

# united

## 1 CORINTHIANS

### STUDY 1 - UNITED IN FOOLISHNESS

1. Ask the group their opinions. Paul had planted the church in Corinth but other prominent leaders had followed him there (Apollos, Peter, others?). The Corinthian church were enamoured with a worldly view of real power lying with impressiveness and strength, which led them to choose to be associated with a leader based on their impressiveness, rather than having their allegiance to Christ about all (which is why 'I follow Christ' is an ironic rebuttal of their attitude).
2. Their allegiance should be to Christ, for it is into him that they were baptised ie. it is in him that their salvation lies, not in any earthly leader who is merely a servant of Christ.
3. The contrast is the apparent foolishness of God's wisdom (ie. his providing salvation through the crucifixion of the Messiah), which is really the power of God, vs the apparent strength/ impressiveness of worldly wisdom and intelligence, which is really bankrupt and foolishness. See if the group can race this all the way through the passage.
4. Stumbling block to Jews - they never thought that the promised Messiah could die a humiliating death at the hands of the enemies of God's people, the Gentiles (see Peter's reaction to Christ's prediction of his death in Mark 8). Foolishness to Greeks - the cross was a shameful and despicable way to die - the idea that this event could somehow be the pinnacle of God's plan of salvation was utterly ridiculous to the Greco-Roman mind.
5. To bring the wisdom of man to nothing, to show that the glory of man is nothing, and to show that it is only through his power that people can be saved, so that all the glory goes to him.
6. God using these 'foolish' means to save us means that none of us can boast - instead, it should lead us to gracious humility, and to confidence in God's means of salvation, despite their appearance to the world.

### STUDY 2 - UNITED IN THE MIND OF CHRIST

1. (i) As a speaker without eloquence, superior wisdom or persuasive words; weak and fearful.
  - (ii) They thought he was unimpressive and his message appeared unwise and weak; they were turning away from his teaching (this is behind Paul's comment in 2:15; more of this next week in ch3-4).
  - (ii) He had just had people sneer at his message (17:32), he was largely alone in Corinth (18:1-5), he had been rejected (18:5-6) and attacked (18:12-17) by the Corinthian Jews.
  - (iv) We often picture Paul as a fearless, courageous preacher of the gospel. Paul's self-description sounds a lot more like how we might describe ourselves in our evangelistic efforts: words failed him, he didn't appear to have all the answers, he was quite frankly scared. Jesus even had to appear to him to assure him that he had "many people in this city" to ensure Paul stuck around and didn't just return to his day job (Acts 18:3) so they could be reached!
2. (i) He wanted the focus to clearly be Jesus (2:2), he wanted the Corinthians' faith to rest solely on God's power (2:5), and he recognised his message is not understood and even hidden from those of this age.
  - (ii) They are coming to nothing and don't want to admit this (2:6), it is hidden from them (2:7), they cannot conceive what God is accomplishing through Christ (2:8-9), it has not been revealed to them by God's Spirit (2:10), it is foolishness to them (2:14).

(iii) We are the mature (2:6), God has destined us to glory (2:7), we have the Spirit (2:10,12), we are spiritual (2:15).

(iv) Someone who accepts the message of the cross; someone who has and walks by the Holy Spirit.

3. We can think God's thoughts after him for the Spirit, who knows God's mind and purposes, reveals these very things to us.

### **STUDY 3 - UNITED UNDER LEADERSHIP**

1. (i) They failed to recognise his message as wise (2:12-16; 3:18-21), they were dividing over which of their leaders they thought best.

(ii) As servants assigned to a task by the Lord, as tools used by the God who gives growth; as labourers.

(iii)

2. (i) As a group of people that God was building, indwelling and one day testing to see if they were up to code.

(ii) Since they were all built on the gospel of Jesus Christ they needed to build up one another in the gospel of Jesus Christ. They should not divide over their preferred leaders but grow through their ministry to become the beautiful edifice that God had designed them to be.

(iii)

3. (i) As servants of Jesus, as those entrusted with his gospel, as accountable to only him, as ones who, like Jesus, had been rejected by the people of the world and were condemned to suffer in this life.

(ii) The Corinthians shouldn't have made themselves judge over such men. They should have better understood what following Jesus looks like (suffering in this life while we await the glory to come).

(iii) The gospel should have helped them see that we are all unworthy. Rather they were judging Paul because he wasn't as good a speaker as Apollos (see Acts 18:24-25,27-28). As a result they no longer viewed him as worth following where they should have been imitating him as their father (1 Cor 4:16).

### **STUDY 4 - UNITED IN GODLY LIVING**

1. The issue is extreme sexual immorality - 'of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate'! Note too the extreme language about the consequences - they should have been 'mourning', 'hand him over to Satan', 'get rid of the old yeast', etc.

2. "... (this verse) states metaphorically what Paul says literally in vv.2 and 13: the man is to be excluded from the community of faith..." "The destruction of the flesh" refers not to his death but to turning from evil desires..." Rosner and Ciampa, 208.

3. The options are that they were boasting about the 'freedom' that existed in their congregation, where they would even accept someone who was sleeping with his stepmother; or, as Rosner and Ciampa suggest, they were boasting about having someone of high social status amongst their congregation (maybe a wealthy benefactor), and this pride in this person meant that they were reluctant to confront the man about his heinous sin.

4. The issue is the holiness of the church that was bought by the blood of Jesus and sanctified (made holy) by his Spirit (see 1 Cor 1:2). Discuss with the group how you think a church like St Paul's would deal with a leader or member who was found to be sleeping with their mother-in-law. 5. Paul uses a metaphor

drawn from the Passover about yeast affecting the whole batch (see 1 Cor 10:17) - what happens with this person, this sin and how it is dealt with will affect the whole church.

6. We are to associate with 'sinners' outside the church (in fact, how can we not?), but we are to be vigilant when it comes to tolerating blatant sin within the midst of the church.

7. Believers suing each other in secular courts over minor matters.

8. See especially vv.7-8. If people would rather press their own rights over minor matters, rather than show grace, they are devaluing the unity of the body that Christ died for.

9. All sorts of behaviours are listed with no hierarchy. The statement is that all of these were what Christ died to wash us clean from, and leave behind by the power of his Spirit within us helping us to change.

10. 'You' here is plural - that is, 'we all, together, were washed, cleaned, sanctified'. This is the true source of our identity and our unity.

## **STUDY 5 - UNITED IN GODLY LIVING**

1. The Corinthians believe that their bodies are theirs to do with as they please, and that they are going to be destroyed anyway, and so they have the right to do whatever they want with them. This has led them to sexual immorality, particularly sleeping with prostitutes.

2. Jesus' resurrection means that our bodies will be raised as well, which means what we do in our bodies matters; our bodies are cited with Christ's body such that they can be said to be 'members of his body'; our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, in that the Holy God dwells in them; we were bought by God at the high price of his Son, which means that our bodies don't belong to us, they belong to God, and we should glorify God in them.

3. Sexual sin is different because it alone impacts our body in a way that drags Christ's body into defilement - it can therefore leave spiritual scars like no other sin.

4. Teaching is that sex for pleasure is a good thing within marriage, and that married couples should seek to serve one another's needs for physical intimacy with their bodies regularly, taking a break only by mutual consent and for a short season. Many outside the church believe that Christians think that sex is dirty or evil, full stop.

5. These verses show that the best thing we can do in our bodies is to be singly devoted to the Lord while we are in them, because the time is short before the Day of the Lord.

6. Because her husband is 'sanctified' through her presence in the marriage, which I take to mean that God treats the husband as one of the covenant people, who has a heightened access to the things of God, and regarded as holy for the sake of the child. The fact that the child is called 'holy' suggests that they too are regarded as belonging to the covenant (until such time as they show they are not part of the covenant) - that's why we baptise infants, as covenant members!

7. Guiding principle is 'remain as you are, unless you have the chance to move from where you are.'

8. 'This world is passing away' means that our status on this earth should not be our primary concern (though it doesn't need to be completely disregarded either). Unmarried people are at an advantage in that they can serve the Lord with single minded devotion, and Paul says this situation in life is 'best' - i.e.. sex or marriage is not a necessary part of being a fully flourishing human being.

## **STUDY 6 - UNITED IN OUR GATHERINGS**

1. He establishes that idols are actually nothing, on the basis that there is actually only one God whom created everything.
2. Food itself does nothing to bring us closer to or further away from God.
3. The heart of the issue is how to care for brothers and sisters with weaker consciences on particular issue.
4. Principle is, if you exercise your 'freedom' is such away as to 'destroy' your brother or sister, you are actually sinning against Christ, who died for them.
5. He says that he used his freedom to become like those whom he was trying to reach for Christ, so that he might win some.
6. He was using freedom to try to serve others, rather than gratify self.
7. 'Rights' are terrible if they are used to destroy others - rather, think about what is 'beneficial', what is 'constructive'.
8. Explore these with your group.

## **STUDY 7 - UNITED IN OUR GATHERINGS**

1. Divisions, expressed through pride and boasting about a superior place within church or within society.
2. The wealthy are eating the meals served as the Lord's Supper in ways that exclude the poor, and drinking the wine served to excess, even to the point of getting drunk. They are flaunting their wealth to the detriment of the church, reinforcing divisions among the body. We have seen these attitudes in the early

