



# 1 CORINTHIANS

A 12-WEEK STUDY

Jay Thomas



**J. I. Packer**

THEOLOGICAL EDITOR

**Dane C. Ortlund**

SERIES EDITOR

“This series is a tremendous resource for those wanting to study and teach the Bible with an understanding of how the gospel is woven throughout Scripture. Here are gospel-minded pastors and scholars doing gospel business from all the Scriptures. This is a biblical and theological feast preparing God’s people to apply the entire Bible to all of life with heart and mind wholly committed to Christ’s priorities.”

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# KNOWING THE BIBLE

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A 12-WEEK STUDY



Jay Thomas

*Knowing the Bible: 1 Corinthians, A 12-Week Study*

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## S E R I E S   P R E F A C E

**KNOWING THE BIBLE**, as the series title indicates, was created to help readers know and understand the meaning, the message, and the God of the Bible. Each volume in the series consists of 12 units that progressively take the reader through a clear, concise study of that book of the Bible. In this way, any given volume can fruitfully be used in a 12-week format either in group study, such as in a church-based context, or in individual study. Of course, these 12 studies could be completed in fewer or more than 12 weeks, as convenient, depending on the context in which they are used.

Each study unit gives an overview of the text at hand before digging into it with a series of questions for reflection or discussion. The unit then concludes by highlighting the gospel of grace in each passage (“Gospel Glimpses”), identifying whole-Bible themes that occur in the passage (“Whole-Bible Connections”), and pinpointing Christian doctrines that are affirmed in the passage (“Theological Soundings”).

The final component to each unit is a section for reflecting on personal and practical implications from the passage at hand. The layout provides space for recording responses to the questions proposed, and we think readers need to do this to get the full benefit of the exercise. The series also includes definitions of key words. These definitions are indicated by a note number in the text and are found at the end of each chapter.

Lastly, for help in understanding the Bible in this deeper way, we would urge the reader to use the ESV Bible and the *ESV Study Bible*, which are available online at [www.esvbible.org](http://www.esvbible.org). The *Knowing the Bible* series is also available online. Additional 12-week studies covering each book of the Bible will be added as they become available.

May the Lord greatly bless your study as you seek to know him through knowing his Word.

J. I. Packer  
Lane T. Dennis

# WEEK 1: OVERVIEW



## Getting Acquainted

The apostle<sup>1</sup> Paul's epistle<sup>2</sup> to the Corinthian church covers many different theological and practical questions, but there is one central issue he is addressing, and that is unity. The Corinthian church was fractured, and the chief reason was pride. This pride manifested itself in a skewed view of the gospel,<sup>3</sup> which led to sinful attitudes about things such as speech and knowledge, and a misuse of their spiritual gifts.

Like many churches today, the Corinthian church was very gifted. They were intellectually sharp; some were financially blessed; they were variously talented and had very visible and powerful gifts from the Holy Spirit. Yet those gifts were not submitted to the greatest of the Spirit's purposes in human lives, namely, love. Paul argues throughout this letter that Christ-exalting, cross-defined love must replace the puffed-up pride that coursed through this church. In fact, a key principle in 1 Corinthians is that giftedness without character leads to bondage and sin, not freedom and redemption.

At the heart of this book is the reality of the cross and resurrection. Paul admonishes this church to return to the logic and pattern of the gospel, so that pride is replaced with servant-hearted love and unity.

## Placing It in the Larger Story

First Corinthians is one of Paul's letters to a first-century church in ancient Corinth. Jesus had completed his earthly ministry, had died on a cross for the

## WEEK 1: OVERVIEW

sins of the world, had been raised from the dead in fulfillment and victory, and had returned to his Father in heaven. The Spirit had been given in full at Pentecost, and the church had begun to grow throughout Asia Minor, with both Jews and Gentiles being brought in. This letter is one of many epistles written to local churches that were growing and wrestling with what it means to be faithful communities of Christ's followers. Each church had unique questions and struggles, and the church at Corinth was no exception. This letter addresses a fundamental and ongoing issue for any local church: how does the gospel unite God's people in humility and love?

### Key Verse

“So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” (1 Cor. 13:13)

### Date and Historical Background

The apostle Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthian church sometime between 53–55 AD, toward the end of his three-year ministry in Ephesus. First Corinthians is actually one of several letters exchanged with this church, but only 1 and 2 Corinthians survive as part of the inspired canon of the Bible.

The ancient city of Corinth, home of the church to which Paul addressed this letter, was formerly a Greek settlement and had been rebuilt after a devastating war in 146 BC. It was a port town and was situated along a trade route. Corinth was prosperous, what we might refer to today as an economically resourceful, bourgeois, new-money town. With those characteristics came cultural dilemmas for the church, which was made up mostly of Gentile converts. Among these challenges were the lure of wealth, social elitism, and rampant sexual temptations tied to paganism. This was a church of new believers who struggled to transcend the values of the Hellenistic, pagan world.

