

THE LOOKOUT

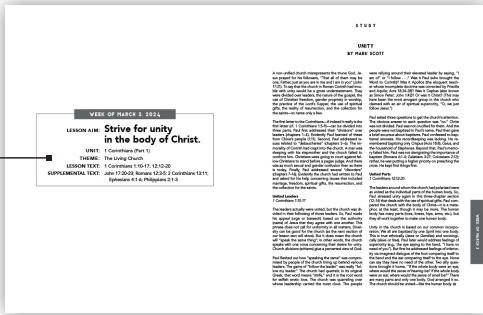
MARCH 2024

Unit: 1 Corinthians (Part 1) Theme: The Living Church

Overview: The church at Corinth had problems, as most churches do... even those that are vibrant and growing. Life was not easy in the pagan Roman culture. Life in the church was not much different. The Corinthian church had problems with unity, leaders, morality, marriage, freedoms, idolatry, spiritual gifts, love, the resurrection, and the collection for the saints. But the church of today can learn to be united from a divided church like Corinth. In this study, we highlight what constitutes unity, the nature of servant leadership, the constraints of freedom, the unifying significance of Communion, and the functioning of the body of Christ.

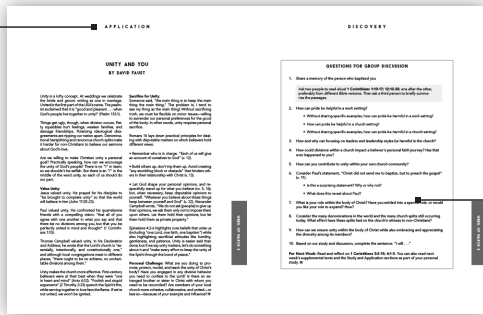
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF MARCH 17, 2024

LESSON AIM: **Know that you are free in Christ, but use your freedom to help others follow Christ.**

UNIT: 1 Corinthians (Part 1)

THEME: The Living Church

LESSON TEXT: 1 Corinthians 8:9-13; 9:19-23; 10:23-33

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 1 Corinthians 8:1-8; 9:1-18; 9:24—10:22;
Philippians 2:1-8

STUDY

SELFLESS LIBERTY

BY MARK SCOTT

In his book *Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don't*, Simon Sinek emphasized that “Great leaders sacrifice their own comfort—even their own survival—for the good of those in their care.” The apostle Paul could have written that line.

The troubled Corinthian church had two overarching problems. Their first “disorder” was composed of two parts. They had an over-realized eschatology (i.e., they thought they already had arrived in an exalted state and therefore they gave themselves to the disciplines of legalism or living in pure license with no restraints). They also had an under-realized eschatology (i.e., they questioned whether resurrection takes place—so what difference does it make how one lives life?). Both misunderstandings caused problems that manifested themselves throughout the Epistle.

Paul also had to address a second disorder. He did this in the “disorder” section of the Epistle—chapters 7–16—marked off with the rhetorical device, “Now concerning” (1 Corinthians 7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1; *English Standard Version*).

Paul addressed challenges related to eating meat offered to idols in a rather long and involved argument (chapters 8-10). Archaeologists have uncovered ancient Corinth’s meat market. Farmers would bring their meat to town to sell. The meat in the market was expensive. But the cheaper meat was sold in the pagan temples. After the pagan priests got their portion (not unlike the ancient Levites, who received a portion of that which was sacrificed), the meat was prayed over to the idol gods. Believers found themselves in a dilemma—should they eat this meat or not? At the heart of this very specific practice was the issue of Christian freedom.

Forfeiting Freedom

1 Corinthians 8:9-13

Early in 1 Corinthians 8, Paul acknowledged that many “so-called gods” (v. 5) were worshiped in Corinth, but he proclaimed, “There is no God but one” (v. 5), and he is the creator and sustainer of the universe. Some believers, armed with that knowledge, knew that eating food sacrificed to idols did not matter. Others, maybe newer Christians who could be called *weak*, struggled with this freedom due to their pagan past.

Paul did not want *the exercise of your rights* (authority) on the part of the “knowledgeable” Christians to cause others to stumble in their faith. To *wound* (cause to be struck down) one’s conscience (the moral umpire) is never good, and Paul did not want weak believers to sin due to the behavior of knowledgeable believers. Paul was willing to

become a vegetarian and forfeit his freedom rather than cause a fellow believer to fall.

Leveraging Freedom

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

To drive home his point, Paul used several illustrations about his freedoms, making applicable connections to apostles, soldiers, farmers, shepherds, and the Law (vv. 1-14). People who serve in these ways derive benefits from what they do. Paul chose not to use his rights as an apostle so that those benefits would not get in the way of the gospel. Paul could receive a salary or not for preaching, but he was compelled to preach nonetheless (9:15-18).

Paul’s goal was to be a universal man. He desired to be culturally, religiously, and ethnically agile. He leveraged his freedoms in Christ for the good of his evangelistic cause. To the Jews he became a Jew (Acts 21:20-26 is an example of such). [Those under the Law would also be Jews, but Paul admitted he was not saved by law—cf. Galatians 2:16.] To the Gentiles he could become a Gentile (Galatians 2:11-14). Gentiles were not under the law, but Paul made it clear that he was under the *Christ’s law*. To the weak people he could become a vegetarian. One of Paul’s great missionary principles was to leverage anything to *win* people to Christ.

