

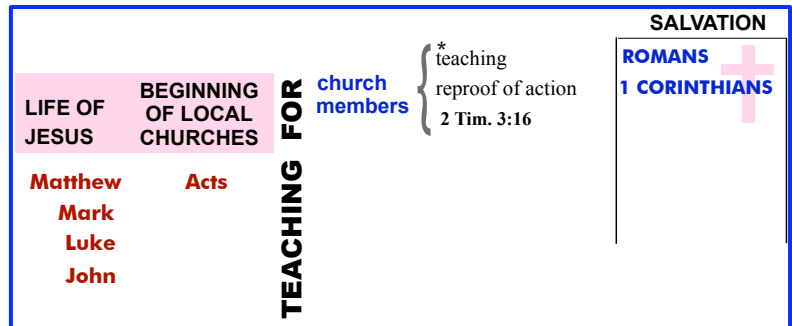
Lesson # 7 - 1 Corinthians

Before starting this lesson, read **the entire book**. If your time is limited, then read as much as possible and perhaps after the lesson, you can finish it.

The New Testament opens with the life of Jesus in the books of **Matthew, Mark, Luke and John**. **Acts** tells about the beginning of local churches. All the rest of the New Testament is teaching.

The 4 books immediately following Acts are for members of local churches and deal with the topic of **salvation**. **ROMANS** gives the teaching about salvation. We are saved from the penalty of sin and we are saved from the power of sin.

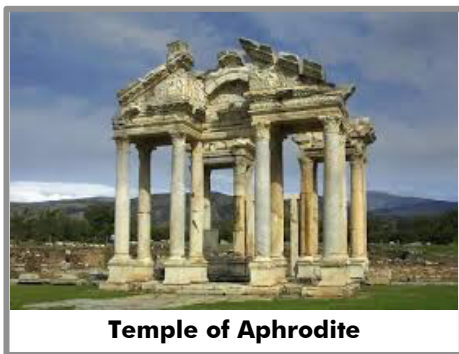
After Romans is the book of **1 CORINTHIANS**. Church members in Corinth have salvation but there is no evidence in their daily lives. Instead of using the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit, they are using their own wisdom. So this letter is **reproof of action**.



Corinth is located in southern Greece. Today it is a small town of 30,000 about 3 miles northeast of where the city used to be. In the days of Paul it had 700,000 inhabitants - 500,000 were slaves and 200,000 free. Because of its location, Corinth was the most important city of Greece. It was on an isthmus - a narrow strip of land which connected southern Greece to the rest of the nation. This gave it access to both land and sea commerce.

Corinth was famous for many things - its industries of brass and pottery, its art, language and philosophy. It was famous for the Isthmian games held every other spring.

As Greeks, they were also known for their great philosophers, orators and superior wisdom. In Corinth, this had led to arrogance.



Temple of Aphrodite

However, Corinth was most famous for its wealth, corruption and sexual immorality. It was thought of as *sin city*. Thruout the Roman empire, the word **corinthianizing** meant excessive immorality. To call someone **a corinthian girl** was another way to say she was a prostitute. These words became part of the Greek language.

The reason for this notoriety was the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. In Corinth, the people worshipped this goddess thru prostitution. Some 1000 priestesses and hundreds of priests were available at the temple as sacred prostitutes. It was called "religious" prostitution because it was part of their religion.

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 and started a Bible school. Most of the people were Gentiles. However some of the Jews continued with him, including one of the synagogue leaders - a man named Sosthenes. Not only did he put his faith in Jesus, but also helped in the development of this new church.

After 2 years, in early 53 AD, Paul left Corinth. Sometime during the next year, Paul wrote a letter to the church which is not in our Bible. Now in 55 AD, Paul is on his 3rd missionary trip. He is working in Ephesus, 250 miles east of Corinth.

One day a family from the Corinthian church comes to Ephesus. They tell Paul that church members have been arguing and creating divisions. A few weeks later, 3 other church members come with reports of problems. They have also brought a letter filled with questions. To deal with everything, Paul writes a letter to the church. It becomes our book of **1st CORINTHIANS**. Evidently Sosthenes is with Paul in Ephesus. Since he had been a part of the church when it began, Paul includes him in the greeting. Paul sends this letter with Timothy in early 55 AD. The church has now been in Corinth about 4 years.

OUTLINE

Reproof based on reports about them. 1-6 It deals with...

...divisions over church leaders, incest, lawsuits and prostitution by church members

Reproof based on questions from them 7-16 It covers...

...marriage, Christian freedom, church services, spiritual gifts, resurrection of the body and giving

Some of Paul's instruction is based on the unique culture of Corinth. I will explain how some of it applies to just their situations. However the *principle* behind the instruction applies to all local churches, whether past or present.

Thruout the book, Paul reproves them for using human wisdom instead of God's wisdom in their teaching and church decisions.

Human wisdom, the wisdom of this world or the foolishness of man is...

...wisdom that originates from human nature.

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

God's wisdom or spiritual wisdom is...

...wisdom that originates from God.

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

Paul contrasts these 2 kinds of wisdom in chapter 1.

Believers in Corinth have God's wisdom in their gifts of speaking and knowledge.

These gifts have come from Christ. They have them because of God's grace.

As a congregation, they do not lack any spiritual gifts.

Yet they are the church with the most problems.

The reason is because they are using human wisdom - the values of society - in their spiritual decisions.

Reproof based on reports about them

For how they evaluate their spiritual leaders

Using human wisdom had created division within the local church over their leaders

My brothers...

(In this book when Paul uses the word *brothers*, he means *brothers* and *sisters* - both male and female church members.)

My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: one of you says, I follow Paul; another, I follow Apollos; another, I follow Cephas (the Aramaic name for Peter); still another, I follow Christ. 1 Cor.1:11-12

Some church members are saying, *We follow Paul. After all, he IS the one who started our church.*

Others reply, *We think Apollos is better. He is so eloquent and able to phrase things in such a beautiful way. And he was our pastor after Paul left..*

Older Jewish believers say, *But Cephas, Peter, is one of the original apostles. Years. ago, when we were in Jerusalem, we heard him teach. We look to him as our teacher.*

A 4th group has said, *all of you are just following people. We consider Jesus as our leader.*

Paul uses the next 3 chapters to reprove them.

He explains that spiritual things must be looked at with wisdom that comes from the Holy Spirit. That's what the word *spiritual* means - that which is connected to or comes from the Holy Spirit.

The results of using the world's wisdom has led them to act like the world and act like infants who only think about themselves.

Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual, but as worldly -- mere infants in Christ ...vs. 3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men - like unbelievers? 3:1-3

When the **world's wisdom** evaluates spiritual leaders, it always leads to arguments, jealous and quarreling.

When **God's wisdom** is used, there is discernment and awareness. Paul now gives 2 illustrations.

Godly leaders are like **gardeners**.

It does not matter who does what in a garden. Growth is what is important. So in the spiritual world. One person plants the gospel message; another comes along and waters or cultivates it thru further teaching. But it is God who produces the spiritual growth.

This means **ALL GODLY MINISTRIES ARE EQUAL** because they are all helping believers grow.



BUT godly leaders are not perfect and sometimes make mistakes. Some even willfully disobey God. So...

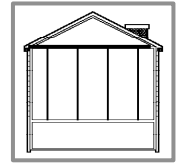
Godly leaders are like **builders**.

Their **MESSAGE** is correct because Paul says they are building on the foundation of Christ.

But their **METHODS** and **MOTIVES** may not be correct.

Some people become spiritual leaders for money, power or prestige.

They do things for what they can get out of it. They have a personal agenda.



This is pictured as building with **wood, hay or straw**.

In contrast, spiritual leaders who have correct motives and methods are said to be building with **gold, silver and precious or costly stones**.



At the end of their lives, godly leaders will stand before Jesus. He will look at and review their ministry. His look will be like fire testing the durability of their building materials.

Wood, hay and straw cannot survive a fire. So all ministry done with wrong motives or wrong methods will not survive Jesus' look. The record of what they have done will disappear from the record book and there will be no rewards or honor for it.

In contrast, when Jesus looks at the ministry of those with godly motives, it will stay on the record and they will be richly rewarded. This is pictured by the gold, silver and precious stones.

Different ministries among godly leaders have equal value.

But methods and motives are not always equal.

In fact, it is possible for Christian leaders to become so jealous of each other, one may try to ruin the work of another. God will then intervene and deal with the jealous leader. So Paul says,

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple. 3:16-17

The word *you* is plural. Paul says the local church is like a temple. If a jealous leader tries to wreck or ruin - to destroy a local church - thru teaching, ridicule or false rumor, God will wreck or ruin that person's life. It can happen thru physical, emotional or economic problems. If there is no repentance, it may lead to premature death.

Chapters 1-4 talk about evaluating spiritual leaders.

Using the world's wisdom will cause a church to have division over their leaders.

Using God's wisdom, a church will know how to correctly evaluate their leaders. Whether in Paul's day or ours...

We are to honor godly leaders.

But we are also to be watchful of their message, their methods and motives.

If leaders do not follow what God has said or if they use worldly wisdom in place of God's wisdom, we have to disagree.

For excusing sin in the church

Church members are using the world's wisdom and have accepted continued sin in their congregation.

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: a man has his father's wife. 5:1

A man in this church is living with his stepmother in common-law marriage. Paul says that even the Corinthians in all their immorality would not dream of doing that. Roman and Greek laws said that was incest. But church members have bragged about their tolerance, acceptance and open-mindedness. Paul says,

You are proud. Should you not rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? 5:2

Paul now gives God's wisdom. Church members are to use church discipline.

The **what** of church discipline

1. *Hand this man over to Satan, so that his **body** may be destroyed and his **spirit saved** on the day of the Lord. 5:5*

In a formal church meeting, church leaders are to publically state the problem and explain that the man has been warned but has refused to repent. Because he wants to follow Satan's paths, the church asks God to remove His hand of protection. This means the man is now vulnerable to Satan's attacks or as the text says, he has been handed over to Satan.

He will experience the consequences of his choice with some kind of physical suffering. This does not mean he has to physically die. But if he refuses to repent, he may die. Paul makes it clear that **if** he dies, it will *not* affect his eternity. Because he is a believer, his spirit will be saved. It is his life here on earth that will be cut short.

2. The congregation is told to expel the man from the church 5:13

After the public meeting, they are to remove him from all responsibility, authority or leadership in the church. He can have no further ministry. But he can attend the teaching part of the service. That is how he will probably come to repentance.

3. *They should not eat with him 5:11b* This has 2 meanings.

Within the church itself

In the first century, after the teaching part of the service, there was always a potluck meal. At the end of the meal there was Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper. So Paul is saying this leader can attend the teaching part of the service, but he cannot participate in the church meal.

Outside the church

Church members are not to invite him for social meals or activities. Socializing with him would be giving approval of his actions.

Because this is a public sin, there must be public repentance. When he has dealt with the problem, then in front of the church congregation he must admit that what he did was wrong. He must be willing to get help so he will not repeat it.

At this point he is forgiven by the congregation. When he repented privately, he was forgiven by God. Now with the public confession, he is forgiven by the local church. He can receive Holy Communion and be part of the social activities. However before he can have any leadership, there must be a time of probation to be sure his repentance is genuine. After that time, he can once again have responsibility.

When to use church discipline.

*But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a **brother**, but is sexually immoral, or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. 5:11*

Paul says this only applies to believers who are active member of the local church.

First they must be warned.

If they refuse correction and continue in these actions, then they must be disciplined by their local church.

It applies to 6 activities.

Immorality

Greed that leads to breaking the law

Idolatry

Abusive language or false accusations that are destructive to other church members

A drunkard

A swindler

In his letters to Timothy, Paul says people who insist on teaching false doctrine are also to be disciplined.

Notice, church discipline is only for believers who violate God's rules - not for those who violate man's rules.

Public church discipline is only after repeated warnings in private by the church elders and there is no repentance.

The **why** of church discipline

Human wisdom within the church says, *We should accept these people and show them love.*

God's wisdom says, people who claim to be in God's family, need to understand - these actions are not compatible with God's family rules.

If they are believers, this discipline will awaken their conscience and they will repent.

The discipline exposes their hypocrisy.

If over time there is no desire to change and they do not care, it means they have been a church member, but never were a believer. The Holy Spirit was not living within them.

God wants the local church to act as a restraint and keep society from deteriorating.

But society will deteriorate even faster if church members live without restraint - without morals or ethics,

The **limits** of church discipline

It is only for **active** church members in their **local** church. It is not for a person who just attends. In addition, this is not instruction for families toward a family member. Dealing with family members is different.

For how they resolve church problems

According to chapter 6, they are upset over trivial matters - things like not being acknowledged for what they have done - not getting a leadership role - not being chosen for a committee or project. So now they handle it the way everyone else in Corinth does - they file lawsuits.

But instead, one brother goes to law against another - and this in front of unbelievers. The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? 6:6-7

Some people think, based on these verses, believers should never use their legal rights or ever go to court. This is not what Paul means. We know that because Paul used his legal rights. He even appealed to the supreme court of the Roman empire. He appealed to Caesar.

In Corinth, lawsuits were always trial by jury. There had to be a minimum of 201 people on the jury. The favorite pastime of the Corinthians was to serve on the jury or at least attend the trial. It was a wonderful way to hear all the gossip and scandal in town.