Paul sternly, but pastorally, exhorted this church to seek the better way, the way of Christ-centered, humble, loving unity built upon the cross-cultural reality of the gospel.

### Outline

- I. Epistolary Introduction to the Letter's Main Themes (1:1–9)
  - A. Greeting: apostleship, sanctity, and unity (1:1–3)
  - B. Thanksgiving: speech, knowledge, and spiritual gifts (1:4–9)

- II. Divisions over Christian Preachers (1:10–4:21)
  - A. The problem reported (1:10–17a)
  - B. God’s wisdom answers the problem (1:17b–4:21)
    - 1. The nature of God’s wisdom (1:17b–2:16)
    - 2. God’s wisdom applied to Apollos, Paul, and the Corinthians (3:1–4:21)
- III. A Report of Sexual Immorality and Legal Wrangling (5:1–6:20)
  - A. Incest, arrogance, and the need for discipline (5:1–13)
  - B. Trivial cases before unrighteous judges (6:1–11)
  - C. Sexual immorality and the body’s resurrection (6:12–20)
- IV. Three Issues from a Corinthian Letter (7:1–11:1)
  - A. Marriage, divorce, and unchangeable circumstances (7:1–24)
  - B. The betrothed and widows (7:25–40)
  - C. Food offered to idols (8:1–11:1)
- V. Divisions over Corporate Worship (11:2–14:40)
  - A. Head coverings and worship (11:2–16)
  - B. Social snobbery at the Lord’s Supper (11:17–34)
  - C. Elevating one spiritual gift above others (12:1–14:40)
- VI. The Futility of Faith If the Dead Are Not Raised (15:1–58)
  - A. The truthfulness of the traditions about Christ’s resurrection (15:1–11)
  - B. Christ’s resurrection and the resurrection of believers (15:12–34)
  - C. The nature of the resurrection body (15:35–58)
- VII. The Collection for the Saints and Travel Plans (16:1–12)
- VIII. Closing Admonitions and Greetings (16:13–24)

**As You Get Started**

What is your understanding of how 1 Corinthians helps us to grasp the identity and role of Christ’s church? What in your view does 1 Corinthians uniquely contribute, theologically and practically, to our understanding of a truly Spirit-filled, faithful local church, as well as the Spirit-filled life of the individual believer?

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## WEEK 1: OVERVIEW

What is your current understanding of what 1 Corinthians contributes to Christian theology? How does this letter clarify our understanding of Christian unity, the role of preaching, church leadership, sexual ethics, principles for worship gatherings, the place and role of spiritual gifts, Christian freedom and conscience, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and other truths?

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What aspects of 1 Corinthians have confused you? Are there any specific questions about church life and personal discipleship that you hope to have answered through this study?

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### As You Finish This Unit . . .

**Take a moment now to ask for the Lord's blessing and help as you engage in this study of 1 Corinthians. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on a few key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight or underline these to review again in the future.**

#### Definitions

<sup>1</sup> **Apostle** – Means “one who is sent” and refers to one who is an official representative of another. In the NT, refers specifically to those whom Jesus chose in his lifetime to represent him; and Paul, whom Jesus encountered and commissioned on the Damascus road.

<sup>2</sup> **Epistle** – Essentially synonymous with “letter.” A literary form common in NT times. Epistles typically included: (1) designation of the author and recipient; (2) brief greetings and expressions of thanks; (3) the body of the letter; (4) personal greetings and signature; and (5) a closing doxology or blessing. Twenty-one books of the NT are epistles.

<sup>3</sup> **Gospel** – The common translation for a Greek word meaning “good news,” referring specifically to the good news of Jesus Christ and the salvation he made possible by his crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. *Gospel* with an initial capital letter refers to any of the four biblical accounts of Jesus' life on earth (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).



**THE BOOK OF 1 CORINTHIANS** contains Paul's exhortations to the church in Corinth, which was struggling with a lack of unity brought about by arrogance and divisiveness.

In this accessible study, pastor and author Jay Thomas helps readers understand the only remedy for such disunity: the pride-defeating truth of the gospel. At the heart of 1 Corinthians is the reality that the good news of Jesus Christ miraculously saves, changes, and unites God's people.

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## ABOUT THE *KNOWING THE BIBLE* SERIES

Over the course of 12 weeks, these studies explore books of the Bible and:

- Ask thoughtful questions to spur discussion
- Show how each passage unveils the gospel
- Tie the text in with the whole story of Scripture
- Illuminate the doctrines taught in each passage
- Invite you to discover practical implications
- Help you better understand and apply God's Word

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**GRAEME L. GOLDSWORTHY,**  
author, *According to Plan*

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BIBLE STUDY

