

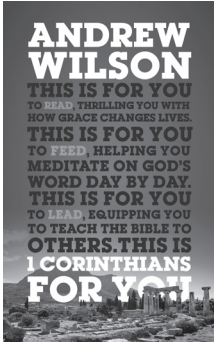
Andrew Wilson

1 Corinthians

The Grace-Changed Church



📖 **8-Session Bible Study**



1 Corinthians For You

These studies are adapted from *1 Corinthians For You*. If you are reading *1 Corinthians For You* alongside this Good Book Guide, here is how the studies in this booklet link to the chapters of *1 Corinthians For You*:

Study 1 > Ch 1-2	Study 5 > Ch 6-7
Study 2 > Ch 2-3	Study 6 > Ch 8
Study 3 > Ch 3-4	Study 7 > Ch 9-10
Study 4 > Ch 5	Study 8 > Ch 11-12

Find out more about *1 Corinthians For You* at:
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A Good Book Guide
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Introduction

One of the Bible writers described God’s word as “a lamp for my feet, a light on my path” (Psalm 119:105, NIV). God gave us the Bible to tell us about who he is and what he wants for us. He speaks through it by his Spirit and lights our way through life.

That means that we need to look carefully at the Bible and uncover its meaning—but we also need to apply what we’ve discovered to our lives.

Good Book Guides are designed to help you do just that. The sessions in this book are interactive and easy to lead. They’re perfect for use in groups or for personal study.

Let’s take a look at what is included in each session.

Talkabout: Every session starts with an ice-breaker question, designed to get people talking around a subject that links to the Bible study.

Investigate: These questions help you explore what the passage is about.

Apply: These questions are designed to get you thinking practically: what does this Bible teaching mean for you and your church?

Explore More: These optional sections help you to go deeper or to explore another part of the Bible which connects with the main passage.

Getting Personal: These sections are a chance for personal reflection. Some groups may feel comfortable discussing these, but you may prefer to look at them quietly as individuals instead—or leave them out.

Pray: Here, you’re invited to pray in the light of the truths and challenges you’ve seen in the study.

Each session is also designed to be easily split into two! Watch out for the **Apply** section that comes halfway through, and stop there if you haven’t got time to do the whole thing in one go.

In the back of the book, you’ll find a **Leader’s Guide**, which provides helpful notes on every question, along with everything else that group leaders need in order to facilitate a great session and help the group uncover the riches of God’s light-giving word.

Why Study 1 Corinthians?

Roman Corinth was a large, bustling, commercial and pluralistic city in southern Greece. It was the regional capital of Achaia, known among other things for its port, its sexual promiscuity and its hosting of the biennial Isthmian Games.

The apostle Paul had founded the church on his second missionary journey, spending a year and a half there (Acts 18:1-18). This letter was written a few years later, in the spring of AD 54 or 55, in response to receiving a worrying letter (see 1 Corinthians 7:1) and some even more worrying news (1:11) from the members of the church.

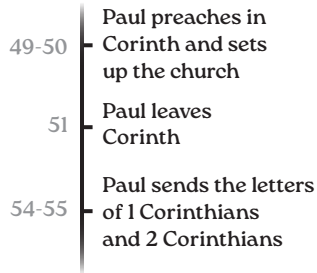
It is hard to be sure how large the church was. It cannot have been much less than 50, given all the names and households Paul mentions. But it is unlikely to have been more than 200, because the whole church met together in one place. If we imagine a church of 100 in a city of 50,000 we will not be too far out. It might encourage us to realise how similar those numbers are to the situation of many churches today.

Some New Testament churches struggled with opposition and persecution from the cities around them. The Corinthians faced the opposite problem: assimilation into a pagan, promiscuous, competitive and idolatrous culture. Much of Paul's effort in writing this letter—whether it relates to leadership, sexuality, the nature of the church, idol food, corporate worship or the resurrection—aims to re-establish the differences between the church and the city; between Christianity and idolatry. That is one of many reasons why it is such a helpful text for those of us who live in the post-Christian West. Paul tackles a huge variety of subjects, writing with punchy clarity while summarising the central themes of the Christian faith with real beauty.

Another reason to study 1 Corinthians is because the Corinthians were a mess, and God loved them anyway. This letter shows us grace in action. We get to watch an exasperated apostle talking to a rebellious and divisive church with a tenderness, affection and faith for transformation that can only come from the power of the Spirit, the example of Christ and the faithfulness of God. That's what this letter puts so richly on display. It brings hope to Corinthians everywhere, including you and me.



