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GENERAL THEMES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Lesson 1: Introduction; chapter 1

The format of our study:

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Introduction

1. Overview of the book

A. Written about three years after Paul left Corinth. Timeline:

1. Paul leaves Corinth – Acts 18:18.
2. Paul stays briefly in Ephesus, then travels to Judea, Antioch – 18:19-22.
3. Paul travels through Galatia and Phrygia, then settles in Ephesus for three years – 18:23-19:41. It is during this stay in Ephesus that Paul writes First Corinthians.

B. List three potential sources of information concerning the situation at Corinth:

1. 1 Cor 1:11 –
2. 1 Cor 7:1 –
3. 1 Cor 16:17-18 (possibly) –

C. The book is somewhat unique in its format. It is not a book that develops a specific treatise throughout; rather, Paul touches on a variety of subjects according to his concerns for their spiritual wellness.

2. The Readers' Situation

A. The mixed make-up of the congregation may help define the issues among them:

1. They were an ethnic mix of Jews and Gentiles – Ac 18:6-8.
2. Corinth was a “melting pot” and populated by sailors, released slaves, former government employees, businessmen, etc. These differences created tension.

B. Paul addresses matters of heinous immorality (Corinth was widely known as a flagrantly debauched city), which would have been “second nature” to Gentiles. He deals with sectarianism which may have reflected ethnic bias (Peter, the Jewish champion; Apollos the Greek orator; Paul the “liberal,” etc.). Association with idolatry in any form would have been divisive between Jew and Gentile.

C. Lawsuits, social division (even infiltrating the observance of the Lord's supper), arrogance, ecstatic behavior (out-of-control emotions in exercise of spiritual gifts) all attest to strife and controversy which dogged this church for a long time.

1. "A sad word is this, about 40 years after this epistle, Clement writes a letter to the Corinthian church and we find it is still troubled with the kind of things Paul deals with in this letter" (McGuiggan, *Commentary on First Corinthians*, p. 10).
2. "Instead of living as Christians in a pagan society some Corinthians were living as worldly people in a Christian community" (Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary – First Corinthians*, p. 22).

3. Paul's Authority in Question

- A. Another factor Paul deals with in both First and Second Corinthians is a challenge to his apostolic authority. His opponents take up a "no holds barred" attack against him, accusing him among other things of being a weak speaker, an illegitimate apostle, a coward, a vacillator, etc.
- B. Satan and his agents will often use *ad hominem* (personal attacks rather than answering the arguments advanced) tactics against us. They did with Jesus ("He has a demon!"; "He is a Samaritan!"); they did with Paul, and they will do so with us.
- C. Such matters grieved Paul greatly, and his personal feelings bleed through in both of these epistles, especially Second Corinthians.



Chapter 1 – Focus on Christ and His Cross, Not Men

Sect/sectarian: **1a** : a dissenting or schismatic religious body; *esp* : one regarded as extreme or heretical ... **3a** : a group adhering to a distinctive doctrine or to a leader (*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*).

Snapshots:

1. Chapters 1-4 address the problem of sectarian division among the Corinthians. We must interpret the various concepts in these chapters in this light.
2. Chapter 1 breaks down into four main sections:
 - A. 1:1-9 – In his opening remarks, Paul emphasizes "the Lord Jesus Christ." How many times does he mention Jesus in these verses?

B. 1:10-17 – The problem defined; Paul’s personal repudiation of sectarian motives.

C. 1:18-25 – Emphasis on the cross of Christ which should produce humility in men.

D. 1:26-31 – Glory properly belongs to God, not men. Any man seeking his own glory is infringing upon a strictly divine right.

Study Points:

1. One thing is clear in the matter of sectarian strife as well as so many other ills being experienced by the Corinthians: they have lost sight of Christ and are exalting themselves. Paul will emphasize repeatedly how they are blessed and prospered by God; they are not responsible for their spiritual advances and thus have no reason for the arrogance that is now characteristic of them.

A. Paul praises them for their deep knowledge and understanding, but where did this knowledge originate according to 1:5?

B. How did they get into fellowship with Christ (1:9, 4)?

C. First Corinthians 1:1-9 is similar to Ephesians 1:3-14: both emphasize the spiritual blessings that are in Christ. Humility begins by understanding that on our own merits, we are deserving of death. But God had not abandoned the Corinthians to their own moral degradation. He had provided access for them into Christ by the gospel. This should humble them, and us. What a shame that they were now focused on themselves and even attacking the one who brought the gospel to them.

2. What is Paul actually pleading for in 1 Cor 1:10? After all, he will later acknowledge a relative degree of knowledge among believers leading to conscience problems (cf. 1 Cor 8:7-13; he calls these brethren “weak” who are yet imperfect in understanding and obligates the “strong” to respect and help them).

3. Explain in context why Paul is thankful that he did not personally baptize many in Corinth and why he says, “*Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.*”

4. Tie together the concepts of the rhetorical questions in 1 Cor 1:13. What do crucifixion, baptism and “name” have to do with each other?

5. What kind of people judge the principle/message of the cross to be foolishness? Did God know they would react this way?

6. What limitation is placed upon earthly wisdom in 1 Cor 1:21?

7. Can you differentiate between what the Jews, as a class, sought in “religion” and what the Gentiles, as a class, sought (1 Cor 1:22)? How do you think people today act similarly?

8. What does a believer see in the sacrifice of Jesus?

9. Because of the nature of the gospel message, what is generally true about those who accept it and conform to it (1 Cor 1:26-27)?

10. How do these truths of the gospel reflect glory upon God? Why is it thus so wrong for men to seek glory for themselves?

11. How does Jer 9:23-24 reflect this truth?

12. Who made it possible for us to be “in Christ” (1 Cor 1:30)? And what does Jesus mean to us?

13. Summarize in your own words this vital opening section of the epistle. What does Paul try to get them to see at the outset?



GENERAL THEMES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Lesson 2: Chapter 2

Snapshots:

1. Paul contrasts the gospel he preached with the sophistry and rhetoric so admired by the Greek-influenced world (1 Cor 2:1-5). Such oratory skill was praised, a skill Paul apparently lacked (cf. 2 Cor 11:6; 10:10). Personally, Paul felt inadequate, but he also knew that his message was of divine origin. Oratorical skill exalts the man; the gospel exalts God who gives the message its substance and power. Paul was deeply aware that his original theology was fatally flawed; his mindset was of those who “*crucified the Lord of glory*” (2:8). This humility governed everything he did; thus he is deeply agitated by the shallow vainglory of the sectarians.
2. There is a vast chasm between the mind of man and the mind of God (1 Cor 2:6-9). The human mind simply cannot fathom the plans and purposes of God. The proof: the “*intelligentia*” of both Jew and Gentile crucified Christ. They had no more insight and understanding than to reject the manifestation of God in their midst.
3. In the third section of this chapter (1 Cor 2:10-16) Paul affirms that God has condescended to reveal His sublime thoughts to puny, wretched men. If we cannot even “*read*” the mind of another human being, how can we possibly know the mind of God – unless He reveals it. And He has through the Holy Spirit. Again, where is the boasting in this? Why should a prophet or another spiritually gifted individual feel superior when all we do is use the tools God has given us? Remember as we study these points: Paul deals with the overall context of factions and pride over men in chapters 1-4. See the concepts in this light and *then* make use of them appropriately in other contexts.

Study Points:

1. Note the following contrasts in 2:1-5:

Human oratory

Excellence of speech/wisdom – 2:1
Persuasive words of human wisdom – 2:4
“That your faith should not be in *but in ...”*
The wisdom of men – 2:5

Inspired Gospel Preaching

Jesus Christ and Him crucified – 2:2
Demonstration of the Spirit and power – 2:4
The power of God – 2:5

2. What does it seem that the weakness/fear/trembling Paul felt in Corinth was tempting him to do with the gospel?

3. Paul picks up on the word “wisdom” (Gk. *sophia*), for he uses it seven times and implies it at least once more. Note Mike Willis’ comment:

“The golden age of Grecian rhetoric (*e.g.* Demosthenes) was already past. By this time rhetoric had fallen from its rank in the higher education of the Greeks. Instead of being the art of thoughtful persuasion which depended largely on a cultured skill in words of conviction, it was now only a method of amusing audiences. High sounding and flippant discussion on subjects such as art, morals, and literature which had little or no grasp of reality were common to Grecian society. Paul had no part in this type of word games” (*A Commentary on Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 58).

