

Lesson #7

PREPARATION FOR LESSON: Read 1 Corinthians 1 - 16**BACKGROUND**

Corinth was the most important city of Greece with about 700,000 inhabitants. It was known for its brass and pottery industries, its promotion of art, language and philosophy and for the Isthmian games held every other spring. The people were arrogant, believing they as Greeks had the greatest philosophers and orators. Their wisdom was superior.

But Corinth was most famous for its wealth, corruption and sexual immorality. Thruout the Roman empire, the word *corinthianize* meant excessive immorality. To call someone a *corinthian girl* was another way to say she was a prostitute. The reason for this notoriety was the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. People worshipped the goddess thru religious prostitution. Some 1000 priestesses and hundreds of priests were available at the temple as sacred prostitutes.

When Paul was on his 2nd missionary trip, he spent 2 years in Corinth, starting c. 51 AD. He began teaching in the synagogue. Later he moved to a private home next door. Most of the people were Gentiles, but some Jews continued, including a leader of the synagogue, named Sosthenes. During that time a large church was established.

Paul left Corinth in early 53 AD. Sometime during the next year he wrote a letter to the church (which was not put in our Bible). Now in 55 AD, Paul is on his 3rd missionary trip. He is working in Ephesus, 250 miles east of Corinth. A family from the Corinthian church arrives and tells him about church problems. Then 3 others come with more reports and a letter of questions. To deal with everything, Paul writes a letter to the church. It becomes our book of 1 Corinthians. He sends the letter with Timothy around in 55 AD. The church has now been in Corinth about 4 years.

Some of Paul's instruction is based on the unique culture of Corinth. However the principle behind the instruction applies to all local churches, whether past or present. The church had problems because they used human wisdom and not God's wisdom.

THEME Reproof for using human wisdom and the values of society instead of God's wisdom and values.

Human wisdom, wisdom of this world, foolishness of man means *wisdom that originates from human nature*.

It is based on values of society and uses only the human mind to logically explain things related to God.

God's wisdom, spiritual wisdom means *wisdom that originates from God*.

It is based on God's values and uses the teaching of the Holy Spirit to logically explain things related to God.

OUTLINE

Reproof based on people's **reports** about: 1 - 6

- divisions over church leaders 1-4
- incest 5
- lawsuits 6:1-11
- prostitution 6:12-20

Reproof based on their **questions** about: 7-16

- marriage 7
- Christian freedom 8:1-11:1
- church worship 11
 - men's and women's appearance
 - Lord's supper (Eucharist)
- spiritual gifts 12-14
- resurrection of the body 15
- giving 16

APPLICATION Human wisdom or God's wisdom.

When leadership in a local church uses the wisdom and values of society for spiritual decisions, there are problems.

Sin is excused or ignored. Evil is called good and good is called evil. To be more acceptable and likeable, the church accepts the ideas of the world. When this happens, God will eventually reprove and bring discipline to the church and its leadership.

As individuals, we also are tempted to use the values of society.

It is then we need to remember we are connected to the power of the Holy Spirit. He is within us to give us God's perspective and understanding of Scripture. He will give us wisdom and spiritual insight about the situation. All we have to do is ask Him.

When it comes to obeying God and being godly in our actions, our attitudes and our choices. Are we going to use the values and wisdom of society or the values and wisdom of God?

Our spiritual lives and the spiritual life of our churches depend on the answer!



EXPLANATIONS

Chapters 1-4 Spiritual wisdom in evaluating spiritual leaders.

- All ministries of leaders are equal if they are working for the goal of leading people to faith in Jesus and spiritual growth.
- All methods and motives of godly leaders are not equal.
Wrong motives are like wood, hay or straw; right motives are like gold, silver, precious stones.
- If a Christian leader tries to wreck, ruin or destroy a local church, God will intervene to bring ruin to his life 3:17

Chapter 5 An active church leader is to be “**handed over to Satan**” because of incest; this is local church discipline.

- **How** Remove him from all responsibility and leadership in the church; cannot participate in the potluck meal which includes Holy Communion; no meals in homes of other church members; will not have God’s hand of protection so that he will experience the consequences for his choices. This may include premature death. Because he is a believer, he has eternal life.

It was a public sin, so he must publicly confess in front of the church congregation. After confession, he is to be forgiven and receive communion. After a time of probation, he can once again have leadership.

- **When** If a believer is an active church member, has not responded to private correction and is guilty of... immorality, greed, idolatry, abusive / defamatory language; is a drunkard or swindler. insists on teaching false doctrine. 1 Tim. 1:19-20 with 2 Tim. 2:17-18
- **Why** To awaken a believer’s conscience so he/she will repent; to reveal if a person in the church is only masquerading as a Christian; to restrain sin in society.
- **Limits** Only for active believers in a local church; this is not for families to use towards a family member.