Constructing Freedom

1 Corinthians 10:23-33

Not everything Paul had the right to do was “right to do.” He espoused this principle earlier in 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. Some scholars believe these passages are the keys to understanding 1 Corinthians. Christians have been set free (Galatians 5:1) but using freedom in non-*beneficial* ways is not *constructive*. Loving God and seeking the good of others should always be the goal.

Paul said it was permissible to eat meat offered to the idol gods based on Psalm 24:1. Everything belonged to the Lord in the first place. Paul constructed the model about Christian liberty as it related to conscience. Paul did not want Christians to be at the whim of just anyone’s conscience, but he did embrace letting “conscience be your guide.” When it comes to eating meat offered to the idol gods, give careful thought to the impact you may have on the new believer’s conscience. The unbeliever will not likely have any issue to raise.

For Paul, the most important thing is the glory of God. He desired no offense (that which leads to stumbling) be given to Jew, Greek, or the church. He desired to please God and save people. That is liberty at the service of a greater dream. ■

APPLICATION

EYE CONTACT

BY DAVID FAUST

When you walk down the sidewalk in a big city, do you notice that pedestrians avoid making eye contact? The same thing happens on elevators, buses, and subways. An unwritten rule forbids looking others in the eye. It's creepy if a stranger looks directly at your face.

In some situations, though, the best way to communicate is eyeball to eyeball. Effective public speakers make eye contact with their audience. Husbands and wives nurture affection by looking each other in the eyes and saying, "I love you." When parents correct their kids, they often say, "Look at me!"

Eye contact can be uncomfortable. When Jesus' critics scrutinized his actions because they suspected he was going to heal someone on the Sabbath day, he "looked around at them with anger . . . deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts" (Mark 3:5). In his encounter with the rich young ruler, the Lord "looked at him and loved him" (Mark 10:21)—making it obvious he cared, although the man still turned and walked away. In a heart-wrenching moment, "The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter" after the impetuous fisherman denied him three times (Luke 22:61).

God constantly pays attention. "The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good" (Proverbs 15:3). The psalmist David wanted to return the Lord's gaze. He prayed, "Your face, Lord, I will seek" (Psalm 27:8). Eye-opening things happen when we seek God's face. Here are three prayers that can help.

"Lord, open my eyes to understand your Word."

Some Scriptures are difficult to understand, but comprehension improves when a Bible reader prays, "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law" (Psalm 119:18).

"Lord, open my eyes to see what you're doing in your world."

Strife fills nations and neighborhoods. Violence and victimization, wars and rumors of wars abound. It's obvious that Satan is hard at work; do we recognize what God is doing?

"Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made" (Romans 1:20).

Even in dark, dangerous times, it's possible to see God's creative artistry in nature, his loving wisdom in answered prayers, his gracious work in transformed lives, and his providential supervision over history's ebb and flow. The songwriter assures us, "This is my Father's world," and "though the wrong seems oft' so strong, God is the ruler yet."

"Lord, open my eyes to see your people."

Spiritual nearsightedness drives us to care mainly about ourselves, but Christ calls us to follow a different rule: "No one should seek their own good, but the good of others" (1 Corinthians 10:24). When God opens the eyes of our hearts (Ephesians 1:18), we will no longer turn a blind eye to others around us. Instead of regarding our neighbors "from a worldly point of view," we will see their potential to be new creatures in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:16-17). Instead of insisting on our own way, we will sacrifice our personal preferences and remove obstacles that prevent others from hearing and believing the gospel.

After all, everyone is made in God's image—even strangers who avoid eye contact on crowded sidewalks and elevators. Behind those eyes that look away are souls who need to know God loves them.

Personal Challenge: Pray for God to open your eyes to his Word, his world, and his people—including others you tend to overlook or avoid. **L**

DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever modified your behavior out of respect for another person's beliefs? What did you do, and why?

Ask two people to read aloud **1 Corinthians 8:9-13; 9:19-23; 10:23-33**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passages.

2. What are some ways you have seen people abuse their freedoms in society?
3. Can you think of a modern example of how a mature Christian with good knowledge of Scripture might cause a newer or less-mature Christian to stumble? (Pay particular attention to the stark warning in 1 Corinthians 8:12.)
4. A lesson writer years ago contended that 1 Corinthians 8:13 ("If what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall") was Paul's application of Jesus' second great commandment ("Love your neighbor as yourself," Matthew 22:39). Would you be willing to give up an entire food group so that another would not turn their back on Christ?
5. In 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, Paul shares several examples of how he changed his behavior "to win as many as possible." Can you think of examples of how he perhaps . . .
 - "became like a Jew, to win the Jews" (v. 20)?
 - "became like one under the law . . . so as to win those under the law" (v. 20)?
 - "became like one not having the law . . . so as to win those not having the law" (v. 21)?
 - "became weak, to win the weak" (v. 22)?
6. Paul understood that not everyone would follow Jesus (see v. 22), but he continued his efforts to win souls to Christ, nonetheless. What would happen if most Christians adopted Paul's attitude and outlook?
7. What are some behaviors, practices, and habits Christians can adopt that are both beneficial *and* constructive (see 1 Corinthians 10:23)?
8. Paul wrote, "No one should seek their own good, but the good of others" (10:24). Does someone you personally know, or have known, come to mind as exemplifying that verse? Who?
9. What is one change you will make in your life this week that will be "for the glory of God" (10:31)?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **1 Corinthians 11:17-34**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■