4. When did God “ordain” the “mystery” and for what purpose?
5. What is the Holy Spirit’s source of information in what He reveals?
6. How does the Spirit communicate these things? What do you think the phrase “comparing spiritual things with spiritual” means?
7. What other than “raw intellect” does Paul say is needed to understand God’s message (2:14)? Describe a “natural man.”
8. How does this explain why “the rulers of this age” did not “know” they were crucifying the Lord? Did they lack information, or something else?
9. What is the spiritual man equipped to do (2:15)? What can the natural man not rightfully do in regard to the spiritual man?
10. What is the end result of the Spirit’s revelation? What do Christians have access to?
11. What is the practical application if this in light of the context of 1 Cor 1-4?



GENERAL THEMES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Lesson 3: Chapters 3-4

Snapshots:

1. After having set forth various principles addressing the work of God via the cross and the revelation of His mind, Paul returns to the Corinthians specifically (1 Cor 3:1-4). He has some hard things to say to them, summarized in the following observation: they are behaving like immature children, and worldly values still have a strong grip on them.
2. Paul now works to put preachers and spiritual workers in proper perspective (1 Cor 3:5-9). All men amount to are instruments in the hand of God. Different men have different abilities, but God uses them all to achieve His ends. It is thus wrong to pit one against the other and build parties around them. To do so is to completely misunderstand the divine scheme.
3. Paul then issues an ominous warning concerning the outcome of the work of God's steward. All such work will be put to a fiery test, and then the steward himself will be tried by fire (1 Cor 3:10-17). Paul then reaches back to the OT for a comparison of the church with the temple. Just as defiling the temple carried the death penalty, so does defiling the church.
4. This warning is then followed with an exhortation (1 Cor 3:18-23). God has so arranged things that the Christian can be benefited by all things. Thus, a sectarian spirit is damaging not only to innocent bystanders; the adherents themselves are injured by depriving themselves of the full range of blessings God has intended for them.
5. Paul shows the inability of man to make accurate assessments of the heart (and worth) of another (1 Cor 4:1-5). The Corinthians' sectarian views intrude into God's realm; they are making judgments only He can make.
6. In a section of biting sarcasm, Paul needles the Corinthians for their arrogance (1 Cor 4:6-13). He charges them with carnal self-glorying, perhaps similar to James and John who thought the kingdom of Christ was about their personal advancement. Paul also gives some insight on society's perception of the apostles: "*we have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now*" (4:13).
7. Paul closes this section with personal appeals for their return to a proper assessment of things (1 Cor 4:14-21). He also issues a solemn warning about the punitive exercise of his apostolic power. Their actions will dictate the spirit in which he comes to them on his next visit.

Study Points:

Chapter 3

1. Paul mentioned the “natural man” in 2:14 who does not “*receive the things of the Spirit of God.*” The Corinthians had been open to revelation, but Paul affirms that they had not grown beyond their spiritual immaturity (3:1-2). But when he says in 3:3: “*you are still carnal,*” he means they were being dominated by fleshly motivations. What is the evidence of this?

2. There is a human tendency to exalt men based on traits which we value or admire, which really amounts to self-adulation. Sometimes it is harmlessly expressed in “fandom.” But when favoritism infiltrates the church, and one is promoted to the detriment of the other, then men are motivated by worldly wisdom and not spiritual principles. Note how many ways Paul puts human servants in perspective:
 - A. Who gave Paul and Apollos their respective abilities (3:5)?
 - B. Where does the principle of spiritual life originate (3:6)? (Think of the life-principle in the seed. All the farmer can do is plant/water, etc., but what truly makes the plant grow?)
 - C. “*For we are God’s _____*” (3:9).

3. Paul’s next point is the subject of much debate (1 Cor 3:10-15). Calvinism sees in this passage “once saved, always saved,” as if Paul is saying our whole life can be in ruins and our works sinful and inadequate, but we will be saved nonetheless. But the “work” Paul refers to is tied to teaching; he “planted” and Apollos “watered.” What is the “crop”? **Souls.**
 - A. Changing metaphors, Paul “*laid the foundation ... which is Jesus Christ*” (3:10-11; cf 2:2).
 - B. Apollos’ “watering” = “another builds on it ... gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw” (3:10, 12). This metaphor continues when Paul says, “*Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*” (3:16).
 - C. There is a coming “*fire [that] will test each one’s work, of what sort it is*” (3:13). This may be final judgment, or possibly the fires of trial, false doctrine and other earthly tribulations which also reveal one’s true spiritual identity. Paul envisions several scenarios:
 1. The teacher’s work endures → he receives a reward (3:14). Cf. 1 Thes 2:19-20.
 2. The teacher’s work is consumed → he suffers loss of “work” (i.e., people he worked to save falter and fail). Paul does not attribute this loss to the teacher, per se. But he is urging the utmost conscientiousness in teaching because of the very fact that all men’s “work” (those whom he has nurtured) will be put to the test.
 3. The teacher himself is tried by fire → “*but he himself will be saved*” (3:15). While it

may be true that the loss of a child of God is tied to a teacher that led him down a false path, Paul does not seem to be arguing this here. His point is more subtle. The fault of the men he is addressing is not false teaching but exalting of men; i.e., *laying a foundation other than Christ*. Sectarian competitiveness is turning the minds of the Corinthians toward humans; they are selecting their “champion” and exalting him for human qualities. This, Paul says, is not building “according to code,” for the building may not withstand the fire.

4. What is the OT imagery in 3:16-17? Explain “defiles the temple” in the present context.
5. Paul is very skeptical of those “wise in this age” (3:18; cf. 1:20-23 2:6; 8:2). What does he mean when he says, “*Let him become a fool that he may become wise*”?
6. How are the Corinthians limiting their blessings in 3:21-22?

Chapter 4

1. In his ongoing effort to restore a balanced view of preachers, Paul says he and others are merely servants and stewards (4:1). They are not to be party leaders or rallying points; they are not to be exalted by oratorical skill or personality. Rather, they are to be “faithful” in the discharge of their responsibilities (4:2; cf. the parable of the talents).
 - A. What do you think Paul means when he says, “*In fact, I do not even judge myself*”?
 - B. When Paul warns the Corinthians to “*judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes,*” does he contradict this when he directs the sinful man to be expelled in 1 Cor 5? Or does he violate his own principle when he indicts Hymenaeus and Philetus in 2 Tim 2:17-18?
2. Paul acknowledges that differences of ability or aptitude exist among God’s servants (4:7), but he attributes these differences to God’s “engineering,” not the ingenuity or efforts of man. What answers are implied to the rhetorical questions in 4:7?
3. What is the standard which should govern the assessments of God’s servants?
4. The arrogance indicated in 4:8 is truly astounding. The Corinthians had an elitist attitude that Paul will address throughout the epistle (cf. 8:1; 13:4; 14:36). They saw themselves as spiritually mature, advanced in knowledge, beyond the need of listening to an apostle. So Paul sarcastically contrasts them with the downtrodden apostles. List the contrasting characteristics mentioned by Paul in 4:8-13:

Corinthians

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Paul/apostles

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.
- 13.
- 14.

5. What distinction does Paul draw between himself and other teachers relative to the Corinthians (4:15)? Should they call him “Father Paul”? What exhortation does Paul draw from this special relationship?

6. What crucial concept of early teaching can we extract from 1 Cor 4:17?

7. What contrast does Paul draw between “word” and “power” relative to the kingdom? What did some in Corinth seem to think of Paul which made them unafraid of him (cf. 2 Cor 10:10-11; 1:15-18, 23)?



GENERAL THEMES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Lesson 4: Chapter 5

Snapshots:

1. Paul suddenly shifts gears to a new topic: he is mortified to learn that the Corinthians are tolerating a heinous form of fornication: a brother has a sexual relationship with his own step-mother. He both rebukes the Corinthians for their tolerance and commands the brother to be excluded from fellowship (5:1-8).
2. Paul then clarifies a misunderstanding of what he had earlier written (5:9-13). He acknowledges a difference of association with fellow Christians and with those of the world. We cannot avoid the necessary associations of commerce, employment, education, neighbors, etc. But we can control spiritual associations. In making this point, Paul reiterates that Christians must not tolerate the presence of determined sinners.

