

1 CORINTHIANS

Living in the World, but Not of It



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Living in the World, but Not of It

By Kevin Cotter

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LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

The Big Picture

God's word is alive and it should be embodied in our lives.

What Do I Need to Know about This Study?

St. Paul wrote his First Letter to the Corinthians while he was staying in Ephesus, in response to problems in the church in Corinth. He had originally evangelized the people in Corinth in 51 and 52 AD while staying with Priscilla and Aquila (see Acts 18). A few years later, a contingent from the Corinthian Church brought him news of divisions and difficulties. Paul is speaking to his own spiritual children in 1 Corinthians (4:14). This is the second of four letters that Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, though only two have been preserved.

Knowing a little about Corinth's history is key to understanding the letter. Corinth had been a major Greek city until the Romans destroyed it in 146 BC. They rebuilt it in 44 BC as a Roman colony for freed slaves and military veterans. It became the capital of the province of Achaia (modern-day Greece) and a major trade city because of its control of two ports on opposite sides of the Greek peninsula. It was infamous for its licentiousness and social ladder-climbing. Many pagan temples dedicated to gods and goddesses such as Aphrodite, Asclepius, Poseidon, and even the Roman emperor filled the city. Every two

years, Corinth hosted a mini-Olympics called the Isthmian Games. At the time that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, Corinth was a booming metropolis, filled with mariners, merchants, tradesmen, and tourists.

Paul makes four main points in the letter. He rebukes the Corinthians for their divisiveness and sin (1–6). Next, he addresses specific questions they had about marriage and food offered to idols (7–10). Then Paul takes up issues regarding the Mass, charismatic gifts, the centrality of love, and the importance of prophecy (11–14). Last, he focuses on the victory of the resurrection of the dead and gives his final greetings (15–16).

For more on 1 Corinthians, see the FOCUS Equip article "An Introduction to 1 Corinthians and the World of Ancient Corinth," by Kevin Cotter.

How FOCUS Equip Studies Work

Each FOCUS Equip study highlights one particular passage of Scripture. As the leader, you guide a discussion about the passage, which allows participants to discover truths within the passage for themselves. This process is called self-discovered learning. Its format can help participants learn about Scripture and the way to discover Scripture on their own.

At the same time, you are not left alone to understand the Scriptures by yourself. Each chapter will contain a section titled “What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?” It will provide you with details about the passage, along with summaries about the passage’s big picture, how it applies to Jesus, and how it can apply to your group.

UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

The discussion guide supplies you with an opening question, some background information to share about the passage, and a set of example questions and answers on each passage to use with your group.

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Prepare by studying “What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?” before the Bible study, and then use the discussion guide to direct the conversation with your group.

How to Prepare Your Study

With all of this information at your disposal, you are all set and

ready to go. You just need to pass out the notes, ask each question as it is written, and read the answers to the questions, right? Well, not exactly. It would not make for a very engaging Bible study. This material is a Bible study in a can: It is meant to preserve good-quality Biblical content and allow for a broad distribution, but someone still needs to take the material out of the can, spice up the content, and serve it to your study. That person is you.

This is where the audience for your study is crucial; these are the people for whom you are “cooking.” Whether you have a group that has never heard the Gospel before or a group that attempts to live out the Gospel each day, you can adapt the Bible study to the group. The flexibility of this format is what can make it so effective.

Most likely, however, you will have a group with both kinds of people. Follow the example of my dance lesson: try to create a Bible study where beginners can learn the basics while the experts can be rejuvenated. Scripture is a great way to do this. St. Gregory the Great once said, “Holy Scripture is a stream in which the elephant may swim and the lamb may wade.” Both groups should be able to discover something meaningful in the Scripture passage.

For more on How to Lead a Bible study, check out our resource on FOCUSEquip.org. As a review, FOCUS Bible study leaders have 3 roles and 3 goals in each study.

Your 3 Key Roles

With all of the above information in mind, remember that you have 3 key roles in this study. These 3 roles are your contribution to the study, and doing these 3 things well will make the study successful.

Introduction

1. **Prayer:** Ultimately, it will be God Who changes the lives of the participants. By personal prayer and praying for your participants, you open the door for God to accomplish great things. Please take time to pray for your group, talking with God about each participant.
2. **Hospitality:** Effectively welcoming participants, getting to know them, meeting them outside of Bible study, and becoming real friends will be a great asset to the study. Create an environment that is open and personal, allowing participants to feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and experiences.
3. **Facilitator:** A good discussion really enhances the fruitfulness of a Bible study. Take the time to review the study and ask good, relevant questions to your group. Guide the discussion, allowing everyone to participate. Bring the discussion back if it gets too far astray.

Your 3 Key Goals

There will, no doubt, be many questions and discussions that come up throughout the study. You may even find yourself a bit lost here or there. However, the goals listed below are what you are ultimately trying to accomplish. Keeping these in mind throughout the study will help you stay on course.

1. **Deep Transformation:** Through interaction with God's word and one another, it is our hope that the lives of your Bible study members will be profoundly changed. The purpose of a Bible study is not to simply learn information or to be a

part of a Bible study club, but allow the Lord to transform our lives. Specifically, we hope that students, through Scripture, are drawn more intimately to our Lord in the sacraments and liturgy of the Church where they can most fully receive the gift of God's grace in their lives.

2. **Intimate Fellowship:** If people are going to be deeply transformed, they will need others along the way, not only to help this transformation, but also to make sure they continue this transformation in the future. Your goal as a leader is to take a group of people with various backgrounds and personalities and help them form authentic relationships with one another.
3. **Spiritual Multiplication:** Another important dynamic of small groups is their ability to be reproduced. As you lead, pray that the Lord will raise up members of your small group to go on to disciple others and to lead Bible studies of their own.

Final Note

One of the best ways to learn how to lead a Bible Study is to learn from others. Consider observing someone else's Bible study to learn how they have been successful. Also, ask a missionary or your discipler to come to your study and give you feedback on how you are doing.

The Challenge

To properly lead this study, you will need to prepare in advance and apply God's word in your own life.

UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read 1 Corinthians 1–2

The Big Picture

St. Paul's solution to the divisions in Corinth is to look to the cross.

Chapters 1 and 2 immediately dive into the problems and culture of the church in Corinth. The community appears as a sick patient; St. Paul serves as a doctor who quickly identifies the illness (division) while figuring out one of the root causes (worldly wisdom).

Introduction (1 Corinthians 1:1–9)

St. Paul begins by identifying himself as an apostle and also mentions Sosthenes as an author of the letter. (Sosthenes is most likely a convert ruler of the Corinthian synagogue named in Acts 18:17.) As he has done in other letters, St. Paul tries to lift his readers' eyes to what they are called to—heaven (v. 2). Despite the problems and immorality in the Corinthian church, St. Paul has no problem identifying them as saints (v. 2). Sainthood does not always equal perfection; at its root, it

is instigated by God's calling and grace in our lives, not our own virtue (CCC 1996–99). Verses 4–9 also introduce several main themes found in the letter as a whole: knowledge, speech, spiritual gifts, the day of the Lord, and fellowship.

Divisions (1 Corinthians 1:10–17)

In this section, St. Paul contrasts the fellowship they have in Jesus Christ (v. 9) with their divisions. St. Paul established the church in Corinth in 50 AD and spent a year and a half ministering to the Corinthians. Other Christian leaders, such as Apollos and Cephas (St. Peter), continued St. Paul's work in Corinth. (For more on Apollos, see Acts 18:24–28.) Now, some believers claim St. Paul as their leader while others claim St. Peter or Apollos; these allegiances may be based on who baptized them (v. 12, 14–15).

St. Paul tries to bring them back to reality—Jesus Christ is the foundation of the Church (v.13). All believers should be united under the power of the cross, not a particular leader (v. 17). In trying to discourage such allegiances to their baptizers, St. Paul can appear to diminish the sacrament of baptism. And yet, it is clear the St. Paul is very much in favor of baptism (see, for instance, 1 Cor 12:13 and Gal 3:27, among others).

The Wisdom of the Cross (1 Corinthians 1:18–31)

St. Paul tries to get to the very root of the problem. The divisions are ultimately caused by the Corinthians' acceptance of Greek wisdom and rhetoric. In Corinth, philosophers and rhetoricians received the same fame and adoration that movie stars and athletes have

today. Those with the best skills at rhetoric were seen as the most trustworthy sources of knowledge. In accepting this way of thinking, the Corinthians are caught up in the rhetorical value of their arguments and of the Church leader they follow.

St. Paul communicates to the Church that the gospel does not work like Greek philosophy. The Faith is built not on worldly wisdom but on the wisdom of the cross (v. 18). This is easier said than done; as St. Paul notes, the word (or eloquence) of the cross was foolishness to those in the Roman Empire (v. 18). Being so used to the concept of crucifixion, we can lose track of its original meaning. The modern equivalent would be like saying, “The wisdom of the electric chair.”

In light of the power of the cross, the wisdom of the world appears to be foolishness (v. 19). St. Paul calls out the wise man (philosopher), the scribe (lawyer), and the debater of this age (the rhetorician) as examples of worldly wisdom (v. 20). The cross has dispelled these forms of wisdom; now the Corinthians need to follow the true wisdom accordingly (vv. 24–25).

While the wise, both Jew and Greek, have a difficult time accepting this cross (vv. 22–24), the foolish of the world have a much easier time. St. Paul’s prime example: the Corinthians themselves (vv. 26–27). Ultimately, the nature of God is to choose the lowly to shame the proud. Why? “So that no flesh might boast in the presence of God” (v. 29).

Application to Jesus

The wisdom of Jesus’ cross is what God uses to shame the wise of this world.

St. Paul’s Wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:1–5)

St. Paul admits that he did not preach with eloquent wisdom when he first founded the Church in Corinth five years earlier (2:1; 1:17). Rather than offering Greek wisdom, St. Paul unashamedly offers the wisdom of the Spirit of God (vv. 2–4). St. Paul is proud of this: He doesn’t want the faith of the Corinthians to rest on a sophisticated presentation, but rather to rest on the cross of Jesus Christ.

Application to Our Lives

We can encounter God through His living Word, which can speak into our lives.

The Wisdom of This Age (1 Corinthians 2:6–9)

St. Paul continues to contrast “the wisdom of this age” with the hidden mysterious plan of God—the wisdom of the cross (vv. 6–8). It is apparent that the wisdom of the world had quite a hold on the Corinthians. One’s economic prosperity was partially dependent on accepting this wisdom. Unlike other places in the Roman Empire, Corinth was a place where someone could easily climb the ladder to a better life. Much of this was a result of the Corinthians’ relationships and connections to others in the city. As a result, there was plenty of pressure to fit in and not damage these relationships. Seeing the culture’s influence on these young Christians, St. Paul challenges the Corinthians to see the world from the perspective of God, not of their neighbors.

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

1 Corinthians 1–2

STEP 1: OPENER

Have you ever had trouble getting along with someone?

STEP 2: BACKDROP

Chapters 1 and 2 immediately dive into the problems and culture of the Church in Corinth. The community appears as a sick patient, and St. Paul serves as a doctor who quickly identifies the illness (division) while figuring out one of the root causes (worldly wisdom).

STEP 3: PASSAGE

Today's passage is 1 Corinthians 1-2. Start by reading 1 Corinthians 1:1-17.

STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.

1. What is wrong with the Church in Corinth?

Answer: Several divisions have formed within the community. Specifically, members are divided over which leader to follow.

2. In his last public prayer, Jesus prayed for unity. Read John 17:21–23. With this in mind, what are the effects of division?

Answer: First, we go against the commandment of Jesus Himself. Second, when we fail to have unity, the world does not come to know the love of God and believe in Him.

3. How has division influenced the Christian Church throughout history?

Answer: The Church has been plagued by division throughout its history. In the early Church, there were many divisions over the identity of Jesus. In the 11th century, the Eastern Orthodox Church broke off from the Catholic Church. In the 16th century, the Reformation occurred. The last two centuries have seen an increasing number of divisions and new Christian denominations.

4. What do you think causes division in our Church today?

Allow the group to discuss.

5. Even though 1 Corinthians is filled with problems like division and sexual immorality, why do you think St. Paul still called the Corinthians “sanctified” (or “holy,” in the Greek) in verse 2?

Answer: Despite their problems, God had still called them into a relationship with Him. God's grace and calling are much more foundational in our status before God. Sainthood does not necessarily mean perfection (CCC 1996–99).

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18–31.

6. Why would the cross be a stumbling block to Jews and a folly to the Gentiles?

Answer: For the Jews, they were expecting a Messiah who would overthrow the political powers at hand (the Romans). Jesus' death on the cross at the hands of the Roman authority seems to be absolutely contrary to this idea. For the pagans, the cross was their form of capital punishment. Saying “the wisdom of the cross” would be like saying “the wisdom of the electric chair” today.

7. What are some of the popular philosophies and thinkers of our day?

Allow the group to discuss.

8. Read CCC 2727. How does the wisdom of the world contrast with the teaching of Jesus Christ and the Church?

Answer: In contrast with the teaching of Jesus Christ and the Church, the wisdom of the world looks at reason and science as the only sources of truth, and material goods or sensuality as the ultimate goal.

9. What role do you think the media (news, television shows, movies, etc.) play in influencing us to trust the wisdom and advice of the world?

Answer: Even without intentionally affirming the actions and ideas found in the media, we can still subtly accept them and allow them to influence us on topics ranging from how we view dating, marriage, wealth, self-image, and other issues.

10. In CCC 2727, how does prayer help us combat the wisdom of the world?

Answer: “Prayer is a mystery that overflows both our conscious and unconscious lives.”

Read 1 Corinthians 2:1–9.

11. Why do you think the wisdom of the world was so tempting for the Corinthians to follow?

Answer: Refer to the “The Wisdom of This Age” section in “What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?”

12. Think about a time when a professor was teaching something contrary to Christianity in class. What goes through your mind in these situations?

Allow the group to discuss.

UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read 1 Corinthians 5–6

Chapter 5 and 6 continue St. Paul's emphasis on getting at the root of disunity. Earlier, he went after the topic of wisdom. Now, St. Paul will turn to particular actions of the Corinthians that are leading to their disunity—sexual immorality and taking one another to court.

The Big Picture

The Corinthians' actions are causing disunity within their community.

Sexual Immorality (1 Corinthians 5:1–2)

St. Paul brings an embarrassing situation to the forefront of the conversation: The Corinthians are allowing one of their members to remain in their congregation despite his incestuous relationship with his mother-in-law. St. Paul notes that this immorality is not found even among the pagans (v. 1) and goes on to chide them for their arrogance (v. 2). The irony is thick: The Corinthians are prideful because of their wisdom, yet not even the wisdom of the world finds such an action acceptable!

Excommunication (1 Corinthians 5:3–5)

St. Paul instructs them to expel this member from their congregation. Specifically, they are “to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (v. 5). What exactly is St. Paul getting at? The hope is that, by being cut off from the community, the person can realize his error, purify his fleshly desire, and eventually be saved. (2 Corinthians 2:5–11 may be referring to this individual.) This excommunication (literally, out of the community or communion) shows the person the true consequences of his actions. Separation from the Church shows concretely how a serious sin can separate one from God.

The Exodus Background (1 Corinthians 5:6–8)

While St. Paul is concerned with the individual, he sees this kind of immorality as harmful to the entire community. In order to demonstrate this, St. Paul makes an elaborate comparison between the Corinthians and the Israelites—parts of which are obvious, while other pieces remain less clear.

Exodus Background

Most people know that the Exodus was about freeing the Israelites from slavery. Yet their slavery extended far beyond just a physical bondage: The pagan worship of the culture served as a spiritual bondage that prevented the Israelites from truly worshipping and serving the Lord (Ex 3:7–12).

God called the Israelites out of Egypt so that they could be set apart to be a holy nation (Ex 19:1–6). God instructed each Israelite family to sacrifice a lamb to show this separation. The lamb was considered a god by the ancient Egyptians, and the slaughtering of a lamb was a crime punishable by death. Through this sacrifice, each Israelite family made a statement that they did not believe in Egyptian idolatry and that they were willing to risk their lives for this belief. It was through this sign that the angel of the Lord spared the Israelites from the killing of the first-born sons (Ex 12:21–27). Finally, as a part of this meal, all of the Israelites were supposed to eat unleavened bread and remove all leaven from their homes (Ex 12:14–20).

The Corinthians have a similar problem: They are surrounded by the idolatry and sin of the Corinthian culture (vv. 9–10). Likewise, St. Paul is calling them to separate themselves from this culture. Jesus Christ, in the Eucharistic meal, serves as their Passover lamb, who provides their salvation (v. 7). St. Paul extends the analogy of the leaven to the sin in the community at Corinth: The Corinthian Christians must remove the sin in their midst in order to truly celebrate this festival (v. 8).

Application to Jesus

Jesus is our Passover lamb in the Eucharist, who gives us salvation and sets us apart to be a holy people.

Judging Others (1 Corinthians 5:9–13)

St. Paul follows this analogy with some practical advice on how to approach serious sin inside and outside the Church. Addressing sin

within the Church, St. Paul instructs us not to associate with believers who commit serious sins (v. 11). (For more, see Mt 18:15–18 and 1 Cor 11:29–32.) Comically, St. Paul notes that, if we applied this principle to everyone in the world, we would need to go out of the world in order to carry it out (v. 10)! We are not called to judge those outside of the Church (v. 12).

Lawsuits among Believers (1 Corinthians 6:1–11)

St. Paul moves on to another practice that undermines community: lawsuits. Apparently, believers in Corinth are taking one another to court, which leads to several errors. First, on the surface, fellow believers suing one another does not seem like a constructive way to build unity in the Church—a the very issue St. Paul is addressing. Second, the Corinthians are setting a poor example by taking their disagreements, errors, and disunity in front of unbelievers (v. 1, 6). Third, St. Paul returns to the theme of wisdom: If the Corinthians are so wise, they should be able to settle these matters on their own. This is another case where the Corinthians are trusting in the wisdom of the world rather than the wisdom of the Spirit found in their Church.

Finally, St. Paul recognizes that some of the Corinthians may be taking their fellow Christians to court specifically in order to defraud them (v. 7–8). We know that it was a common practice in Corinth for the rich to take advantage of the poor through court cases by bribing the judges or hiring superior lawyers.

While some Corinthians are deceiving others, St. Paul does not want them to be deceived about the consequences (v. 9). These actions will lead a person not to inherit the kingdom of God. Homosexuality is one of those actions listed—one of the few times that the New Testament

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

1 Corinthians 5–6

STEP 1: OPENER

Have you ever been in a situation where you needed to speak up about someone's behavior, but had trouble doing it?

STEP 2: BACKDROP

Chapters 5 and 6 continue St. Paul's emphasis on getting at the root of disunity, which he began in chapters 1 and 2. Earlier, he went after the topic of wisdom; now, St. Paul turns to particular actions of the Corinthians that are leading to their disunity—sexual immorality and taking one another to court.

STEP 3: PASSAGE

Today's passage is 1 Corinthians 5–6. Start by reading 1 Corinthians 5:1–5.

STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.

1. What problem does St. Paul address in the beginning of chapter 5?

Answer: A man is living with his father's wife.

2. Given the Corinthians' tendency to rely on the wisdom of the world, what is ironic about this problem?

Answer: The Corinthians tend to trust more in the wisdom of the world than in the Spirit of God, but not even the pagans (with their worldly wisdom) find the man's behavior acceptable.