The people who served on the jury were the Corinthians who were known for their corruption, evil and immorality. So Paul raises the question, how could **they** ever be qualified to deal with spiritual issues and trivial problems between church members.

Church members have the Holy Spirit to give them God's wisdom. They are the ones to judge spiritual matters. And if they are cheated out of a leadership position or not given recognition, they should accept it. That is not a problem of justice; it's a problem of attitude.

Paul is not forbidding the use of civil courts.

He is teaching a principle of how to deal with spiritual matters within a local church.

Arguments between pastor and church members, between pastor and church councils or between the church members themselves, should be settled within the church by those who are spiritual.

If there is no one, then a spiritual believer from outside should be asked to come and give God's wisdom.

However, if a church member or leader is guilty of embezzlement, breach of contract, physical or sexual abuse, taking property - these are civil matters. They have to be immediately reported to the authorities and tried in civil court.

Scripture teaches - **civil matters in civil courts and spiritual matters within the church.**



In chapter 6:9 Paul mentions the same list as he did for church discipline. He says those that do these things will not be in God's kingdom. Let me explain what he means.

People cannot be in God's kingdom - they cannot live with Him in eternity if they do not accept the payment of Jesus. Those without His payment do not have 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.

When believers fell back into those lifestyles, it was the responsibility of the local church to bring discipline, so all would know this was not compatible with a life belonging to God.

For thinking prostitution is OK for believers

Church members have used the values of society and said prostitution is OK for believers. Paul tells them,

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. 6:19-20

In these verses Paul is talking about believers as individuals.

The word **temple** is the word for the most holy place in the Jewish temple where the very presence of God resided.

Paul says, *Because the Holy Spirit lives within you, your body is now a temple where the presence of God lives. Because God is holy, He requires holiness in your life.*

With this, Paul ends his reproof involving **reports** about them.

He now begins ...

Reproof based on questions from them

Questions about marriage problems – chapter 7

Some were unique to that day. For example, Paul was not against marriage but he knew time was short and so he said it was better not to marry. And he was right. Just 9 years later, 64 AD, two-thirds of Rome was burned and Nero blamed the Christians. From then on, Christians were persecuted and killed by the thousands. Those without a spouse or children had far less problems and hardship.

There is a principle from all his instruction about marriage that still applies to us. If a person becomes a believer and their spouse is not, it is not automatic grounds for divorce or separation. But if at some point, the unbelieving spouse wants out of the marriage, the believer should not fight it.

Questions about Christian freedom – chapters 8-10

Church members are using the world's wisdom and saying they have a right to do what they want.

Paul gives them God's wisdom.

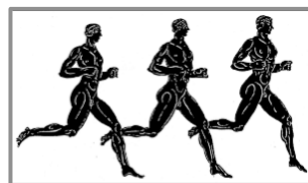
In chapter 8 he answers their specific questions.

In chapter 9 he gives examples from his own life.

Chapter 10 begins with examples from the Old Testament and ends with a summary.

A statement that Paul makes about his own life is often misunderstood, so let's read 9:24-27.

Do you not know that in a race, all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly. I do not fight like a man beating the air or shadow boxing. No, I beat my body, meaning, I discipline my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified from the prize.



The context of these verses is about Christian ministry and freedom of leaders to do whatever they want.

Paul uses the illustration of the Isthmian games that are held in Corinth. To qualify, athletes must be citizens of Rome and then undergo 10 months of rigorous training. They cannot drink wine and can only eat certain food. If they accept the discipline and then win, they receive a crown of ivy leaves. A statue of them is made, they receive a cash award at the moment and benefits for the rest of their life.

If they do not accept the discipline, they are disqualified and cannot participate in the races. This means they cannot win a prize. But they are only disqualified from the races of that year. It has **nothing** to do with their Roman citizenship. And when the games are held two years later, they will have another chance to go thru training, accept the discipline and potentially win the prize.

Paul is saying Christian **ministry** is like running a race.

Obviously, to be eligible for Christian ministry, one has to be a believer in Jesus - a citizen of God's kingdom. In order to have an **effective** ministry, one must be willing to use self-discipline.

The reward will be enjoyment of God's blessings in this life as well as rewards in eternity.

Christian leaders without self-discipline can become disqualified from ministry. However it has nothing to do with their citizenship in heaven. They are still believers.

However, being disqualified is only temporary. If they accept discipline, opportunities for ministry will be given back to them. In 9:27, Paul is saying, *I am teaching others*, (and they become leaders used by God). *How tragic it would be, if God cannot continue to use me because I refuse to discipline **myself**.*

Paul now gives the basis of using our freedom in ministry.

Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, it should be for the glory of God. 10:31

When other people see us do this or that, will they think more highly of God or will they think less of Him?

Questions about freedom in local church worship – chapter 11

In the culture of Corinth, Greek men in Corinthian temples always had their heads **uncovered**. It was their way to recognize the **deity** of their gods.

So if a Greek believing man **covers** his head in the local **church**, based on the culture and customs of Corinth, he would be saying he does not recognize the deity of Jesus. So Paul commands, *Men in the local church, keep your heads uncovered.*

In contrast, Greek women in pagan temples in Corinth, always **covered** their heads to show they were not a prostitute or involved in adultery.

So in the local Corinthian church, if a Greek believing woman has her head **uncovered**, within that culture, she would be saying she is involved in immorality. So Paul commands, *Women in the local church, keep your heads covered.*

Paul is telling believers they have freedom in their worship. But before they use that freedom, they should use God's wisdom to consider what their actions mean within their culture.

Questions about spiritual gifts in local church worship – chapters 12-14

Church members in Corinth are using their spiritual gifts like the world would use them...

to show off, be the center of attention, the most important, have the most power or get the most glory.

Paul reproves their actions and gives them God's wisdom.

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** the gifts are used.

When they are used with God's wisdom...

There is no rudeness or showing off.

No one vies for attention or gets their feelings hurt if they cannot use their gift at that moment.

The one with a lesser gift will not be jealous of someone with a greater gift.

People want to have the spiritual gifts that will benefit the congregation or Christian community.

When God's wisdom is used, teaching about spiritual gifts will have balance.

Every believer has at least 1 spiritual gift - no one has been left out. Some have many gifts.

No one has all the gifts, so that we need each other within the Body of Christ.

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

There is no one gift that everyone has to have.

God provides each local church with spiritually gifted people so the church can accomplish its purpose – to train and build up believers in the faith.

Desire spiritual gifts that will be of greatest benefit to other church members – not the gifts that make you feel good.

When GOD'S wisdom is used, spiritual gifts will always unite and strengthen the local church.

When the WORLD'S wisdom is used, spiritual gifts will always destroy and divide the local church

At the end of chapter 14 Paul talks about women being silent in the church.

In the city of Corinth, the goddess Aphrodite completely influenced the Greek religion. It was the **women** in Corinth who had dominant roles in all religious activities and celebrations. Women believers are now using the values of society to be dominant in the local church. The men sat on the main floor. All the women sat in a balcony to the side.

During the service, when a man would stand up to speak, his wife, from the balcony, would stand up to question or challenge what he was saying. *What do you mean? Why do you say that?* Obviously this was very disruptive; it was also disrespectful. So Paul says the women should remain silent. If they have questions, they should wait until they get home and then ask their husband.

We know that women did speak in the church because in the previous chapter, Paul refers to women praying or speaking in a service. In this chapter, Paul is dealing with their attitude. They were acting as tho they were superior to their husband.

Questions about resurrection of the body - chapter 15

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 have a resurrection body to live eternally.

Paul has written this letter to a church with problems. Whether it be the church in Corinth, or our local churches today – **when leadership uses the values of society for their spiritual decisions, there are problems.**

Sin is excused or ignored; evil is called good and good is called evil. To be more acceptable and likable, 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 from Scripture - to give us spiritual wisdom and insight. 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 wisdom and values of society or the wisdom and values of God?

Our spiritual life and the spiritual life of our churches depends on the answer.

EXTRA INFORMATION FOR THE STUDIOUS AND INQUISITIVE

FROM A SPIRITUAL VIEWPOINT, THERE ARE 3 KINDS OF PEOPLE

	Kind	Description	The Holy Spirit's relationship to them	How the Holy Spirit will use Scripture
1	Non-believers 1 Cor. 2:14	Reject what is of the Holy Spirit	Does not live within them	Convicts of sin, God's rightness, judgment John 16:6
2	Immature believers 1 Cor. 3:1	Jealous, argumentative, divisive 1 Cor. 3:3	Lives within, but not in control	Reveals sin & need for control Emphasizes obedience & commands
3	Mature believers 1 Cor. 3:1	Understand the things of God 1 Cor. 2:12	Lives within, and is in control	Gives us a desire for holiness Reveals deeper things of God Reveals what God has for us Directs us in greater worship of God