Study Points:

1. What was the reaction of the Corinthians to this situation (5:2)? How should they have felt? What did the wrong attitude keep them from doing?
2. How does Paul emphasize the authority of the act he commands (5:4)? Why do you think it was necessary to “pile on” these terms?
3. In what setting was this action to be implemented (5:4)?
4. Note the equivalent phrases of the action Paul commands the Corinthians to take in ...
 - a. 5:2 –
 - b. 5:5 –
 - c. 5:9, 11 – What additional description is given in 5:11b?
 - d. 5:13 –

5. What is the goal of this action to be taken (5:5)? Explain how expelling someone from fellowship might attain this goal.

6. Note the “do you not know” rebuke (5:6). Where have we seen this previously? How is “leaven” used as an illustration?

7. What is the difference between “keep company with” (5:9-10) and “unequally yoked together with” (2 Cor 6:14ff)? Is Paul contradicting himself in these two passages?

8. How extreme is the practice of such an action according to 5:11? Did Paul approve of believers eating in the home of unbelievers (1 Cor 10:27)? Why the difference?

9. To what extent do you think God expects such discipline to be observed in family relations? Are there family obligations that supersede spiritual fellowship?

10. What does Paul mean by judging those “outside” and “inside”? Does this mean Christians have no right to point out the errors of the wicked, as Paul did in Romans 1?



GENERAL THEMES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Lesson 5: Chapter 6

Snapshots:

1. In the middle of a section dealing with sexual issues (incest – ch 5; temple prostitution – ch 6b; marriage/celebrity – ch 7), Paul parenthetically deals with the issue of lawsuits in 6:1-11. Mike Willis comments: “A better view of the connection between chs. 5 and 6 is to view Paul’s comments in relation to the church’s failure to become involved in its own internal affairs. In one case, they failed to exercise discipline; in this case, they failed to intervene in personal disputes” (*A Commentary on Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 178).
2. Paul chides the Corinthians for submitting their disputes to heathen courts which do not operate on the principles of the kingdom, principles that Christians should observe when dealing with each other.
3. Paul then turns his attention to the matter of consorting with temple harlots. Because of the Corinthians’ conditioning to immorality, it seems that they had found a way to justify engaging in fornication with idolatrous priestesses. Judging by Paul’s argumentation, it seems as if they reasoned along the lines that such activity was a matter of indifference. They equated it with eating meat sacrificed to idols, which was not inherently wrong. Their analogy was in error, and Paul sets them straight.

Study Points:

1. Whereas the Corinthians turned a blind eye to gross immorality in ch 5, they were not so forgiving when their own rights were violated. Paul says, “*Dare any of you ...*”; again he is shocked to hear such reports of their behavior. How many times does Paul rebuke them with “*do you not know*” in this chapter?
2. Paul’s basic arguments regarding lawsuits are:
 - A. Disagreements are being submitted before the “unrighteous” (6:1). “Saints” are in a much better position to make fair judgments based on kingdom principles.
 - B. Saints will judge the world and angels as well (6:2-3). The nature of this judgment is not specifically revealed. Perhaps it is an outgrowth of the fact that saints have examined and accepted the legitimacy of the grand scheme of redemption, and the choice they have made will stand as condemnation of a sinful world and rebellious angels. Or maybe it is a judgment that involves more than this. Paul does not explain further. He merely says in his ar-

gument: “If you discern heavenly principles, can you not make the simpler, easier judgments – “the smallest matters” (6:2); the “things that pertain to this life” (6:3-4)?

C. What are the Corinthians inadvertently admitting when they appeal to courts to settle their grievances (even though they pride themselves on their “smarts”!)(6:5)?

D. Regardless of the judgment rendered by the courts, Paul says the mere fact that they took the matter to unbelievers is an _____ (6:7). Paul counsels that to accept the wrong is better than “airing dirty laundry” before the world.

3. **Special Note:** In my view, Paul’s reference to these controversies as “smallest matters” and “things that pertain to this life” put these issues into the category of mere differences of judgment, matters of fairness rather than criminal behavior or civil injury.

A. If it is a matter of clear transgression, what is the “tribunal” to help settle it (Mt 18:15-17)?

B. If it is a criminal matter, what is God’s appointed entity to deal with it (Rom 13:1-7)?

C. It is an error to conclude by 1 Corinthians 6 that a Christian cannot press criminal charges against a brother. The fact is that the church is not designed to investigate, prosecute and punish criminal behavior; the government is God’s agent for that. But in matters of judgment, fair play or difference of opinion, good and wise brethren certainly can and should render decisions that all can abide by.

4. In 6:9-11, Paul is giving a strong rebuke. He essentially says, “In defrauding your brethren (6:8), you are committing unrighteousness. *Do you not know* that unrighteousness excludes you from the kingdom?”

A. He further notes that they had already renounced their unrighteousness, even extreme forms of it. But they have slipped back; they think that they are excused from *practicing* righteousness in all its forms.

B. Reminder of their cleansing and sanctification should jar them into reassessing their view of each other and abandoning the pursuit of their “rights.”

5. It appears by Paul’s reference in 6:12-13 that the Corinthians were justifying their immoral practices with harlots on the basis of indifference. This may be difficult for us to fathom since we come from a completely different cultural perspective. Let’s note the Corinthians’ arguments and Paul’s answer to them:

A. 6:12 – Idolatrous prostitution is lawful, the satisfaction of a natural instinct (like eating).

Answer #1: Even if the argument was granted, not all lawful things are helpful. It is not

enough to justify a practice merely on the basis that it is lawful. Paul will later argue that “rights” must give way to “love.”

Answer #2: Christians must not sacrifice self-control to any behavior, even if a “right” or a matter of indifference.

- B. 6:13 – Relations with a temple prostitute is no different than eating. Just as eating is the fulfillment of a natural desire, so is sexual relations.

Answer #1: The stomach is made for food, but the body is not made for fornication. The eating process will eventually be done away, but the body will be transformed and glorified (6:14).

Answer #2: Your bodies are “members of Christ” (6:15). They exist for His purposes and to glorify Him. You cannot take what has been sanctified unto God and join it to a harlot without adverse consequence.

Answer #3: In sexual relations there is an intimate union formed between a man and a woman that can only be lawfully and fully enjoyed in the realm of marriage (6:16). It is inconsistent to join oneself to a harlot, thus perverting the marriage bond, and also be joined to Christ in spirit.

Answer #4: The sin of fornication is different from all other sins as “*he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body*” (6:18). True, other sins are done with the body and often have adverse effects upon one’s body, but physical intimacy with someone other than one’s mate corrupts the very nature of his creation. “Man” was created “male” and “female.” They were created to compliment one another in every way, but this is most intimately fulfilled in sexual union. It involves one so deeply in the mind and body of another that to cheapen it in the context of fornication is to uniquely sin against oneself.

- C. 6:19-20 – The last answer to the Corinthians’ argument is that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, perhaps a play on the temple harlots with whom the Corinthians are cavorting. Earlier Paul had said that the Corinthian church was the temple of the Spirit (3:16-17) in that God was dwelling among them as His people. Here Paul argues that the individual’s body is also the temple of God, and that it has been purchased by the blood of Christ for His use. Any tendency toward selfishness must be overcome by the knowledge that our lives/bodies are not our own, but we belong to God.

- D. In all these justifications of temple prostitution, the Corinthians demonstrated a shallow conception of their physical, spiritual and emotional make up. Paul is trying to rein them in and show them the fallacy, inconsistency and destructiveness of their thinking.

- E. So powerful and deceptive is fornication that Paul says we should just _____ it.