3. What does St. Paul instruct the Church to do with this man?

Answer: They are "to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (v. 5).

4. What do you think it would feel like to address this man about this sin?

Allow the group to discuss.

5. What is the logic behind St. Paul's instructions?

Answer: By being cut off from the community, he can realize his error, purify his fleshly desire, and eventually be saved.

6. Read 2 Corinthians 2:5–11. Some commentators have recognized this person as the one in 1 Corinthians 5:1–5. What is the final result?

Answer: It appears that the man comes back to the Church. St. Paul instructs them to love and forgive him.

Read 1 Corinthians 5:6–13.

7. What point is St. Paul making with his analogy in vv. 6–8?

Allow the group to discuss.

8. Read Exodus 12:14–27. Explain the “Exodus Background” in “What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?”

9. How do you think the Corinthians’ situation compares with the one in Exodus?

Answer: They are surrounded by the idolatry and sin of the Corinthians’ culture (vv. 9–10). Likewise, St. Paul is calling them to be separated from this culture. Jesus Christ is the Passover lamb of their salvation (v. 7). Just as they remove the leaven, the Corinthian Christians must remove the sin in their midst in order to truly celebrate this festival (v. 5:8)

10. In what ways are we called to be a holy people separated from the world?

Allow the group to discuss.

11. How are we supposed to approach those inside of the Church who are in serious sin?

Answer: There should be a certain separation. Note that this case specifically involves people in the Church, committing serious sin, and calling themselves faithful Christians. This does not mean that we should not seek to win these people back to Christ. However, we cannot continue relating to them in the same way. Think, for example, about how a parish or diocese should respond to a person who publicly rejects many of the Church’s teachings, but claims to be Catholic. There can be no formal association between the two.

12. What temptations do we face when there is a problem or sin that needs to be addressed?

Allow the group to discuss.

13. Read Matthew 18:15–18. What does Jesus tell us to do in these situations?

Answer: Address the person yourself. Then, bring others with you. Finally, tell it to the Church.

14. What does St. Paul say about our associations with those outside of the Church?

Answer: We can associate with them, but we are not to judge them.

UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read 1 Corinthians 7

The Big Picture

Dealing with practical issues on marriage, St. Paul gives several important pieces of advice.

On one hand, the pagan culture of temple prostitution and affairs leads to sexual immorality (1 Cori 6:12–20). On the other hand, some Corinthians have decided to go the completely opposite way and condemn marriage and sex altogether. In this sexually charged city of Corinth, St. Paul walks a fine line in his advice to the Church.

To Marry or Not to Marry (1 Corinthians 7:1–7)

On this topic, St. Paul is replying to a specific question from the Corinthians (v.1). The phrase “it is well for a man not to touch a woman” is a euphemism meaning “not to have sexual relations.” While here and elsewhere St. Paul will affirm that it is better to be celibate (v. 8), he does not fall into the trap of viewing marriage and sex negatively. He notes that “because of the temptation to immorality”

(v. 2), men and women should marry one another. Verse 4 shows St. Paul’s view of equality and self-giving between husband and wife in marriage, where both rule over one another’s body. While it would be commonplace in the ancient world to say that the man rules over the woman, it would have been revolutionary to grant men and women equal status. Notice the balance: While St. Paul prefers celibacy, he does not discourage marriage.

St. Paul also allows spouses to refrain from sexual relations for a time (v. 5). Concerned about the immorality in Corinth, St. Paul instructs the married partners to come together again to avoid temptation (v. 5). Catholic teaching also allows periodic continence from sex for child spacing and family planning (different from artificial contraception). In a study filled with culturally charged topics, this one might be the most controversial. At the same time, it fits very well with this letter. Using contraception is the wisdom of the world; it is ingrained as a cultural truth. Will we trust in the wisdom of the world or the wisdom of the Spirit through the Church? (For more on this topic, see CCC 2368–70 and search online for Janet Smith’s talk *Contraception: Why Not?*, available in both print and audio format.)

The Question of Marriage in Different Situations (1 Corinthians 7:8–16)

In perhaps the most complete advice about marriage in the New Testament, St. Paul gives a very clear teaching on divorce, referring to Jesus’ teaching on the subject (Mt 19:1–9): Married spouses should not seek a divorce from one another. If divorce does occur, the spouses are told to “remain single or else be reconciled” (v. 10). Like Jesus, St. Paul leaves no room for remarriage, because a marriage in the Church is life-long bond that can only end with the death of one of the members (7:39–40).

St. Paul goes on to give advice to those who are married to non-believers. One can imagine that a conversion to Christianity, especially in the early Church, could be a cause for alarm for the non-believing spouse. For most pagans, the worship of a crucified criminal must have been quite odd. Because of this fact, divorce was a realistic situation for many of these new Christians. St. Paul notes that divorce should not be instigated by the believing spouse, because conversion of the non-believer can happen through marriage. But, if the non-believing spouse initiates the divorce, the believing spouse is not bound to the marriage (v. 15).

St. Paul's principle on marriage between believers and non-believers has been developed into Catholic Canon law as the Pauline privilege (CIC 1143 §1–2). In addition to this privilege, the Catholic Church does grant annulments that allow those who were married in the Church to have their marriages dissolved. Unlike a divorce, an annulment acknowledges that a sacramental marriage never occurred. Rather than breaking the marriage, as a divorce does, an annulment sees that something was wrong at the very beginning, such as a lack of consent. (For more, see the Canon law of the Catholic Church, specifically 1096 §1141–55.)

Application to Jesus

Just like Jesus, St. Paul discourages divorce and promotes celibacy.

Remaining in Your State (1 Corinthians 7:17–24)

The message of this entire section is summed up in verse 20: “Every one should remain in the state in which he was called.” Historically, this section was used to justify slavery (v. 21). Slavery in the Roman Empire was not the same thing as slavery in America: While some slaves were still treated poorly, many slaves were educated and held important posts. St. Paul does note that, if one can gain his freedom, then he should do so (v. 21), and that Christians should not give themselves to slavery (v. 23).

On Marriage and the World (1 Corinthians 7:25–40)

In this section, St. Paul expands on his reasons for preferring celibacy over marriage (similar to Jesus' words in Matthew 19:11–13). First, he mentions an impending distress (v. 26), and later that the form of this world is passing away (v. 31). Specifically, St. Paul could be referring to Jesus' prediction in Mark 13 about the destruction of the Jewish temple that would mark a new age, or perhaps to some other impending distress. Generally, St. Paul is giving the Corinthians an eternal perspective on life: This world lasts only so long, including marriage. Verses 29–31 express this perspective vividly but, of course, do not discount St. Paul's instructions in the beginning of the chapter (vv. 7:1-5).

