).

3. The Christian spouse must not pursue divorce, except for marital unfaithfulness of a non-Christian spouse.

4. In a bad situation, separation is acceptable, but not divorce.

Q: What principles do you find in this long passage which can apply to all believers, not just the married?

1. As a rule, stay in the place/situation you were when you were saved.

2. Staying single is OK, and sometimes preferred.

3. Those who struggle with lust should probably be married.

4. The present situation (in this case great persecution) might affect the advice.

1 Cor 8. Paul talks to the “weak” and the “strong” On the one hand… On the other hand…

1 Cor 8:1-3 Q: What is the most important principle in dealing with disputable matters (movies, facebook, alcohol, casinos, voting, jobs)? Love/unity!!

1 Cor 8:4-6 Q: What is Paul’s definition of the “weak?” (those who do not know

and who have a sensitive conscience)

Q: What is Paul’s advice to the “weak”? (to learn and to not judge.)

1 Cor 8:7-13 Q: What is Paul’s definition of the “strong?” (those who understand the truth about the question)

Q: What is Paul’s advice to the “strong.” (do not use your knowledge in a way that would hurt the weak)

Q: Applications?

1 Cor 9:1-23 The Christian bill of rights.

1 Cor 9:1-12 Q: What were some of the rights Paul had with regard to the Corinthians? (respect, obedience as apostle, pay for work, etc.)

Q: What are some of our “rights” in the church?

1 Cor 9:13-23 What did Paul do with these rights? Why?

v. 32 Q: What was the result of him giving up his rights?

Q: What are some rights we have that we should consider willingly giving up for the sake of others and of the gospel?

1 Cor 9:24-27 Q: How does this relate to using or giving up our rights as Christians?

1 Cor 10:1-13 Application from Israel’s history. Paul to the Corinthians: Let us reason together here. Q: How does this relate to our use of our rights (which is still the subject in this section?

Our salvation may be at stake.

We will be tempted to bring worldly attitudes into the church, but there is no excuse.

1 Cor 10:14-32 A very important part of 1 Corinthians. We are returning to the same basic question as 1 Cor 8:1-13, which proves this is the context of the whole section. Q: What should I do with my rights as a believer if I am part of Jesus’ church?

Q: For them it was meat sacrificed to idols. What would it be for us?

(consuming alcohol, posting a visit to a casino on facebook, kinds of clothes to wear, movies to watch, political activities to take part in….)

Opening question for this particular Bible Study: If the church is a body, then what part of the body are you?

1 Cor 10:31-32 A summary of this entire section! The key is love and unity, not your opinion or your freedom in Christ.

1 Cor 11:1-2 Be imitators. Q: What is Paul asking them to imitate, and why is he asking them to imitate him? How can we accept this advice of Paul?

Bottom line, we need living examples of Christ. Are you willing to go the extra mile in order, not only to do what is right, but to serve as an example to the younger and weaker believer?

1 Cor 11:3-16 One of the hardest and potentially most confusing passages in the Bible. Context: “Now” a hint that he is moving on to another question, so the context has to do with the next subject, which is the proper use of our gifts as Christians and the problem of “spiritual pride.” Apparently, there was a problem of female Christians trying to run things in the church and of people being puffed up about having certain gifts. Both of these have to do with spiritual pride.

Q: In the context here, is he talking about what goes on in church? (No, this is probably about marriage and prayer)

My opinion: Corinth has an unusually large proportion of “sharp” and “strong” women, and these women have been giving in to temptation to not submit to their husbands. This has leaked into the church as well.

Q: What is his point to these sisters? You need to accept the role in which God has put you.

v. 3 Who is greater/better/more important God or Christ?

What Christ and man?

What about man and woman? So, it is not about greatness or importance, but about humility and accepting your role.

Q: Is the hair the issue, or is this an outer symbol of the principle Paul is raising? The hair is the symbol, in the context of 1st century Greek culture, of the spiritual principle.

1 Cor 11:17-34 Probably, this particular situation is not our problem, so we have to ask how to apply it to ourselves (and remember the context)

Q: How would you describe the problem in Corinth?

Q: What would be the solution?

v. 19 At first glance, this passage seems to contradict everything he has been saying about division, such as 1 Cor 1:10. Q: What, then, is his point in 11:19?

(that the situation can become so bad that, in extreme situations, division may be the only way to preserve a pure Jesus-like church)

This passage is not principally about the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, but

Q: What can we learn about the Lord’s Supper in this passage, as far as its purpose for us?

v. 27 Is this passage teaching that if you are doing poorly spiritually, that you should not take the Lord’s supper? [No!!! He is talking about those who take it unworthily (an adverb) not about those who are unworthy (adjective) taking it]

v. 28 But we should evaluate ourselves. Q: With regard to what? (Whether we are, as an individual or as a church, celebrating the Lord’s Supper in a worthy manner)

v. 33 So when you come together, come to serve others, not yourself.

Q: application for us in our worship meetings?

1 Cor 12:1-26 A really famous and practical passage. The underlying question is about use of miraculous gifts, but this is not the application in this chapter.

1 Cor 12:4-13 (skipping v. 1-3 for now, as we will get back to miraculous gifts later) Q: What is Paul’s main point here?

(note: he is talking about miraculous gifts, but we can apply this to non-miraculous gifts)

Q: What gifts do we tend to honor the most if we are struggling with worldliness as the Corinthians were?

Q: Why is it so bad to honor one gift above another (esp. v. 11)

Q: What is the point of 12:12-13?

1 Cor 12:14-30

Q: Why do you need me, and why do I need you?

Q: Should we treat everyone in the church equally? (v. 22-25)

Answer: No. We should do the exact opposite of what the world would do!

v. 25 So, how do we avoid division, then, in this context?

Q: According to the metaphor used here, what will happen to you if you cut yourself off from the body?

1 Cor 12:31-13:13

1 Cor 12:31. Q: What are these “greater gifts?”

Q: What is the most excellent way?

Might Paul be exaggerating/using hyperbole here? (yes!) Why is he doing so?

Q: Based on 1 Cor 13:1-3, what do you think was going on in Corinth?

Q: Have you ever been like this, or how do you see that you might be susceptible to this kind of thinking?

v. 4-7 (go through these qualities one at a time, explaining them and asking for examples)

Q: What will these “greater gifts” look like? Can you share about someone who is a good example in these areas?

v. 8-13 Paul is subtly calling something childish. What is he calling “childish”? (the tendency to look at outward rather than inward qualities and the tendency to be attracted to showy, flashy gifts, rather than the more important but less flashy gifts of love)

Q: Why is love greater, even, than faith and hope? (perhaps because in heaven neither faith nor hope will be needed? Other comments?)

1 Cor 14:1-25 This is kind of like a private conversation between Paul and the Corinthian church, which we are privy to. Before reading this passage, because we do not have speaking in tongues and prophecy in our churches, most of what he is talking about is not relevant to us. Here is the question to ask while we read:

Q: What is it in the issue here that might have application to us? What is the principle behind the specifics? Does a key little phrase stick out to you?

According to Paul, why is prophecy “better” than tongues (v. 12 seems to be key)

Also, note, v. 20 relates back to 1 Cor 13:8-13.

Q: How might we apply this principle? (It’s not about you but about “us” and about God)

1 Cor 14:26-40 Orderly worship. Q: What does it seem that worship in Corinth was like? (much more spontaneous than we are used to). Is there any hint here about the role women were taking in the service that might explain his comment?

Perhaps we, as a Christian group, do not have to worry so much about overly spontaneous worship. In fact, perhaps the opposite.

1 Cor 15:1-11 I thought that love was the most important thing! Apparently, Paul is switched topics, as he is discussing a new most important thing. 1 Tim 4:16, John 4:24 Of the two “wings of an airplane”, which has Paul switched over to? (Paul has switched from life and spirit to doctrine and truth. The next section is about false doctrine)

Q: Given this, what is the most important thing in our belief system acc. to 15:1-11?

v. 9-11 Because he is about to speak on doctrinal/theological matters, Paul is reminding them that he speaks with authority on these matters! Q: Who is the “them” in 1 Cor 15:10? (the other apostles or perhaps certain influential leaders in the Achaian churches or in Corinth).

1 Cor 15:12-28 Q: What false teaching has made the rounds in Corinth? (v. 12)

My guess (for what it is worth) is that this belief was held by a small minority and Paul is chiefly using this as an opportunity to preach on the resurrection to inspire the church, so let us be inspired as well!

Q: Do you agree with 1 Cor 15:17-19 to be literally true, or is Paul exaggerating to make a point?

1 Cor 15:29-34 Q: What other false teaching seems to have been held by at least a small group? Does anyone actually teach this bizarre thing today? (yes!!)

v. 33-34 “Dudes. Seriously??? Let’s get real here. Stop listening to this obvious foolishness! (to paraphrase) Q: Why can we listen to this if we are weak and not being careful?

1 Cor 15:36-58 A seriously encouraging and inspiring passage. Let us be encouraged. v. 35-36 Some are all caught up in debates about the specific details of what happens when we die. Paul says to us, “Hey, let’s look at the big picture here and not get caught up in the trees without seeing the forest.” It will be awesome.

v. 45 Who is this “last Adam”? Why is Paul calling Jesus the last Adam? What analogy is he finding here? (that our physical nature is after Adam but our spiritual nature and spiritual body is like Jesus).

1 John 4:17 In this world we are like him. This will be even more true after the resurrection.

Q: How do you feel about the encouragement in v. 50-58? Q: What are you inspired to do in light of this fact?

1 Cor 15:58 Therefore… Therefore means “in view of what I just said.”

Q: What had he just said? (victory over death through the resurrection of Jesus)

Q: Do you believe this? Are you sure? WHY do you believe this?

Note: He does not say “stand firm” No, he says, “Therefore, stand firm.”

Q: Stand firm, do not be moved from what??

Q: Stand firm, do not be moved by what??

Q: Have you given yourself fully to the work of the Lord?

If not, why not?

Q: What do you fear, really?

Parallel passage: Romans 12:1-2

1 Cor 15 In view of what? Romans 12 In view of what?

This is what we all want, and it is Paul’s prayer that we have it. Paul had it.

1 Cor 16:1-24 The letter is pretty much done. This section is a little like the announcements at the end of church and we are a visitor. But…

1 Cor 16:1-4 This is the only place in the Bible which instructs that collection be made every Sunday.

Q: Why does he instruct them to put aside money every week, rather than a one-time contribution? Q: Do we need to do this?

Q: What does “in keeping with his income” mean? Is this required of us as well?

1 Cor 16:5-12 Not much there for us. This applies to a situation in Corinth.

1 Cor 16:13-14 repeats 15:58

1 Cor 16:15-18 Q: Who should we submit ourselves to and recognize in the church?