GENERAL THEMES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Lesson 6: Chapter 7

Snapshots:

1. In this chapter Paul covers various questions relative to marriage:
 - A. The legitimate realm physical desires (7:1-9).
 - B. Prohibition of believers to divorce (7:10-11).
 - C. The case of a believer married to an unbeliever (7:12-16).
 - D. A general principle of Christianity: belief in Christ is not a catalyst for sweeping social change (7:17-24).
 - E. The advisability of entering marriage due to the “present distress” (7:25-38).
 - F. The remarriage of widows (7:39-40).
2. Paul acknowledges that some things stated herein spring from his own personal judgment (7:25-28). Some things were previously addressed by the Lord (7:10-11). But Paul also enters an area that Jesus didn’t specifically address (7:12ff).
3. This chapter has given rise to much contradictory teaching; we must endeavor to handle it with care and honor the context to get a balanced view of Paul’s teaching.

Study Points:

1. Marriage itself seems under attack in Corinth. Perhaps some argue the opposite of the sexual libertarians of 6:12ff – that sexual relations ought to be abstained from as they encourage fleshly passions. Whatever the specific argument, Paul first balances celibacy against marriage:
 - A. The way to handle sexual desire is not to *abstain* from marriage but to *engage* in it – 7:2.
 - B. How should the husband/wife look at their own bodies in terms of sexual responsibility?
 - C. What is the only reason for self-imposed abstinence in marriage? And what is the danger even in this separation?

- D. To those in Corinth who were pushing celibacy as a more spiritual way of life, what does Paul say limits participation in the celibate life? What does Jesus say that is similar to this (Mt 19:11-12)?
2. What is the general rule of marriage stated by Paul in 7:10-11?
- A. Is this in agreement with Jesus' teaching? How did Jesus say it?
- B. In the eventuality of divorce (of which God would not approve), what are the only options?
3. If "the rest" = a Christian/non-Christian union, the marriage addressed in 7:10-11 would be a Christian/Christian union.
- A. As was the case in chapter 5, it seems some misunderstood the teaching on being married to a non-Christian. There is nothing in the gospel that makes such a union invalid. What, then, should the Christian do if the non-Christian is content to stay married?
- B. How does Paul describe God's approval of such a "mixed" marriage? Even if God approves, is it always a wise and/or expedient marital situation?
- C. What is the obligation of a Christian if the non-Christian insists on divorcing? How do you understand the words "not under bondage" (7:15)?
4. In 7:17-24, Paul contemplates various situations from which one might be called to salvation by the gospel: circumcised/uncircumcised; slave/free. These are not sinful states, for if they were repentance would demand a change. But Paul is saying that becoming a Christian does not result in societal upheaval.
- A. What is the main concern of the Christian according to 7:19?
- B. How should slave or free look at their particular circumstance (7:21-22)?
- C. Should Christians rise up en masse and demand social reconstruction to fit a Christian model? Cf. 5:12: *"For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside?"*

5. Paul discusses the strain that marriage places upon the Christian (7:25-35). His comments in the whole chapter are set against the backdrop of some undefined “present distress.” What is Paul’s aim in this advice?

A. *“Such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you”* (7:28).

B. *“I want you to be without care”* (7:32).

C. *“And I say this for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction”* (7:35).

6. Describe what kind of outlook Christians should have on things of this world according to 7:29-31.

7. What is the natural consequence of being married according to 7:33-34? And what happens when we add extra stress, like persecution, economic collapse, warfare, natural calamity, etc.?

8. What advice, then, does Paul give the man relative to his daughter being given in marriage?

9. What if he does not follow Paul’s advice? How might we benefit from Paul’s outlook in this matter?

10. Paul closes the chapter by considering the widow’s situation. Again, the general rule is *“a woman is bound by law as long as her husband lives”* (7:39; cf. 7:10-11). What is her liberty? What might be the wisest thing for her to do?



GENERAL THEMES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Lesson 7: Chapters 8-10 (1)

Snapshots:

1. The specific problem Paul addresses in chapters 8-10 is controversy surrounding eating meat sacrificed to idols. Given the historic cultural and religious differences between Jews and Gentiles, this controversy should not be surprising. Some considered themselves enlightened enough to eat such meat without scruple, reasoning that an animal offered to a non-existent being was untainted. Based on sheer intellect, they were correct.
2. But the underlying problem that Paul exposes is this: such a matter cannot be adequately settled on the issue of knowledge alone. When a “strong” brother exercises his liberty founded on knowledge and eats the meat, he sets a precedent for a “weak” brother, who still has a “hang up” about eating sacrificed meat, to do likewise and violate his conscience. This issue, Paul says, must be settled in the realm of love and consideration, not the cold, bold assertion of rights.
3. In chapter 8, Paul clarifies the issue and lays the responsibility for edification directly on the shoulders of the strong.
4. In chapter 9, Paul will bring into the discussion his own willingness to forego rights and liberties in order to gain as many as possible for Christ.

Study Notes:

Chapter 8:

1. In the Corinthian correspondence (cf. 7:1), the assertion seems to have been made that “we have all knowledge” (8:1). This sounds as if the letter advocated the position of the strong, those who wanted to continue to eat sacrificed meat unencumbered. Paul echoes their sentiment, but then adds this rejoinder: “*Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.*”
 - A. How does Paul further moderate an overemphasis on knowledge in 8:2?
 - B. What does Paul say is even more important than acquisition of proper data (8:3)?

2. Paul then grants that certain knowledge of God is true – 8:4-6. What does he say about:
 - A. Idols –
 - B. The Father –
 - C. Jesus Christ –
3. Paul then adds a “however” (8:7-8) ... *“However, there is not in everyone that knowledge.”*
 - A. Can you explain how a Christian could eat meat “with consciousness of the idol”?
 - B. In what category does Paul place food in 8:8?
4. Paul then issues a most sobering warning to those who do not have scruples about eating such meat – 8:9-13.
 - A. What impact does the example of the strong have on the weak – 8:9?
 - B. How, exactly, does the weak stumble – 8:10?
 - C. What is the consequence of violating his conscience – 8:11?
 - D. How does Paul describe the fault of the strong for encouraging this action – 8:12?
5. 8:13 is transitional. Paul declares that, based on the above implications, *“I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”* This leads him to give the example from his own life of foregoing liberty and keeping his desires in check so that he doesn’t impede others – *even in matters where he has the “right” to participate!*

Chapter 9:1-18:

1. In 9:1-2, Paul clearly establishes his apostleship by the Corinthians’ firsthand knowledge of his apostolic power worked in their midst (cf. 2 Cor 12:12). Paul must do this because of an

anti-Paul faction in Corinth. In order to establish his next point of self-denial, he made it clear that he had more than Christian rights; he had *apostolic* rights.

2. Paul next presents a series of _____ questions to advance his argument (9:3-13). How many of these questions do you count?
3. Here is Paul's line of reasoning:
 - A. 9:4-6 – Paul has equal rights with the other apostles to support himself and a believing wife through his apostolic work.
 - B. 9:7-11 – Paul appeals to everyday affairs and the Law of Moses to affirm that a man can be supported by his work.
 1. What occupations illustrate Paul's point?
 2. What does muzzling an ox have to do with evangelistic support? What type of argument does Paul use to apply this to a man?
 3. Paul then asks a comparative question: "*If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?*" (9:11).
 - C. 9:12-14 – Paul presses his point home by referring to men already supported by the Corinthians to teach (9:12); by the example of priests who live via their service (9:13); and finally by a direct command of the Lord (9:14).
4. But here is Paul's **punch line**: "*Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ*" (9:12). This is the point he is trying to drive home to the "strong," those who could eat meat without scruple. Nobody is stronger than Paul, but he is willing to sacrifice whatever it takes to further the kingdom.
5. Concerning his refusal of support from the Corinthians (which became a source of attack by his detractors, cf. 2 Cor 11:7-9; 12:13), Paul notes an inner motivation for this as well: it kept his true intentions honest.
 - A. Paul says of his preaching that "necessity is laid upon me" (9:16). In other words, Paul was compelled by the direct commission of Christ to pursue this apostolic work: "Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!"
 - B. Rather than indulge himself and use his apostolic liberties to the fullest (to compensate himself for this "bondage" to Christ), he supported himself to preach the gospel in order to verify his own motives to himself. Thus Paul is not commanding the "strong" in Corinth to do something he is not willing to do. In fact, this has been the whole focus of his life since that day the Lord appeared to him on the outskirts of Damascus.



GENERAL THEMES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Lesson 8: Chapters 8-10 (2)

Snapshots:

1. Paul continues to describe his own efforts at self-control (9:19-27).
2. He then draws a stern warning from the history of Israel (10:1-13). Lust, idolatry, sexual immorality and murmuring were constant temptations – even as they are for the Corinthians.
3. Then, after digressing to make various related points to support his argument, Paul returns to the main theme of idolatry in 10:14-11:1. He makes some specific applications concerning eating in idols' temples, buying meat in the market and eating in the home of an idolater.
4. It is interesting to note that Paul dealt with these specifics *only after* laying the groundwork of the attitude and outlook that should lead to the behaviors. He wants them to understand the principle, not just conform to an edict.

Study Notes:

1. Describe what Paul means when he says, “I have made myself a servant to all” (9:19).
2. What does Paul’s accommodation of the scruples and beliefs of others say about our attempts to teach the gospel? What is required of us beyond merely imparting information to the lost?
3. In 9:24-27, Paul illustrates his point with a local sporting event. The Isthmian games, held every two years, featured athletes who forfeited many liberties and pleasures in order to compete at a high level.
 - A. He says, “*Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown ...*” (9:25). Whether he speaks of the literal garland placed on the head or of the praise of men, he notes that great sacrifices are made by carnal men for temporary rewards.
 - B. “*But we for an imperishable crown*” (9:25b). Our stakes are much higher: on the positive side the crown of life; on the negative side “*lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified*” (9:27).

C. Note that when Paul speaks of disciplining his body and bringing it into subjection, in the present context he is not speaking of *sinful cravings* but the selfish exercise of his personal rights. True, we must control our carnal appetites, but even beyond this we must forfeit even things that may be right but which are not edifying to others. The standard for faithfulness is indeed high.

4. **Principles:** The story of Israel's trek through the wilderness is one of unfulfilled potential and capitulation to carnal desires. And, Paul warns, the Corinthians are close to emulating them.

A. Explain the "all ... most" contrast in 10:1-5.

B. Consider the episodes mentioned by Paul that brought God's wrath against Israel:

1. Lusting after evil things (10:6) – This may refer to the warped memories of the Israelites which focused only on the cucumbers, melons, leeks, etc. of Egypt while conveniently forgetting the slave labor, orders to kill the male babies, etc. (cf. Num 11:4, 34). Would the Corinthians likewise focus on the food associated with idolatry and forget the ignorance, guilt and fornication that came along with it?
2. Idolaters (10:7) – This is a reference to the making of the golden calf in Ex 32. Again, rather than work out their faith in an unseen (but well-evidenced) God, the people feared the absence of Moses and reverted back to their Egyptian conditioning.
3. Sexual immorality (10:8) – The Moabite women, at the instigation of Balaam, enticed the Israelites into fornication (Num 25:1ff; 31:16). This was late in the wilderness wandering and represented a great defeat when the end of the journey was in sight. And Paul has already addressed the sexual laxity among the Christians in Corinth; it was a particular weakness of the inhabitants of this city.
4. Temptation of God (10:9) – This reference is to the occasion when "*the people spoke against God and against Moses: 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread'*" (Num 21:5). This was a direct slap in the face of God for His care and provision for them, and He punished them with a plague of poisonous serpents.
5. Murmuring (10:10) – Two specific instances of murmuring are Numbers 14, where the congregation was stirred to rebellion by the evil report of the spies, and Numbers 16 in the aftermath of the rebellion of Korah. The essence of murmuring is standing in judgment of God, of finding Him deficient, unfair and incompetent. In the first instance God threatened to destroy all Israel (Num 14:11-12); in the second He sent a plague against them which was initially designed to "consume them in a moment" (16:45). Moses interceded on both occasions and spared the people great slaughter (although 14,700 died for complaining about Korah's treatment).

C. According to 10:6, 11, were the Corinthians so different from the Israelites? Are *we*??

D. What is Paul's point? That God's demands upon His children can be a hardship that, if not properly appreciated, leads to complaint and rebellion. The Corinthians must avoid the notion that breaking with idolatry causes them such a great hardship that they murmur against God or otherwise rebel against the great blessings of fellowship that He offers them.

5. **Application:** Flee from idolatry; do not eat in idols' temples (10:14-22).

A. How does Paul equate eating the Lord's supper with eating "of the table of demons"?

B. To do so, even with a "mental reservation" ("I know there's no substance to idols" – 10:19), is to provoke God's anger, just like the Israelites did in the wilderness.

6. **Principles:** List the two main principles that bear upon this question in ...

A. 10:23 –

B. 10:24 (cf. Ph 2:4) –

C. Again, not every issue can be settled by, "What does not specifically violate God's law?"

7. **Applications:** What should the Christian do about ...

A. Buying meat in the market – 10:25-26?

B. Eating in the home of an idolater – 10:27?

C. Eating a meal where the meat has specifically been identified as sacrificial – 10:28-29?

8. **Principles:**

A. Do everything to _____ (10:31).

B. Give no offense to _____ (10:32).

C. Seek to please others *for* _____ (10:33).

D. Imitate _____ (11:1).



GENERAL THEMES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Lesson 9: Chapter 11

Snapshots:

1. In chapters 11-14, Paul addresses issues that relate to worship gatherings of the Corinthians.
2. Two errors are addressed in chapter 11:
 - A. An insubordinate attitude was displayed among women who were exercising spiritual gifts of prayer and prophecy. Arrogance was not just the domain of men in Corinth; these women felt so superior in their gifts that they rejected the common tokens of womanhood.
 - B. The Lord's supper became a common meal fractured by social divisions.

Study Notes:

The Covering – 1 Cor 11:2-16:

1. 11:2-16 has long been a doctrinal battlefield: Is the passage eternally legislating a covering for women as they worship? Or is Paul dealing with a cultural feature and a temporary situation? Each Christian must weigh the arguments and decide his convictions.
 - A. Part of the difficulty lies in scant historical evidence concerning first century dress, specifically coverings. Both sides often claim that history supports their view.
 - B. Another difficulty is Paul's assertion that female head covering is consistent with divine order. This convinces some that the head covering is eternally mandated. Others say that Paul merely observes that the custom accords with divine order and that the Corinthian women have no grounds to violate social mores.
2. Note the various appeals Paul makes in persuading the Corinthian women of their error:
 - A. Man is head of the woman – 11:3.
 - B. A woman praying/prophesying uncovered is tantamount to her shaving herself – 11:5. A shaved woman, notes Paul, is assumed to be shameful (11:6).
 - C. Creation shows that woman is the glory of man – 11:7. She is “from” man (11:8); she is “for” man (11:9).

- D. Because of the angels – 11:10. The only scriptural parallel I see in this phrase relates to disobedient angels who “*did not keep their proper domain*” and are now “*reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day*” (Jude 6). While this explanation may not satisfy everyone, we should at the very least strive for an explanation that harmonizes with other Biblical teaching.
 - E. General propriety – 11:13-14. “Nature,” the general practice/habit of society, shows a consistency with an artificial covering: long, coiffed hair is an adornment of women, not men. Paul merely draws a parallel here, not a proof. As the feminine hairdo often sets the woman apart from a man, so does the veiling of a woman (this is akin to 11:5 – “shorn”).
 - F. General practice – 11:16. Paul argues that the Corinthians are out of step with the consistent rule/practice of other churches (cf. a similar observation in 14:36).
3. Consider (from a non-covering point of view):
- A. Paul’s comparison between men/women praying/prophesying covered/uncovered indicates that he contemplated them doing the *same thing*: that is, what he forbade men doing covered he forbade women doing *uncovered*. In public worship today, men and women are *not* doing the same thing when the male is leading a prayer and the female is sitting silently and following his lead. In this very act of allowing herself to be led she is showing submission.
 - B. The specific activity under consideration is “praying and prophesying.” I would suggest that these are spiritual gifts, and that the women themselves were doing this. This is quite different from what is practiced today as a woman puts on a covering *while someone else preaches/prays*. Another thought: preaching *does not equal* prophesying, as the latter was done by inspiration. So, to be accurate, only prayer would apply today. But remember, it is when *the woman herself prays* that she should be covered, not *when being led by a man*.
 - C. The essence of taking off the covering was a blurring of gender distinction. The woman in taking her covering off was emulating a man. Such is not the case with a covering today. A closer analogy to modern times – though an imperfect one – would be a woman showing up to teach a ladies class dressed in a suit and tie, wingtips and a cropped hairdo; i.e, trying to be like a man. But this analogy breaks down in that women today don’t wear women’s fashions in order to show submission to men.
 - D. The setting of 1 Cor 11 does not appear to be a mixed assembly as chapter 14 forbids a woman to speak in any leadership capacity in such a venue. But the uncovered woman in ch 11 is praying and prophesying, not merely *being led* in such.
 - E. The pro-covering view creates an article of religious clothing, something foreign to the NT.
4. Again, because of the controversial and personal nature of Paul’s teaching in this passage, each Christian woman must decide for herself whether she is worshipping in accordance with God’s will.

