

# 1 Corinthians Lesson 2

## Introduction Part 2

### Review

Last week we laid the historical foundation for understanding 1 Corinthians. We saw that Paul wrote this letter from Ephesus around AD 54–55 in response to disturbing reports from Chloe’s household and a letter the church itself had sent with specific questions. We noted the deep problems plaguing the young congregation—divisions over leaders, sexual immorality, lawsuits, confusion about marriage and Christian liberty, disorder in worship, and questions surrounding the resurrection. Most importantly, we saw Paul’s heart as a spiritual father who writes not to shame his beloved children but to call them back to living worthy of the gospel they had received. The central truth we highlighted was that the kingdom of God is not demonstrated in eloquent words but in the power of lives transformed by the cross and resurrection of Christ.

With that historical context in place, we are now ready to move from the background of the letter to the letter itself. Today we will look at how Paul structures his argument and applies the same gospel truth to every issue the Corinthians were facing.

### Main Idea / Big Picture

The entire letter of 1 Corinthians is one unified message applied to five different problems in the church. Paul does not jump randomly from topic to topic. Instead, he repeatedly brings the same gospel truth — the cross and the resurrection — to bear on every issue. The Corinthians were living like the old world still ruled. Paul calls them (and us) to live like Jesus really died and rose.

### The Five Major Sections of the Letter

1. Chapters 1–4 — Divisions and quarreling over leaders
2. Chapters 5–7 — Sexual immorality and questions about marriage
3. Chapters 8–10 — Food sacrificed to idols and Christian freedom
4. Chapters 11–14 — Problems in public worship gatherings
5. Chapter 15 — The resurrection of the dead

### The Gospel Pattern That Holds It All Together

Paul uses the same solution for every problem: the cross humbles us and the resurrection redefines how we live.

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- Chapters 1–4: They divide themselves based upon a particular leaders or fathers in the faith. This division is the primary problem (first mentioned in the letter) and is the source for quarrels, judgments, partiality, selfishness, etc. What is the solution?

Paul answers with the cross. “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18) “We preach Christ crucified... Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1:23–24).

- Chapters 5–7: There was some gross immorality and more selfish behavior. In the context of immorality, the assembly was not addressing the problem. Paul addresses this as “boasting.” What is the solution Paul presents.

“For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (5:7), and “You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So, glorify God in your body” (6:19–20). The purchase of believers through the Cross means that how we function as believers in our body matters.

- Chapters 8–10: Using “freedom” to eat meat sacrificed to idols and in the process harm weaker brothers.

Paul addresses this in a long diatribe that begins in 8:6,11 “yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him... For through your knowledge, he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died.”

But Paul continues in this case by explaining in Chapter 9 that for the sake of the Gospel “He becomes all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some” (9:22), In this context he mentions the weak. The weak is in context of chapter 8 where some are ignorant of the truth of false gods.

Paul returns to the same argument in his conclusion in this section: “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved” (10:31-33).

- Chapters 11–14: Hedonistic, self-pleasing, activity during services when assembled was rampant in the Corinth.

What is Paul basis for correction in this section? The sacrifice of Jesus as represented in the Final Supper in chapter 11. “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had

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given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (11:23-26). Jesus was self-sacrificial sharing and loving.

In Chapter 12 this is addressed as being one as we are the body of Christ. "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (12:12-13). Being identified with Christ means that we are all part of the same body and therefore we should be unified and not arrogant against one another.

When examining chapter 13 and the characteristics of love, we can relate it back to the life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. "Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails; ..." (13:4-8a). This is a portrait of Jesus' life and sacrifice on the cross. We see this also in Romans 5:6-8: "For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

- Chapter 15: The Resurrection question has hit Corinth. Some have been teaching that Christ has not been raised and Paul, just as he has previously, reiterates the gospel to reinforce truth and hope. This is not only for our eternal life, but it is the basis for how we live.

"If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (15:14). The resurrection is the foundation of why we believe in Jesus. The fact that Jesus was raised means that we will be raised as well. At the end of chapter 15, Paul gives the practical application that is tied to this doctrine: "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (15:58). The basis for our service is the hope of eternity and the resurrection.

### Paul's Key Literary Techniques

#### 1. Answering direct questions and misconceptions:

As we move forward in the text we are tasked with understanding Paul's rhetoric. We know that Paul addresses direct questions, we see this in the repeated "Now concerning" passages.

But there are times in this letter that draws a question; Is Paul affirming a statement or correcting one? In chapter 6 Paul states in verse 12 "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable." There is a question here that is being examined. Is Paul quoting their misconception and then correcting it, or is Paul asserting a truth?

Other passages create the same inquiry:

1 Corinthians 7:1 - Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman.

1 Corinthians 8:1 - Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.

2. Sharp sarcasm (especially chapters 1–4) Used to wake them up from pride. Example in 4:8 stands out clearly when read aloud. "1 Corinthians 4:8: You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and indeed, I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you." We must be ready for Paul's sarcasm and ensure that we do not misunderstand his rhetoric as affirmation.
3. Allegory. Paul uses examples and pictures to make a point in the text. We must be careful to not treat Paul's use of metaphor or allegory as the "proper interpretation" of the Hebrew text. Instead, we need to lean what Paul's point is in the letter. Here are some examples:

1 Corinthians 3:9–17 — Building / Temple metaphor (one of the longest sustained pictures) Paul presents himself as a "skilled master builder." The foundation is Jesus Christ. Materials (gold, silver, precious stones vs. wood, hay, straw) will be tested by fire. The church is "God's building" and "God's temple." Each person's work will be revealed by fire.

1 Corinthians 5:6–8 — "Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us

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therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

Leaven and the Passover Paul takes the Exodus command to remove leaven and applies it directly to sin in the church.

1 Corinthians 9:9–10 — “For it is written in the Law of Moses, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.’ Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was written for our sake...” Deuteronomy 25:4 (the ox not muzzled) Paul quotes the law about oxen and immediately uses it to discuss workers in ministry:

He applies the principle to the right of gospel ministers to receive material support.

1 Corinthians 3:6–9 — Agricultural metaphor Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God gives the growth. “You are God’s field.”

1 Corinthians 6:19–20 — “Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God. You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.”

1 Corinthians 9:24–27 — Athletic metaphor (race and boxing) Paul compares the Christian life to running a race and boxing, with self-discipline so as not to be “disqualified.”

1 Corinthians 12:12–27 — The Body of Christ (the most extended metaphor in the letter) Paul develops the picture in great detail: many members, one body; the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; weaker parts are indispensable; God arranged the members as he chose. This functions almost allegorically to teach unity, diversity, and mutual care.

### How to Read 1 Corinthians for Yourself

- Watch for the “now concerning” transitions (7:1, 8:1, 12:1, etc.) — these signal Paul answering their questions or the report from Chloe’s people.
- Read sections aloud in an attempt to catch tone and sarcasm.
- Ask: What problem is Paul addressing? How does he bring Jesus’ identity or the cross or resurrection into it?
- Look for negations and corrections of premise statements.