In addition to this impending distress, St. Paul also mentions the reality of marriage: You face the worldly troubles of attending to your spouse (vv. 28–29, 32–34). With our interests thus divided, we have less time to devote to the Lord and His work. The Catholic Church rightly enacts the beauty of this teaching in the celibate priesthood and religious life. These men and women have the freedom to dedicate their lives to “the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord” (v. 32).

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

1 Corinthians 7

STEP 1: OPENER

Have you ever over-reacted to something?

STEP 2: BACKDROP

On the one hand, the pagan culture of temple prostitution and affairs leads to sexual immorality. On the other hand, some Corinthians have decided to go the complete opposite way and condemn marriage and sex altogether. In this sexually charged city of Corinth, St. Paul walks a fine line in his advice to the Church.

STEP 3: PASSAGE

Today's passage is 1 Corinthians 7. Start by reading 1 Corinthians 7:1-7.

STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.

1. What problem is St. Paul addressing in verses 1-7?

Answer: St. Paul is addressing an attitude in the Corinthian Church that opposes sex and marriage.

2. Why is this problem interesting in light of a Corinthian culture where prostitution and sexual license are encouraged?

Answer: The problem is interesting because St. Paul just addressed sexual immorality and prostitution (1 Cor 6:12-20). In response to this sexual immorality, some in Corinth have overcorrected in the other direction. St. Paul has to help them find the balance.

3. In the Roman world, women had few rights. What would be surprising to the Roman culture about St. Paul's words in verses 3-4?

Answer: Not only does the man have rights over the woman's body, but the woman has rights over the man's body.

4. St. Paul points out abstinence in marriage as a way to pursue holiness (prayer). The Catholic Church also promotes abstinence as opposed to contraception in marriage. Read CCC 2370. What is the main reason for this teaching?

Answer: Contraception severs the unitive and procreative meaning of sex and obstructs the mutual self-giving between spouses. Rather than completely loving one another, spouses withhold a part of themselves from the other when using contraception, which can lead to objectification.

5. How does the main reasoning against contraception relate to St. Paul's words in verse 4?

Answer: St. Paul envisions men and women living their marriage in total self-giving to one another.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:8–16.

6. What is St. Paul's advice on divorce for believers?

Answer: St. Paul advises the Corinthians who are married to believers not to divorce. If divorce does occur, they are to remain unmarried or be reconciled (v. 11).

7. What's the difference between divorce and a Catholic annulment?

Answer: See the third paragraph of "The Question of Marriage in Different Situations" section in "What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?"

8. Read Matthew 19:1–10. What is the disciples' reaction to Jesus' teaching on divorce?

Answer: They find it to be difficult.

9. Why is this a difficult teaching, especially in our culture today?

Allow the group to discuss.

10. How is this teaching helpful to spouses, families, and society as a whole?

Answer: For spouses, this teaching helps them to stay together during difficult times. For families, it helps to provide two parents to raise children. For society, it helps to provide more stability in society as a whole.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:17–31.

11. Overall, what is St. Paul's view of marriage?

Answer: St. Paul has a balanced approach: While he prefers celibacy over marriage, he does not consider marriage to be sinful.

12. Read Jesus' teaching in Matthew 19:11–12. How does it compare to St. Paul's teaching?

Answer: Both teachings prefer celibacy over marriage, for those who are able to remain celibate.

13. What reasons do they give to support their preference for celibacy?

Answer: For Jesus, it is for the benefit of the kingdom. Similarly, St. Paul notes that a celibate person can be more concerned about the things of the Lord rather than the things of the world.

14. Why is celibacy difficult to embrace in our culture?

Allow the group to discuss.

UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read 1 Corinthians 8–9

The Big Picture

As the Corinthians struggled with the problem of eating meat sacrificed to idols, St. Paul will use love and his own example to persuade them.

At first, it doesn't seem that the Corinthians' problem with eating meat sacrificed to idols has much to do with us in the 21st century. But St. Paul's words 2,000 years ago still have much to teach us today about care for fellow Christians and evangelizing others.

Love and Knowledge (1 Corinthians 8:1–6)

Continuing his responses to the Corinthians, St. Paul addresses the following question: Should Christians eat meat from animals slaughtered in the pagan temples during religious ceremonies?

First, we must realize how ingrained this practice was in the lives of the Corinthians. Because of the large number of temples, and thus animal sacrifices, in Corinth, most meat was bought from a temple.

Plus, the temples were the center of the social scene in Corinth. Weddings, birthdays, and other celebrations were celebrated in the temple with a meal. Business networking and success came through attending and hosting parties in the temple. To attend the party but not to eat the food offered would have been an offense to the host.

It is mostly likely that the ones who wrote to St. Paul were okay with eating idol meat. St. Paul begins by quoting some of their slogans—"an idol has no real existence" and "there is no God but one" (v. 4). St. Paul does not disagree with these statements (vv. 5–6), but as we will see in verses 7–13, he has a problem with the way they are applied.

Corinthian Idol (1 Corinthians 8:7–13)

While the statements above are true, not everyone in the community can clearly recognize them. Many in the Corinth church were once idol worshippers (v. 7; 12:2). By eating the meat dedicated to idols, the Corinthians could cause their fellow Christians to stumble (v. 10). It seems that certain members place being correct and eating what they want over the realistic needs of their fellow believers who are tempted by their actions. St. Paul really drives the point home here: Jesus Christ died on the cross for these people—can't you just refrain from eating meat (v.11)? St. Paul will continue to discuss this topic of idol worship in chapter 10, but he abruptly stops to talk about his own ministry and apostolic authority.

Application to Jesus

St. Paul uses the example of Jesus to show what we should be willing to do for the sake of another's salvation.

St. Paul's Ministry (1 Corinthians 9:1–18)

At first glance, this section appears to have nothing to do with the previous argument about idol worship; it illustrates St. Paul's own example of what he has given up for the sake of the salvation of others. He hopes that the Corinthians will be inspired and realize that giving up meat is nothing compared to what St. Paul has given up. This principle is called moral authority—the ability to instruct others because you are living out the principle in your own life.

At the same time, St. Paul feels that he needs to defend his apostolic authority. Some of the divisions discussed in chapter 1 might have arisen because some trusted the authority of Apollos, or even more so, the authority of St. Peter. In fact, some scholars have noted that because St. Paul worked as a tent maker, the Corinthians did not respect him as much. Greek teachers usually accepted money from those who they taught and did not lower themselves to this type of menial labor. While claiming to be an apostle, St. Paul did not have the look of an apostle or a sophisticated teacher. In his Second Letter to the Corinthians, this distrust of Paul's authority would get worse (2 Cor 11:7–9; 12:13).

In St. Paul's defense, he points out the rights that he could take as an apostle if he wished (v. 3). He should have the right to food and drink (v. 4) and to be paid for what he does (v. 6). St. Paul also mentions a

right to be accompanied by a wife (v. 5). He confirms that, while he has these rights, he refuses to take them. Why? St. Paul does not want to put “an obstacle in the way of the Gospel” (v. 12). Even more so, St. Paul feels compelled to preach the gospel, believing he will face judgment if he does not (v. 16). Vatican II reiterated these words in its Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*):

A true apostle looks for opportunities to announce Christ by words addressed either to non-believers with a view to leading them to faith, or to the faithful with a view to instructing, strengthening, and encouraging them to a more fervent life. “For the charity of Christ impels us” (2 Cor. 5:14). The words of the Apostle should echo in all hearts, “Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel” (1 Cor. 9:16). (5)

All Things to All Men (1 Corinthians 9:19–27)

St. Paul has not taken money for his work, and he conforms himself to whatever situation he is in to preach the gospel. In particular, while he knows he doesn't need to follow the Jewish law anymore, St. Paul continues to subject himself to it so that he can preach the gospel to the Jews. St. Paul hopes to use his own life as an example of why the Corinthians should abstain from meat. For a summary of what St. Paul was willing to go through to preach the gospel, see 2 Corinthians 11:21–29.)

Finally, St. Paul closes with an athletic example (9:24–27). This example would have hit home with the Corinthians: Every two years, Corinth hosted the Isthmian Games, an athletic event second only to the Olympics in the ancient world. The population of Corinth would quadruple during these events; it was the focal point of the Corinthians' social life and economic prosperity. (St. Paul's work as

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

1 Corinthians 8–9

STEP 1: OPENER

Have you ever spent all your energy on some important task or goal?

STEP 2: BACKDROP

Continuing his responses to the Corinthians' questions, St. Paul addresses the question: Should Christians eat meat from animals slaughtered in the pagan temples during religious ceremonies?

First, we must realize how ingrained this practice was in the lives of the Corinthians. Because of the large number of temples, and thus animal sacrifices, in Corinth, most meat was bought from a temple. Plus, the temples were the center of the social scene in Corinth. Weddings, birthdays, and other celebrations were celebrated in the temple with a meal. Even business networking and success came through attending and hosting parties in the temple. To attend the party but not to eat the food offered would have been an offense to the host.

STEP 3: PASSAGE

This week's passage is 1 Corinthians 8–9. Start by reading 1 Corinthians 8:1–13.

STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.

1. If you haven't done it already, explain the backdrop to this passage about idol meat.

2. Who are the two parties in this debate that St. Paul is addressing?

Answer: One party is arguing that it is okay to eat meat in the temple because the objects of worship there are not real gods. The other party is a group of Christians who are still tempted to believe in idols. When their fellow Christians eat temple meat, this latter group can be led to believe it is okay to worship these gods.

3. For St. Paul, what is at the root of this issue?

Answer: Some in the community are putting knowledge ahead of loving their fellow believers (vv. 1, 7).

4. In what situations do we tend to care more about what we know than how we love?

Allow the group to discuss.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:1–23.

5. What is St. Paul trying to defend in 9:1–12?

Answer: St. Paul is trying to defend his apostleship and way of life.

6. What has St. Paul given up?

Answer: St. Paul mentions that he has given up receiving food and money to preach the gospel (vv. 4, 6). He has also given up the choice to have a wife (v. 5) and continues to live like a Jew to reach the Jews (v. 20).

7. The Corinthians continue to have a problem with St. Paul's sacrifices. Read 2 Corinthians 11:7-15. Why do you think this is a problem?

Answer: See the second paragraph in the "St. Paul's Ministry" section of "What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?"

8. What is the connection to St. Paul's argument in chapter 8?

Answer: St. Paul is using himself as an example of how to sacrifice for the sake of the salvation of others.

9. Read 2 Corinthians 11:21-29 for an even better look at St. Paul's life. What strikes you about his example?

Allow the group to discuss.

10. Why was he willing to give up all of these things, even though he didn't have to?

Answer: St. Paul wanted to remove every obstacle in the way of preaching the gospel.

11. Read the excerpt from Apostolicam Actuositatem in the last paragraph of the "St. Paul's Ministry" section in "What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?" How can quotes like these change our understanding of our mission within the Church?

Allow the group to discuss.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

12. Explain the Isthmian games, described in the last paragraph of "All Things to All Men" in "What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?"

Answer: No answer is needed.

13. How does this analogy tie in to St. Paul's larger argument?

Answer: If athletes are willing to do anything to win a perishable crown, we should be willing to do so much more for an imperishable one.

14. What keeps us from developing a greater zeal for sharing the gospel?

Allow the group to discuss.

15. What obstacles stand in the way of sharing our faith with others?

Allow the group to discuss.

UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read 1 Corinthians 10

The Big Picture

Lessons from history can help us understand the present.

St. Paul continues his response on the subject of idol worship. The example of the Israelites is very similar to the Corinthians' current situation; by seeing the causes and effects of the Israelites' destruction, maybe the Corinthians can properly see what they are doing and where it might lead them. It takes some time to sort out all the similarities between the Israelites and Corinthians, but once we do, we are able to see ourselves in the story as well.

Corinthians of the Past (1 Corinthians 10:1–4)

Even though he is speaking to a primarily Gentile audience, St. Paul calls the Israelites "our fathers" (v. 1). St. Paul sees the new Christian Church as grafted onto the covenant God established with the Israelites. Just as the Corinthians were baptized in water and the

spirit, the Israelites were baptized, in a way, through their crossing of the Red Sea, under the direction of a cloud of fire that prefigured the Holy Spirit (v. 2).

The Israelites and the Corinthians have a number of similarities. The Corinthians are set apart in a new family of God through baptism; the Israelites were set apart from the Egyptians into a new nation through their crossing the Red Sea. Furthermore, the Eucharistic meal that the Church partakes in was prefigured by miraculous manna and water that were supernaturally provided by God.

The Fall of the Israelites (1 Corinthians 10:5–13)

Despite these supernatural privileges, the Israelites still failed to be faithful to God. St. Paul cites a couple of examples: First, in verse 7, he mentions the episode where the Israelites worshipped the golden calf in the desert (Ex 32:4, 6). St. Paul quotes Exodus 32:6: "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to dance." "Rose up to dance" is a euphemism that refers to the sexual orgies that occurred during the worship of false idols. In verse 8, St. Paul alludes to Numbers 25:1–9, which tells of how the Moabites sent women over to the Israelite men to influence them to worship their pagan gods.