The Lord's Supper – 1 Cor 11:17-34:

1. *The problem:*

- A. The Lord's supper has become a matter of division instead of communion – 11:18, 22.
- B. A solemn memorial has become a gluttonous common meal – 11:21.
- C. What does Paul say they are actually *not* doing according to 11:20?
- D. What is one outcome of factions arising in a local church (11:19)?

2. *The result:*

- A. Some are shamed (the poor who are being excluded) – 11:22.
- B. Guilt of profaning the supper is incurred – 11:27, 29.
- C. This profaning of the Lord's supper is evidence of gross spiritual sickness – 11:30.

3. *The solution:*

- A. Confine social gatherings to the proper realm: the home – 11:22, 34.
- B. Wait for each other and commemorate the Lord's supper together – 11:33.
- C. Engage in inward examination; assess your attitude as you partake – 11:28. Is Paul saying that a Christian must be *worthy* to eat the supper? To what does the “worthiness” apply?
- D. Remember the solemn nature of the supper: a memorial of the death of the Lord – 11:23-25, and a proclamation of that death until He returns – 11:26.



GENERAL THEMES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Lesson 10: Chapters 12-14 (1)

Snapshots:

1. Paul now moves to his next major subject: the abuse of spiritual gifts. He begins by putting the gifts into the proper context: the variety of gifts is by design (12:1-11). They represent the differing contributions to the good of the whole, like the various organs of the body create a structural unity (12:12-31).
2. Then, in one of the most poetically descriptive passages in Scripture, Paul gets to the heart of the problem: the Corinthians are not acting in love toward one another (13:1-8). Specifically, they have assigned subjective values to the gifts, turning them into an occasion for competition. This arrogant spirit of gamesmanship evidences a lack of maturity; they are behaving like children and need to grow up in love.

Study Notes:

Chapter 12:

1. Paul first lays down a “litmus test”: “*no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit*” (12:3). This “speaking” stands in contrast to the “dumb” (mute) idols that formerly influenced them (12:2). It seems that there may have been controversy concerning the legitimacy of the pagan oracles that some in Corinth continued to hearken to. What these oracles may have said about Jesus is not known, but some disparaging comments had been made. Paul says such is *prima facie* evidence of false prophecy. It should be rejected at face value.
2. Continuing to establish true marks of the work of the Holy Spirit, and to rebuke them concerning their carnal competitiveness, Paul next offers a list of genuine gifts. Note the true unity in diversity concept:
 - A. Diversities (12:4): Gifts (*charisma* – 12:4), emphasizing free bestowal, not earned or developed skills; ministries (*diakonia* – 12:5), emphasizing the purpose of service; activities (*energema* – 12:6), emphasizing that God is behind it all accomplishing His divine will through Spirit-influenced men.
 - B. Common source: The Spirit, the bestower of the gifts (12:4); the Lord, the one who, as Redeemer, is being served by the gifts (12:5); God, the Father, who is accomplishing His ultimate purpose of salvation through the Spirit, His Son and His people – Christians.

- C. Common purpose: The manifestations of the Spirit are for the profit of all (12:7), not for personal notoriety or selfish ambition.
3. After enumerating various gifts (12:7-11), Paul refers to the human body as an illustration of the interdependence of Christian assets (12:12-26).
- A. From external observation, not to mention modern insight via microbiology, it is obvious that the body is comprised of a multitude of differing yet complimentary parts. So it is with Christ. Shall the one Spirit who causes men to be baptized into one body (12:13) then create factions in that body? This would lead to dysfunction.
- B. Resentment by the “lesser members” of the body – 12:15-20. Those on the bottom of the “totem pole” were marginalized into thinking they were unimportant. What literary device does Paul use to get his point across? To what is he appealing by these questions?
- C. Paul then establishes the importance of the “lesser members” of the body – 12:21-26.
1. What parts of the body are vital in 12:22? Can you give an example?
 2. In 12:23-24 Paul speaks of the waste/reproductive organs, parts considered “dishonorable” but also given more attention than others to make them presentable.
 3. Paul says that no schism should arise because of this interdependence. Rather, all the parts should have the same _____.
4. The application: 12:27-31 – “*Now you are the body of Christ and members individually.*” God has appointed different assets in the church as He has in the physical body. This should create *unity*, not rivalry. While it was not wrong to desire the “*best gifts*” (12:31), Paul will introduce “*a more excellent way*” that will put the exercise of the gifts in proper perspective.

Chapter 13:1-8:

1. Paul’s description of love, while couched context of spiritual gifts, looks all the way back to the beginning of the epistle. All of the Corinthians’ problems were fundamentally tied to the absence of genuine love. Thus “*the more excellent way*” contrasts with lawsuits, division, arrogance, inconsideration of the weak and other flaws that marred the Corinthian church.
2. Note Paul’s description of what love is/does – 12:4-5:
 - A. Suffers long (*makrothumia*) – Long-tempered, in control of emotions so that difficult circumstances can be endured. “Patient” is used in other translations. The Corinthians were volatile, “quick on the trigger.”
 - B. Kind (*chresteuomai*) – The word “kind” hardly needs defining, but Willis’ note on *chrestos* (Lk 5:39) is helpful. It describes old wine, which has mellowed and lost its sharpness. The Christian should be gentle and easy in his dealings with others; they should feel safe.

- C. Does not envy (*zeloo*) – Here is a jealousy over the abilities or position of others which becomes resentful. The Corinthians with the lesser gifts had no right to become envious.
- D. Does not parade itself (*perpereuomai*) – Bragging on one’s abilities or accomplishments is unloving. Note: There is a difference between sharing news of good fortune and desiring prominence at the expense of others out of insecurity.
- E. Not puffed up (*phusioo*) – This is the attitude behind the parading: arrogance/conceit.
- F. Does not behave rudely (*aschemoneo*) – Here is sensitivity to decency and decorum, the ability to account for the feelings of others. All are misunderstood at times and we inadvertently offend, but to be inordinately self-centered to the hurt of others is not loving.
- G. Does not seek its own (*ta heautes*) – Selfishness again defines the Corinthian church. This is the man who acts out of self-interest and is unconcerned about his impact on others.
- H. Not provoked (*paroxuno*) – This person has a chip on his shoulder. He is quickly irritated, overly sensitive. He explodes over the smallest matters.
- I. Thinks no evil (*logizomai*) – Most translations emphasize the practice of keeping a ledger on wrongs suffered. This is the first step toward bitterness and resentment. Love will remember that people make mistakes, and wisdom will recall one’s own faults and forgive.

3. 12:6-7:

- A. Does not rejoice in iniquity (*chairei epi te adikia*) – There should be no glee or sense of pleasure when wrong is done. We sometimes think happy thoughts when someone “gets what was coming to them.” But we must remember what sin cost God and the destructive effects of transgression upon not only the sinner but other innocent parties as well.
- B. Rejoices in the truth (*sugchairei de te aletheia*) – Interesting contrast between sin and truth. Sin rests upon deception, leading to suffering. Righteousness rests on truth, leading to joy.
- C. Bears all things (*stegei*) – Two possibilities: love is a strong foundation that can bear any load, or love conceals the faults of others and protects them in their vulnerability.
- D. Believes all things (*pisteuei*) – This is not a naïve view of the world that ignores reality but a desire to believe in and hope for the best in others.
- E. Hopes all things (*elpizei*) – Love does not resign itself to the worst in people; it does not lead to pessimistic despair and the extinguishing of hope for better things.
- F. Endures all things (*hupomono*) – The Christian is not exempt from disappointments, failures, injuries, abuse or any of life’s other traumas. What quality will see him through? Stubbornness? Raw tenacity? Self-confidence? An eye for an eye? No, it is **love** that endures all things.