1 Corinthians 54-55 AD



1

Saved and Spirit-Filled

1 Corinthians 1 - 2

Talkabout

1. What would you say are some of the most common symptoms and causes of division in the church?

Investigate

The church at Corinth was in a mess. We will find that out very quickly. This letter gives a host of examples: squabbling, incest, sleeping with prostitutes, idolatry, drunkenness during Communion, chaotic worship services, denying the future resurrection, and who knows what else. This was a church that was divided along a whole range of fault lines.

 **Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9**

DICTIONARY

Apostle (v 1): someone chosen and sent by Jesus to teach and serve the Christian church.

Sosthenes (v 1): probably Paul's scribe.

Sanctified (v 2): made clean and pure.

Holy (v 2): set apart; totally pure.

Grace (v 3, 4): undeserved kindness.

2. Given the state that the Corinthian church was in, what is surprising about the way Paul starts his letter?

3. List all the things that these verses tell us about Jesus.

In Paul's world, letters followed a fairly set pattern. After the introductory elements of verses 1-9, he then turns to the main reason for his letter.

 **Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-17**

DICTIONARY

Apollos and **Cephas** (v 12): two other prominent church leaders.

Eloquence (v 17): a persuasive way of speaking.

4. What, according to these verses, was the primary problem in the Corinthian church (v 10-12)?

- Look ahead in your Bible at the summary headings in the rest of the letter. What else does the Corinthian church appear to have been divided over?

5. Why does it make no sense for Christians to divide around human leaders (v 13-17)?

Apply

Divisions between Christians today may not explicitly be about choosing a particular leader to follow, but Paul's warning still applies.

6. What secondary issues or individual loyalties do you think Christians today are most likely to divide over? What do we need to remember from these verses?

Getting Personal | OPTIONAL

Which are you more aware of in your church: the flaws that need correction or the evidences of God's grace? How does Paul's introduction help you with this? Pause to give thanks for your church and for God's work in it.

Investigate

The primary problem in the Corinthian church is division (v 10). But the root of division is almost always self-importance and arrogance. So before engaging with the factions and leaders in more detail in chapters 3 and 4, Paul looks first to cut the legs out from underneath worldly divisions by skewering human pride. He does this by drawing a series of contrasts—wise/foolish, strong/weak, influential/lowly—and showing how the gospel puts us on the “wrong” side of all of them.

 **Read 1 Corinthians 1:18 – 2:5**

DICTIONARY

Righteousness (1:30): being in right relationship with God.

Holiness (v 30): set apart as clean and pure.

Redemption (v 30): paying a price to free a slave.

7. Why does the Christian message sound foolish, both in its delivery (v 17-20) and its content (v 21-25)?

- Why does the Christian church look weak (v 26-31)?

- How does the gospel invert the world's expectations?

8. In what way have the Corinthians been boasting in human wisdom (v 12)? How do the truths of verses 28-31 counter the Corinthians' prideful division?

Explore More | OPTIONAL

Reread 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

- What lessons can we draw from these verses about the best way to go about gospel ministry?
- Do Paul's words here mean that it is wrong to use "wise and persuasive words" or powerful language in our talks and sermons? Why/why not?

Read 1 Corinthians 2:6-16

9. What contrasts does Paul draw between "the wisdom of this age" and God's wisdom (v 6-9)? Which wisdom will triumph in the end?
10. What does Paul say in verses 10-16 about the role of the Spirit? Is this different to how we tend to talk about the Spirit? If so, in what way?

Getting Personal | OPTIONAL

"What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived"—the things God has prepared for those who love him—these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit." (2:9-10)

The eternal future God has prepared for us will be beyond anything we've ever experienced. The reassurance for Paul, however, is not that our future cannot be imagined but that it can—but only by the Spirit's revelation (v 10). The Spirit provides a foretaste now of our unthinkably glorious future.

In what circumstances or areas of your life do you most need to hear this reassurance? How does it change your perspective on difficulties or disagreements in your life right now?

Apply

11. Discuss occasions when you have experienced the things described below. How would this passage encourage or challenge you in those moments?

- The Christian message feels weak and foolish.

- We explain the gospel to people and they just don't get it.

- We are tempted to feel inferior (or superior) about our own spirituality.

Pray

Praise God for the message of Christ Jesus—your righteousness, holiness and redemption (1:30)—and for his Spirit who dwells in you.

Pray that you and your church would walk together in humble unity, and for your leaders—that they would “preach Christ crucified” week by week (1:23).

Pray for friends and family who regard the Christian message as foolishness; ask God to show them the power and wisdom of the cross by his Spirit.