For Our Instruction

As St. Paul points out in verse 6, these things are warnings for us. The original Greek translation uses the word *typoi*, which can be translated as "type" or "pattern." The reason for this story is clear: St. Paul wishes the Corinthians to "shun the worship of idols" (v. 14). This story of the Israelites and the golden calf isn't just a nice example; it is very similar to the Corinthians' current situation.

1 Corinthians 6:12–20 gives us an insight in the Corinthians' struggle with the sexual immorality of prostitution. In the Roman Empire, prostitution was both legal and a positive way to engage in worship, especially of fertility gods. Furthermore, the Roman and Greek culture separated the body from the soul, such that satisfying a sexual desire was as morally acceptable as eating to deal with hunger pangs. On top of this, the Corinthians are using the slogan "all things are lawful to me" (6:12) to give themselves the freedom to continue their pagan worship, including prostitution. (Note: 1 Corinthians 6:12–20 can be a confusing passage. Apparently, St. Paul is trading barbs with the Corinthians in a mock conversation back and forth, with St. Paul's reply coming after the Corinthian quotation, in the RSV-CE. Since the Greek does not include quotation marks, translators have to guess where they should go.)

Historically, we know that the pagan temples of Corinth followed a course similar to the sexual immorality of the Israelites during their worship of the golden calf, with the same pattern of eating, drinking, and "rising up to dance." It was a common custom to have celebratory meals in the pagan temples that included heavy eating and drunkenness. But the party did not stop there: Many temples employed women who served both as hostesses and priestesses, and orgies would sometimes follow the meal.

St. Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 6 and the example in Numbers 25:1–3 show that sexual immorality and the worship of pagan gods are intimately connected. Rather than presenting us with a weak view of the body, St. Paul shows us that our bodies are members of Jesus Christ Himself (1 Cor 6:15–16). Just as the Spirit of God dwelled in the Jewish temple, the Spirit of God resides in us—not abstractly, but in our very bodies (v. 19). We need to avoid defiling this holy place, which belongs to Jesus Christ Himself (vv. 19–20).

Application to Jesus

Do we treat our bodies like they are members of Jesus Himself?

An Idol or a Demon? (1 Corinthians 10:14–22)

St. Paul then moves from this warning to the reality of the idol meat. While it is true that the gods that the pagans worship are not real, demonic forces are present in the pagan temples (v. 20). The pagans partner with demons through meat offered to idols (v. 16); the Corinthian Christians, on the other hand, partake in Christ through the body and blood of the Eucharist. We cannot partake in both sacrifices. Just as in the example of Israel, the Corinthians must not provoke God, who doesn't want us to chase other, false gods (v. 22; Ex 20:4–6).

Practical Issues with Meat (1 Corinthians 10:23–31)

After breaking down the spiritual reality of idol meat, St. Paul adds some practical advice. The Corinthians are free to eat meat sold in the market, because the connection to pagan temple rituals and demonic forces is minimized (v. 25). But if the Corinthians are told where the meat comes from, they must abstain from it for the benefit of the consciences of others (v. 28).

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

1 Corinthians 10

STEP 1: OPENER

Have you ever heard or read a passage of Scripture that seemed like it was written just for you in that moment?

STEP 2: BACKDROP

St. Paul continues his response about idol worship in chapter 10. He starts off with a story from the Old Testament about Moses and the Israelites in the desert. The story is similar in many ways to the Corinthians' current situation. By seeing the causes and effects of the Israelites' destruction, perhaps the Corinthians can properly see what they are doing and where it might lead them. It takes some time to sort out all the comparisons between the Israelites and Corinthians, but once we do, we are able to see ourselves in the story as well.

STEP 3: PASSAGE

Today's passage is 1 Corinthians 10. Start by reading 1 Corinthians 10:1-5.

STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.

1. St. Paul begins with a comparison between the Israelites and the Corinthians. What are some key similarities?

Answer: See the "Corinthians of the Past" section in "What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?"

Read 1 Corinthians 10:6-13.

2. Read Exodus 32:1-7 and Numbers 25:1-3 for background on 1 Corinthians 7-8. What is going on in these passages?

Answer: See "The Fall of the Israelites" section in "What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?"

3. In reference to verse 10, read Numbers 11:4-6. Why do the Israelites grumble?

Answer: They grumble about the lack of meat.

4. How does this apply to the Corinthians?

Answer: This is what the Corinthians did earlier in the letter (1 Cor 8:1-13).

5. How do the sins of the Israelites compare to the sins of the Corinthians?

Answer: See the "For Our Instruction" section in "What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?"

6. Read 1 Corinthians 6:12–20. Why are the Corinthians struggling with sexual immorality?

Answer: See the “For Our Instruction” section in “What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?”

7. What is the logic behind making a comparison like this?

Answer: If the Corinthians can see how God judged the Israelites for their actions, maybe they will be able to see the consequences of their own actions.

8. Read CCC 115–18. Why is it important to see our lives in light of Scripture?

Answer: Just like the Corinthians, we can examine our lives through the lives of those in Scripture. What were they tempted by? How did they react, in good ways and bad? How did this affect their relationship with God?

9. Practically, how can we allow the story of Scripture to influence the story of our own lives?

Answer: Using Scripture in our prayer is helpful. If we examine the stories closely, many times we can see our own lives in ways we never thought possible.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:14–22.

10. What is St. Paul’s real concern when the Corinthians eat the meat offered to idols?

Answer: The real concern is that the Corinthians are worshipping demons in the pagan temples or even falling into sexual immorality.

11. Practically, what instructions does St. Paul give them?

Answer: See the “Practical Issues with Meat” section in “What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?”

12. In what ways will these instructions help the problem?

Answer: It will keep the Corinthians out of the temple while also helping show both Christians and non-believers that Christians do not worship pagan gods.

13. How does this passage apply to our lives?

Allow the group to discuss.

14. What do you think tempts us the most in our culture?

Allow the group to discuss.

UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read 1 Corinthians 12–13

The Big Picture

No matter what gifts we possess, the gift of love rises above all.

In chapters 12 and 13, St. Paul explores the topic of spiritual gifts. Apparently, some members of the community were boasting about their own gifts and questioning others who lacked them. St. Paul will give a more well-rounded picture of how the Church is to function while asking the Corinthians to place love above all else.