GENERAL THEMES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Lesson 11: Chapters 12-14 (2)

Snapshots:

1. In the latter portion of chapter 13, Paul puts spiritual gifts in proper context by comparing them with the duration of love. Paul is saying that the Corinthians have things out of balance; they are putting too much emphasis on things that are temporary and neglecting things that are eternal (cf. Mt 23:23 for a similar criticism of the Jews).
2. Paul moves to correct abuse of the gifts in worship in chapter 14. He stresses that edification of the body is the reason for assembling, not showcasing individuals for their talents. Too, he says that they have exalted the lesser gift – tongues – at the expense of the more valuable tool of prophecy. He also faults them for their corruption of worship through a competitive drive for dominance. The worship at Corinth was chaos and confusion, and this Paul faults for being at odds with the very nature of God.

Study Notes:

1 Corinthians 13:8-13:

1. First Corinthians 13:8-13 presents some challenges of interpretation. The key to the section is understanding the phrase “that which is perfect” (NKJ, ASV), “the perfect” (ESV, RSV, NASB, Moffatt), “once perfection comes” (JB). Three main ideas are advanced:
 - A. When the completed NT comes. The thought is that when revelation is complete, the gifts will disappear as they are no longer needed.
 - B. When heavenly perfection is reached. This idea is that our present knowledge is still dim and incomplete, but in heaven we will know everything with clarity.
 - C. When we become spiritually mature. This view says that the Corinthians were behaving immaturely relative to the gifts. When they spiritually grow up, they will stop looking at the gifts as a form of competition.
2. Paul begins by saying “*love never fails,*” but prophecies, tongues and knowledge will all come to an end (13:8). These are the gifts that the Corinthians were so proud of and competed with one another over. Paul says “you are fighting over something that isn’t even going to last.”
3. In 13:9-11, Paul uses the progression of maturity to make his point. Initially, we think and

speak as children in our immaturity, then we “put away childish things” when we grow up. He does not say we put away toys; “childish things” refers back to our thinking and speaking.

4. In 13:12 Paul uses a “now ... then” progression in reference to a mirror. The apparent reference is to a crude, metal mirror common in his day which only gave a faint image of one’s real appearance. This is contrasted with a “face to face” image that is far superior in clarity.
5. Paul elevates love above hope and faith as the greatest expression of spirituality (13:13). Based on his argument that “love never fails” (13:8), Paul may be saying that love surpasses the others because of its endurance. Since hope will turn into possession (cf. Rom 8:24), and the end of faith is salvation (1 Pe 1:9), they will not continue in the heavenly state as they were on earth. But love will continue, though undoubtedly in a more mature way.

1 Corinthians 14:

1. Paul stresses in this chapter the fundamental purpose of assembling: *edification*. But the Corinthians have strayed from this, even as they strayed from the true purpose of the communion.

A. Finish these phrases and note the passage they are found in (NKJ version):

1. “He who prophesies speaks _____ and _____ and _____ to men.” Passage:
2. “He who prophesies edifies _____.” Passage:
3. “Since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the _____ of the _____ that you seek to excel.” Passage:
4. “Let _____ be done for edification.” Passage:

- B. The “competition” in the first part of the chapter (14:1-25) seems to be between those who prophesy and those who speak in foreign languages (without interpretation). For the purposes of the assembly, prophecy is superior to speaking in foreign tongues because the purpose of edification is achieved. But, as humans are disposed to do, this order had been inverted and tongue-speakers had more prestige.

1. How does Paul use musical instruments to make his point about uninterpreted tongues?
2. What is the result of ...
 - a. Speaking in a foreign language without interpretation (14:11)?
 - b. Praying/singing in a foreign language without interpretation (14:14, 16-17)?
 - c. An unbeliever seeing a multitude of Christians speaking in tongues (14:23)?

C. Paul's conclusion about prophecy vs. uninterpreted language in the assembly: *"I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may _____, than ten thousand words in a tongue"* (14:19).

2. The next major section deals with competition among the Corinthians to "hold the floor" (14:26-40). It seems that some wanted to dominate the proceedings and would not give way to others who had something to share via the Spirit. Paul's main conclusion here is that such self-willed, arrogant behavior is producing chaos. This is at odds with the nature of God and His design for the assembly:

A. *"For God is not the _____ of _____ but of _____, as in all the churches of the saints"* (14:33). Again, the Corinthians are out of step on this as they were with the "women's liberation movement" in chapter 11.

B. *"Let all things be done _____ and in _____"* (14:40).

3. What is the solution on uncontrolled tongue-speaking (14:27)?

4. What is the procedure when one receives a prophecy while another is speaking (14:30-31)?

5. What excuse does 14:32 seem to answer?

6. What are women doing to disrupt the assembly under the guise of clarification (14:34-35)?

7. What is the specific context of "silence" in 14:28, 30, 34? In what way does a woman "break silence" and violate Paul's teaching?

8. In 14:37, on what grounds does it appear that some are opposing Paul's teaching?

9. While these matters deal with the age of spiritual gifts, there are underlying principles that are valid whether the worship is accompanied by miraculous gifts or natural ones. Let us be careful to understand the specific statements of Paul in the proper context and make parallel applications to the present day.



GENERAL THEMES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Lesson 12: Chapter 15

Snapshots:

1. The last major issue Paul addresses concerns the resurrection. A faction in Corinth had come to believe that the resurrection of the body was not part of God's future plans. Paul says this is a grave mistake with serious and perhaps unanticipated consequences.
2. Paul first establishes the eyewitness testimony of Christ's resurrection (15:1-11), then says that such a truth is at odds with the claim that "*there is no resurrection of the dead*" (15:12).
3. Paul then shows that the resurrection is a necessary precursor to all things being brought to completion (15:20-28). This is followed by a sharp rebuke (15:29-34).
4. The rest of the chapter explains the rationality, sequence and process of a bodily resurrection (15:35-54). The chapter closes with a taunt aimed at death, a declaration of triumph and an exhortation to perseverance (15:55-58).

Study Notes:

1. A persistent danger for Christians is to gradually drift from basic truths. Paul "backs in" to the discussion of resurrection by reviewing the gospel "*which I preached to you, which you also received and in which you stand*" (15:1). At the heart of this gospel is the proclamation that "*Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures*" (15:3-4).

A. What evidence does Paul give of the resurrection?

B. Who saw Jesus "last of all"?

2. Paul says that "some among you" deny the resurrection (15:12). Factionalism in Corinth was rampant. There were a multitude of competing ideas, attitudes and desires in this church. Division was robbing Corinth of its potential and, worse, threatening its very existence.

3. List six implications of denying the resurrection in 15:13-19:

A.

- B.
- C.
- D.
- E.
- F.

4. When will the dead be raised according to 15:23?

5. What is the “last enemy” that will be destroyed when the end comes?

6. Paul deals with some practical implications of denying the resurrection in 15:29-34:

- A. Paul declares the “baptism for the dead” to be invalid – 15:29. What was this practice? The language is too vague to be certain, and this has given rise to much debate throughout Christian history. Whatever it referred to, Paul’s argument simply is: “If resurrection will not occur, then this contradicts the practice of being baptized for the dead, which apparently was accepted or advocated by those who denied resurrection.
- B. Paul and his apostolic companions “stand in jeopardy every hour” for no reason – 15:30. He had earlier said that their preaching is vain and they are false witnesses if Jesus had not been raised Himself. Based on Paul’s description of apostleship in 1 Cor 4:9-13, it is hard to find a sensible motive in choosing such hardship and persecution for so little in return.
- C. Denial of the resurrection is not merely a doctrinal inaccuracy. Such a teaching will inevitably lead to moral breakdown – 15:32. This is often overlooked by naïve idealists who seize upon novel interpretations. Sooner or later, they open the door to some concrete sin that undermines the saint.