Chapter 6

- Christians and the court: Civil matters should be handled in civil courts (includes civil offenses within a local church). Spiritual matters within the church.
- vs. 9 - Human wisdom and the values of society say these things are OK. God’s values say these are not OK. People cannot be in God’s kingdom - live with Him if they do not accept the payment of Jesus. Those without His payment do not have the power to resist the culture around them. In Corinth, these were the lifestyles that controlled the people. Thru salvation, Corinthian believers had been freed from that control because they were connected to the power of the Holy Spirit.
But now, using the values of society, believers are saying these things are OK. Paul says, when believers go back into these lifestyles, it is the responsibility of the local church to bring discipline. Everyone will know these things are not compatible with a life belonging to God.
- vs. 19 Church members, using the values of society, said prostitution was OK.
Paul says because the Holy Spirit is living within them, their body is now a temple where the presence of God lives. Because He is holy, He requires holiness in their life.

Chapter 7 Spiritual wisdom in matters of marriage.

- Paul says it is better for Corinthian believers not to marry because time is short. In 9 years (64 AD), Rome will burn and Nero will blame the Christians. Thousands are killed in the persecution. Those without families will have less problems and hardships.
- Principle that applies to us - If one person becomes a believer and the spouse does not, it is not automatic grounds for separation or divorce. But if the unbelieving spouse wants out of the marriage, the believers should not fight it.

Chapters 8-10 Spiritual wisdom in using Christian freedom

Chpt. 8 answers their specific questions.

Chpt. 9 gives examples of Christian freedom from Paul’s personal life.

The Isthmian games in Corinth illustrate Christian ministry. vss. 24-27

To participate in the Isthmian games, one had to be a Roman citizen and accept 10 months of rigorous training. If an athlete refused to discipline himself, he was disqualified from the games of that year. But it did not affect his Roman citizenship; it did not keep him from future games.



EXPLANATIONS *continued*

In Christian ministry, one has to be a citizen of God's kingdom and be willing to use self-discipline. Christian leaders without self-discipline can become disqualified from ministry. But it has nothing to do with their citizenship in heaven. They are still believers. It does not keep them from future ministry. Notice, this is not about salvation, but about Christian ministry.

Chapter 10 gives Old Testament examples of freedom that were misused. vss. 1-22

The basis of Christian freedom in ministry vss. 23-33

So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all for the glory of God. 10:31

Will my actions cause others to think more of God or less?

Chapter 11 Spiritual wisdom in church worship and cultural practices

In Greek religious culture, Greek men in pagan temples always had their heads uncovered. It was their way to recognize the deity of their gods. In the local Corinthian church, if Greek believing men cover their heads, within that culture, it would be saying they do not recognize the deity of Jesus. So men believers are to keep their heads uncovered.

In the city of Corinth, Greek women in pagan temples always covered their heads to show they were not prostitutes or involved in adultery. In the local Corinthian church, if Greek believing women have their heads uncovered, within that culture, it would be saying they are engaged in immorality. So women are to cover their heads.

Principle - Have freedom in your worship, but consider what your actions mean within the culture, before you use that freedom.

Chapters 12-14 Spiritual wisdom in using spiritual gifts

Spiritual gifts are from God; they have a place; they are important and they are needed.

The use of spiritual gifts does not automatically make a church spiritual. It depends on **how** they are used.

Teaching about spiritual gifts will have balance when God's wisdom is used.

Every believer has at least one spiritual gift; no believer has all the gifts.

There is no gift that proves the presence of the Holy Spirit more than another.

There is no one gift that everyone has to have.

The gift of tongues in chapters 12-14 is the ability to relate a message about God to a person who speaks a language you never learned. It was needed in a sea port where sailors attended the church service but no one spoke their language. During the service a member would have the ability to speak about God in that person's language so there was a clear understanding of the gospel.

When spiritual gifts are used **with human wisdom**, they will destroy and divide a local church.

When spiritual gifts are used **with God's wisdom**, believers will grow and become stronger; God will be glorified.

Chapter 14:33-36 Women are to be silent in the church.

Because of the goddess Aphrodite and her influence, Corinthian women had dominant roles in religious activities and celebrations. So using the values of society, women believers thought it was OK to be dominant in the local church.

The men sat on the main floor. The women were in a balcony to the side. During the service, when a man stood up to speak, his wife, from the balcony, would stand up and question or challenge what he was saying. Obviously that was disruptive and disrespectful. So Paul says women are to remain silent and wait until they get home and then ask their husband. Paul is dealing with their attitude - acting as tho superior to their husband.

It is obvious that women did speak in the churches, because in 1 Cor. 11:5, Paul refers to women praying or speaking in a church service.

Chapter 15 Spiritual wisdom in believing in the resurrection

Greek teaching said resurrection of the body was impossible. Church members are using human wisdom and also think it is impossible. Paul says it is part of the salvation message. Because Jesus lives with a resurrection body, we also will live with a resurrection body.