Concerning Spiritual Gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1–11)

Referring again to the questions in the letter sent to him, St. Paul addresses the role of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Corinth (v. 1). Verses 4–7 set the tone for his message: Different people have different gifts, abilities to serve, and ways of working for the kingdom. God gives everyone—not just a few leaders or super-charged Christian specialists—the particular gifts that will benefit the entire community

(v. 7). At the same time, St. Paul refers to each member of the Trinity as he goes through this list—“same Spirit” (v. 4), “same Lord” (v. 5), and “same God” (v. 6). Perhaps there was a controversy concerning different spirits giving (or not giving) particular gifts. St. Paul emphasizes that all gifts come from the same source (v. 11).

One Body (1 Corinthians 12:12–31)

St. Paul’s metaphor is well-known by many Christians today; it would have been well-known in the ancient world as well. Leaders often used this metaphor to call for social order and, in particular, to keep the lower classes from an uprising. Here, St. Paul steers the metaphor in a different direction. Rather than calling on the lower classes to know their place, he is hoping that the more prideful members of the Church can see the value in the Christians they deem lower than themselves (either spiritually, physically, or both).

Just as there is no “bad” part of Jesus Christ, the Church (as the mystical body of Christ) has no bad members, either. St. Paul makes this point in the analogy by showing more care to the less honorable or unpresentable parts of the body (vv. 23–24). God does this in order to prevent discord and to encourage the proper care of all (v. 25).

Reacting to the notion that all true Christians should have the same gifts, St. Paul notes the different gifts that can be within the Church, starting with the members with the most authority: the apostles (v. 29).

Application to Jesus

The Church is truly the mystical body of Christ.

True Love (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

1 Corinthians 13 is perhaps the most popular passage in St. Paul’s letters, bringing to mind romantic love and weddings. As we have seen elsewhere, no passage remains detached from the letter or from the point he is trying to make. Our cultural association with the passage can distract us from the original meaning that St. Paul was hoping to convey: For him, the ultimate equalizer in the argument over gifts and disunity is love. The message of love is meant for the community as a whole, not just for a spouse.

Pharisees

St. Paul begins by noting how our actions look without love: ineffective. Even if we are absolutely faithful (enough to move mountains) or give up our lives (in martyrdom), these acts are nothing without love.

St. Paul would have known this all too well in his former life as a Pharisee. While Jesus’ own teachings and life are more like the Pharisees’ than any other group of Jews, He is also very critical of them. The picture that Jesus paints of the Pharisees in the Gospels is of people who are able to follow the law but do not do so with love (see Luk 7:36-50, 11:37-54). They may tithe ten percent of their possessions, but they do not realize the love of God (Luk 11:42). They may be able to teach

everyone the law, but they care little for actually helping others, especially the weak.

St. Paul’s message to the Church in Corinth is clear: If you have amazing gifts but do not love those in your community, all your gifts are ultimately nothing.

What Is Love? (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

St. Paul’s poetic poem about love tends to direct our minds toward an emotional, romantic side of love, and yet the characteristics of love he describes don’t exactly match the American dream for romance. Notions of patience and bearing all things don’t usually play into the normal “chick flick” love story. This whole love thing is not an easy idea to live out! The Corinthians would know this all too well: As St. Paul lists what love is and is not, the issues that he has addressed up till now should flip like flash cards through our minds. (See the chart below. At times, the English words used are different, but they have the same Greek root. In these cases, the word in parentheses shows an alternative English translation of the Greek to show the connection.)

1 CORINTHIANS 13	THE LETTER AS A WHOLE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “is not jealous” (v. 4) • “is not boastful” (v. 4) • “is not arrogant (or puffed up) (v. 5) • “is not insisting on its own way” (not self-seeking) • “does not rejoice at wrong (or injustice) (v. 6) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “jealousy...among you” (3:3) • Boasting mentioned in 3:21, 4:7, 5:6 • Puffed up mentioned in 1:29-31, 4:6; 4:18-19; 5:6 1-2 • “Do not seek your own advantage” (10:24) • Injustice is the theme of 6:1-11

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

1 Corinthians 12–13

STEP 1: OPENER

Have you ever received an amazing gift?

STEP 2: BACKDROP

In chapters 12 and 13, St. Paul explores the topic of spiritual gifts. Apparently, some members of the community boasted about their own gifts and questioned others who lacked them. St. Paul will give a more well-rounded picture of how the Church is to function while asking the Corinthians to place love above all else.

STEP 3: PASSAGE

Today's passage is 1 Corinthians 12–13. Start by reading 1 Corinthians 12:1–11.

STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.

1. What problem is St. Paul trying to address?

Answer: Perhaps some of the Corinthians believed that everyone should have the same gifts, or that certain gifts came from different spirits.

2. How does St. Paul try to solve it?

Answer: St. Paul tries to illustrate that there are a variety of gifts that all come from the same source (a member of the Trinity).

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12–31.

3. What analogy does St. Paul use?

Answer: St. Paul uses the analogy of the body.

4. What other problems is St. Paul addressing in this passage?

Answer: It appears that some members consider themselves more important than others. This division is causing problems in the community.

5. What gifts or parts of the Body of Christ do you value the most in the Church?

Allow the group to discuss.

6. What gifts or parts of the Body of Christ do you look down on?

Allow the group to discuss.

7. How do we overcome these attitudes?

Answer: Allow the group to discuss. A part of the solution lies in treating everyone in the Body of Christ the same, no matter who they are.

8. How can this be helpful in building up our own character?

Answer: We grow as people when we are concerned about others and not just about ourselves.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1–3.

9. What is St. Paul's ultimate answer for this debate in chapter 12?

Answer: Love.

10. St. Paul, who was a Jewish Pharisee before his conversion to Christianity, would have known what it was like to live the faith without love. Read Luke 7:36–50.

Answer: No answer is needed.

11. Give some background on the Pharisees from the “Pharisees” section in “What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?” What do the Pharisees do well?

Answer: They are able to follow the law and live a righteous life.

12. How do the Pharisees fail?

Answer: They fail to love because they are caught up in their own obedience and not God's mercy. They lose sight of God's love and the love they are supposed to give to others.

13. How do we avoid the mistakes of the Pharisees?

Allow the group to discuss.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–13.

14. What is the world's view of love?

Answer: At times, the world sees love as an emotion, something that can come and go rather than a choice to be made.

15. How is this different from Paul's view of love?

Answer: The picture of love that St. Paul paints is a difficult one to live up to. Love is meant for the hard times, not just for your emotional happiness.

16. How do the characteristics of love apply to the themes throughout the letter?

Answer: See the chart in the “What Is Love?” section in “What Do I Need to Know about This Passage?”

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1 CORINTHIANS