7. Paul next addresses the idea that bodily resurrection is inconceivable, illogical. After all, how could God reconstitute a body eaten by wild beasts, drowned in the sea or consumed in a fire? And how can we comprehend a body that is not subject to hunger, weariness, limitations of time and space?

- A. Paul illustrates from nature that “*what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be*” (15:37). That is, the acorn does not resemble the oak. One life form (the seed) is planted, decays and comes forth with a completely different shape.
- B. Paul then points to the variety of “bodies” in nature. God has created a vast array of varying forms, both living and inanimate. This we should not let the limits of our imagination handcuff God, especially to the point of denying His creative (or recreative) power.

8. What are the various descriptions of the body sown in death (15:42-44)? How is it raised?

9. Whose image do we reflect in earthly life? Whose image will we then reflect in resurrection?

10. Describe the transition from “corruption” to “incorruption.”

Conclusion: Denying the resurrection *is to miss the whole point of what the human experience is about!* God has made us as a composite unity, spiritual beings housed in a body. In our present state, the body is suited for temporal existence. Our spirits interact with a material world limited by space, time and biological factors such as the need for food, sleep, exercise, etc. Our bodies are also affected by hostile forces. We are subject to disease, accident, wear and tear. Year by year, “our outward man is perishing” (2 Cor 4:16). We are distressed by this decay of the body because we instinctively understand it to be part of who we are.

Ideally, as our bodies and minds wear out and we digress toward death, we might be filled with joyful anticipation at the prospect of “graduating” to a higher degree of existence. But all of mankind has lived in bondage to the “fear of death” (Heb 2:15). This fear is generated by sin, which Paul calls “*the sting of death*” (15:56). Death and sin have always been the “checkmate” of mankind. Death affects all from peasant to aristocrat, from coward to champion. And to die in sin, alienated from God, is the true source of our dread at leaving this world.

“BUT THANKS BE TO GOD, WHO GIVES US THE VICTORY THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST” (15:57). The payment for sin has been made; the law-justification system has been replaced by faith-justification, and the result of this is the knowledge “*that (our) faith is not in vain in the Lord*” (15:58). Humanity has been restored to fellowship, purpose and true motivation to serve God diligently and faithfully through life. All of this through the gospel’s hope of resurrection.

Paul says in 2 Cor 5:4: “*For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.*” We are not designed to be “free-floating spirits.” We desire to be “further clothed.” Paul says the physical body has a role to play in this, that “it” is raised in incorruption (15:42). Our body will be reconstituted into a form that is suitable for heavenly living. What a joyful hope to be fashioned by God into a new being that can dwell in His very presence, to have a body that is not subject to harmful forces, that will not suffer decline and eventual separation from the heavenly host of friends and fellow saints.

The Corinthians were heading down a dangerous path in their infatuation with such speculations. Paul rebukes, exhorts and teaches in order to correct and restore them to sound thinking. May we also be properly instructed and motivated to “*be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord*” (15:58).



GENERAL THEMES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Lesson 13: Chapter 16; Review

Snapshots:

1. Paul gives instructions concerning the collection for the Jewish brethren in Jerusalem (16:1-4). The main passages in the NT dealing with this contribution are Ac 21:15ff; 24:17; Rom 15:22-31; 2 Cor 8-9.
2. He then reviews his future travel plans (16:5-9) and explains why Timothy is coming and why Apollos isn't (16:10-12).
3. He closes with general exhortations to faithfulness (16:13-16), thanks for their gift (16:17-18) and words of greeting and conclusion (16:19-24).

Study Notes:

1. On the procedure for collection (16:1-2), note the following points:
 - A. It is for the "saints." We learn in other places that these saints are in Jerusalem and of Jewish heritage (Rom 15:26-27; Ac 24:17).
 - B. There was uniformity among the contributors ("*as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also.*")
 - C. The contribution was to be made "*on the first day of the week.*" It was an individual collection: "*let each one of you.*" The standard of giving was "*as he may prosper.*" The purpose of this was "*that there be no collections when I come.*" Thus, this was a regular, weekly "storing up" to meet needs that congregations are justified to meet.
 - D. Since Paul envisions staying in Corinth perhaps for the winter, his instruction of not collecting when he comes does not envision a hurried, last-minute scurrying around to gather the funds. Rather, it seems that Paul was very concerned with the wrong appearance, and he didn't want the gathering to be associated with his coming – as if someone might say, "Yes, from the minute Paul got here he started reaching into people's pockets." Another consideration is that a last-minute collection would garner far less for the Jerusalem brethren than a purposed, long-term commitment based on steady income.
 - E. We must also understand this episode relative to authority to gather funds today. This contribution was unto a targeted need; it did not address local "operating" expenses. Paul had

already received funds from the Corinthian messengers (cf. 1 Cor 16:17), and he previously mentioned others who had been paid for their teaching/preaching among them (9:12). Also, the Corinthian church has been in existence for several years.

- 1) What was the method of gathering in these other situations? Did the early Jerusalem contributions follow such a “first day of the week” pattern? We simply do not have that information.
 - 2) Are we justified to use this precedent for collecting for normal operating expenses such as constructing buildings, providing Bible study material, paying preachers’ salaries, sending to evangelists in other places?
 - 3) If we answer “yes,” then we do so on the basis that this is an “approved apostolic example.” Such reasoning recognizes that this is the only NT teaching concerning the funding of congregational work, and that even though the contribution is situation-specific, it constitutes the only *known* procedure of gathering funds in the NT.
 - 4) If we answer “no,” we must be prepared for other implications. If this contribution does not constitute precedent, the first day of the week is not specific. Neither is the method fundraising: the church might establish a business, buy and sell property, sell its services or do any number of other things to fund its work. In fact, this is what has led to many religious groups becoming business ventures dressed in religious garb.
2. Paul writes 1 Corinthians from Ephesus and plans to stay there through Pentecost. How does he assess the situation in Ephesus? What does he say about Ephesus in 1 Cor 15:32? What are all of Paul’s plans subject to?
 3. What is Paul’s concern for Timothy in coming to Corinth?
 4. What does Paul call the household of Stephanas? How does he urge the Corinthians to respond to them?
 5. Why should men such as Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus be acknowledged?
 6. Love, grace and good wishes all around conclude the book. Paul ends on a high note of encouragement after writing a pointed, challenging epistle. He later expresses how concerned he was over the Corinthians’ reception of it and is relieved to learn that much good was done (cf. 2 Cor 7:4-11).

Summary Thoughts: The following is a selected list of guiding principles from 1 Corinthians:

1. Be of one mind – 1:10.
2. Glory in God – 1:31 (not men – 3:21; cf. 4:6).
3. Do not defile the temple (the church) – 3:17.
4. Follow Paul’s example – 4:16 (cf. 11:1).
5. Put away sinful brethren – 5:9-11, 13.
6. Be willing to accept wrong – 6:7.
7. Flee sexual immorality – 6:18.
8. Glorify God in body – 6:20 (cf. 10:31).
9. Satisfy sexual needs with lawful spouse – 7:2.
10. Satisfy the needs of spouse – 7:3-5.
11. Remain married – 7:10-11.
12. Serve God where you are – 7:17.
13. Hold on lightly to this world – 7:29-31.
14. Understand limits of knowledge – 8:2.
15. Do not make weak stumble – 8:9.
16. Be a servant to all to win souls – 9:22.
17. Discipline self, rule over desires – 9:27.
18. Look for escape from temptation – 10:13.
19. Flee from idolatry – 10:14.
20. Seek the well-being of others – 10:24.
21. Don’t rebel against gender roles – 11:3ff.
22. Examine motives in Lord’s supper – 11:28.
23. Respect all members of the body – 12:19, 25.
24. Do all with love – 13:1-3.
25. Be mature in understanding – 14:20.
26. Let all be done for edification – 14:26.
27. Do not be deceived – 15:33 (cf. 3:18).
28. Awake to righteousness, do not sin – 15:34.
29. Be diligent, fruitful in work – 15:58.
30. Use funds for good of others – 16:1-2.
31. Respect those who labor in teaching – 16:15.
32. Look forward to Christ’s return – 16:22.