

Corinth: A Church Torn Asunder
Studies from Paul's Letters to the Corinthians

Leader's Guide

By Bass Mitchell



Introduction to the Corinthians Series

from Bible Study by Email
by Bass Mitchell
<http://www.homiliesbyemail.com>

This is a 13 session study from the First and Second Letters of Paul to the Corinthians. The key theme in these letters is that of unity among the believers. Paul faced all kinds of divisive issues among the Corinthians. In his wise counsel, we, too, might find some healing, for the church in many ways is still divided and broken.

Sessions Outline

<i>Session</i>	<i>Texts</i>	<i>Titles</i>
One	1 Corinthians 1:2-17	Paul Appeals for Unity
Two	1 Corinthians 2:1-2, 4-13,15-16	Wisdom & Unity
Three	1 Corinthians 4:1-13	Leadership & Unity
Four	1 Corinthians 5:1-13	Confrontation & Unity
Five	1 Corinthians 7:1-5,8-16	Troubled Relationships
Six	1 Corinthians 8	Think of Others - Love
Seven	1 Corinthians 12:4-20,26	Working Together
Eight	1 Corinthians 15:20-27,35-44	Resurrection
Nine	1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13	Love
Ten	2 Corinthians 2:4-17	Reconciliation
Eleven	2 Corinthians 4:5-18	Suffering
Twelve	2 Corinthians 9:1-13	Cheerful Givers
Thirteen	2 Corinthians 13:1-13	Confrontation & Growth

Session Format

These sessions come with two parts - a commentary and teaching suggestions. The commentary is really a detailed examination of the biblical passages, along with some practical ways it relates to us today. The teaching suggestions give you ideas for leading that session, along with other materials that will help you relate it to today and your own church/life. There is a student handout for each session which provides some detailed commentary on each passage, along with a story or two that relates it to today.

Before you begin or continue reading any of this material, it would be good to read both letters to the Corinthians, giving them a fresh hearing (encourage the class to do this as well). You may even wish to read from a Bible dictionary an introduction to these letters, although you will be given a lot of background material in the course of this study.

Session 1: Leader's Guide

BIBLE LESSON: 1 Corinthians 1:2-17

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PREPARING TO LEAD THIS SESSION

Paul's two letters to Corinth deal with matters that also confront the church today. Perhaps these sessions will provide a guide to seeking solutions for some of the problems we still encounter in the church.

The first four-sessions of our study come from 1 Corinthians. It begins with a session about Christian unity. Other sessions focus on the role of the Holy Spirit as teacher, the leaders of the church as servants of Christ, and the need for discipline in the church.

Reading. Make sure you read carefully the introductory articles in the teacher's book. These will provide invaluable information to help you understand Paul's letters to the Corinthians. Next, go to a quiet place, sit down and read the letters themselves as if they were sent to you. Read them out loud for that often results in hearing them in new ways.

Prayer. Think about the individual persons in your class. Prayer for their peace and well being. Pray for greater unity in your local church and for the church everywhere.

Maps. Be ready to show at least two locations on a biblical map - Corinth and Ephesus (where Paul was writing this letter). Quality maps are available from Cokesbury.

STUDENT PAGES. You will want to have copies of it for them and given out ahead of time. Also, be very familiar with it as it provides lots of information that you will wish to refer to throughout the session.

Introducing the Lesson

Incomplete Sentence. You could also have this on the chalkboard or a piece of newsprint: "Unity is..." let the class complete it. Write their answers on the board. Now have them complete this sentence: "Christian unity is..." Write their answers. Use these as springboards into today's session on unity.

Place the following outline on the board, or poster board, or on an overhead transparency.

- An outline of 1 Corinthians 1:2-17:
- Vss 2-3 Greeting & Affirmation
- Vss 4-7 Thanksgiving
- Vss 8-9 God's Faithfulness
- Vss 10-12 Appeal for Agreement
- Vss 13-16 Christ is Not Divided

- Vs 17 Why Paul was Sent

Reading. Read or have someone prepared to read 1 Corinthians 1:2-17. Ask the class to close their eyes and just listen as it is read, even imagining that they are the first recipients of it. Then, have them share any thoughts, feelings, questions or insights that came to them as they listened.

Read vss 2-3. Tell them that Paul uses the word “church” to describe them. How would members of the class define “church”? (Some might think of a building or place. For Paul, it’s the people.) Share with them, from the teacher’s book, Paul’s other thoughts about the church.

There is a wonderful hymn in the new United Methodist Hymnal (page 558) entitled, “We Are the Church.” You could read the words or even lead them in singing it. It says in very simple but powerful words what Paul means here and throughout his letters.

Write “Grace” and “Peace” on the board. Ask the class to define these or describe them. Let them discuss how they think these words (experiences) relate to unity.

Read vss 4-7. Ask them, “What are the things for which Paul gives thanksgiving?” (For them, the grace that has been working in them, for their many spiritual gifts). Ask the class to think about their own church. let them list the things about it for which for they are thankful. Another way to ask this is, “If suddenly the church did not exist, what would go missing from your life?”

Ask them what the phrase “the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ” means to them. (The notes in Teacher share Paul’s meaning). How do they feel about the coming of Christ? (Scared, confused, does no matter, excited). There’s a bumpersticker I saw recently that said, Why do they think Paul mentions the coming judgment of Christ? (Maybe as a stimulus to stop being so divisive).

Read vss 8-9. Paul says that an expression of the faithfulness of God is the gift of “koinonia” or fellowship. Explain what Paul means. Koinonia is God’s gift. We do not earn it or create it. It grows out of the love and grace of God flowing into our lives. It makes us love others more than ourselves, be willing to lose the race if we can help someone who has fallen. When have you or members of the class experienced real koinonia? Do you have it in your class? In your local church?

Read or ask someone to read vss 10-12. Ask the class, “Why do you think Paul refers to them as ‘brothers’?” (Maybe because he wanted to them realize that they were brothers and sisters in Christ). Some Christians often refer to one another as “brother” or “sister.” Is the church a family? If so, how so? And maybe, if it is, that’s part of our problem - that is - too often we act like family - difficult to get along with and quarreling! But, of course, Paul means family in the fullest and most positive sense of that word, God’s family. An elderly pastor (who, like Paul, must have seen his share of dissension in churches) once taught me this little poem:

