

A Still More Excellent Way

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Lesson One: Christians with Attitudes

Unity

If we're not careful, we don't have too much trouble detaching

the Bible from our lives. We treat it like a dictionary. We open it for five minutes, find the proof text we were looking for, and then set it back on the shelf without wondering what produced the proof text in the first place.

The way we sometimes treat 1 Corinthians 1:10 is a perfect example of this technique. Often, we only use this verse to beat up other churches. We take the sword of the Spirit and turn it into a club.

This is not an incorrect use of the verse. However, we cannot grasp just how appropriate a use it is until we look at the verse's context. The denominational world is the church in Corinth run amok. Denominations exist because they have become so attached to their human teachers that they prefer them to Jesus.

But what about us? How united are we? Our churches split all the time, and the brotherhood grapevine has it that some of these splits occur over things like the color of carpet in the church building. Is that any more pleasing to our Lord than the denominational spirit that we are so quick to condemn?

1 Corinthians isn't just a call to unity for the Corinthians. It's a call to unity for us as well, not just unity with our friends or those who are agreeable to us, but unity even with the brethren whom we might naturally dislike. Certainly, this can take work sometimes, but if following Jesus were easy, then everyone would do it.

1 Corinthians 1:1-17

1. With what self-description does Paul open the epistle? Why is this significant?

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7. For what is Paul thankful in 1 Corinthians 1:14-15? Why is this significant?
8. What is Paul trying to say in 1 Corinthians 1:17? Does it *really* mean that Paul wasn't meant to baptize anyone? If not, why not?

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

9. Is Paul jumping to an entirely new train of thought in 1 Corinthians 1:18, or is he just making a transition to the next point of the same argument? If the latter, what's the connection?
10. In what sense is the word of the cross "foolishness," as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:18? Why do we need to understand this?
11. What is the message of 1 Corinthians 1:19-21? In what areas of our lives today is it particularly relevant?

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3. Page 11, Question 6.
4. Page 15, Question 5.
5. Page 19, Question 6.
6. Page 23, Question 2.
7. Page 39, Question 3.
8. Page 45, Question 12.

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7. What's Paul talking about in 1 Corinthians 16:17-18? Why is this important?
8. What idea does Paul stress in 1 Corinthians 16:19-24? What makes this significant?

Review

This section cites eight questions throughout the book that are about the Corinthian church. Explain what we learned about the Corinthians from those questions, as well as what Paul said in response.

1. Page 3, Question 3
2. Page 3, Question 5.

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12. What is Paul talking about in 1 Corinthians 1:22-23? Where do we see similar things today?
13. What does 1 Corinthians 1:26 tell us about the Corinthians? When we consider the way the Corinthians were behaving, why is this especially ironic?
14. According to 1 Corinthians 1:27-28, was it accidental that the Corinthian church had this composition? What does this tell us about God and about His church?
15. What does 1 Corinthians 1:29 tell us about God's purpose in this? Why is this important? What does this have to do with the Corinthians?
16. Look at 1 Corinthians 1:30. In what sense is Jesus our "wisdom from God?"

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Lesson Two: Wisdom from Men, Wisdom from God

Paradigms

"Paradigm" is a fifty-cent word that's thrown around a lot by management consultants, but all it really means is "A way of looking at something." We see different paradigms at work all the time.

For example, if you hand a little girl and a little boy two identical piles of Legos and tell them to build something, their different paradigms will determine what they do. Boys like violent things and girls like sweet things, so generally speaking, the boy will end up making a gun or a tank and the girl will end up making a house. Although both of them start with the same raw materials, their different ways of looking at the world will lead to different results.

1 Corinthians 2:1-3:17 is really nothing more than the tale of two paradigms. Paul paints a picture of two men, the natural man and the spiritual man. These two men can take the same information or the same situation and react in completely different ways, all because of the way in which they think. The Corinthians' problem, he tells them, is that they're still thinking naturally when they ought to be thinking spiritually.

What's our paradigm? Do we think like God wants, or do we share the mindset of the world around us? Do we believe that God is the only road to happiness, or do we spend four hours a week in church and the rest of our lives in the materialistic rat race? Christianity isn't just about living right. It's about shifting paradigms, learning to see differently until we share the mind of Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:1-16

1. Is there a connection between Paul's argument in the last part of 1 Corinthians 1 and the first part of 1 Corinthians 2? If so, what is it?

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2. What principle does Paul establish concerning "the collection for the saints?" Was this collection precisely the same thing that we do today? What makes this example useful to us?
3. Why is Paul concerned about this particular collection? Consider passages like Romans 15:26-28 and 2 Corinthians 9:12-15 in your answer.
4. What does 1 Corinthians 16:5-12 tell us about what Paul is doing to edify the Corinthians? What lessons should we learn from this?
5. What instruction does Paul give in 1 Corinthians 16:14? How does this fit in with the overall theme of the book?
6. What's Paul's message in 1 Corinthians 16:15-16? What can we learn from this about the position of "such men?"

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Lesson Thirteen: Housekeeping and Review

Imperfection

By the end of 1 Corinthians, it's easy for us to see that the Corinthian church was a work in progress. They quarreled, tolerated immorality, cheated each other, made up rules about what being "spiritual" meant, messed up the Lord's Supper, and disrupted the assembly, to name just a few of their more egregious sins. If we knew of a church today with as many moral problems as the church in Corinth, we probably wouldn't even go near the place!

The amazing thing about Paul's letter to the Corinthians is not his repeated rebuke of their evil practices. Any of us would have said much the same thing, if not nearly as well. The amazing thing about it is that Paul—and by extension, Jesus—still had hope for that church. Paul believed that with the right instruction and the right attitude, even the wayward Corinthians could get their act together.

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This is a hope we would do well to learn with respect to the imperfect churches (and the imperfect Christians!) of our day. We need to face facts. No earthly body of the Lord's people is ever going to be perfect, and sooner or later, all of us are going to run into Christians who do wrong and even do us wrong.

In circumstances like those, we need to imitate Paul's attitude toward his disappointing Corinthian brethren. We're here to help God's people, not reject them in disgust. Let's never give up on each other. Let's believe in God and the ageless power of His word to transform lives. Even ours.

1 Corinthians 16:1-24

1. In 1 Corinthians 16:1, we see the final "now concerning" transition of the book. What's Paul's subject this time?

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2. How impressively does Paul present himself in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5? Why is this important?
3. What does Paul describe as the goal of his preaching in 1 Corinthians 2:5? How does this goal relate to everything else he's said so far?
4. Does Paul come to a new idea in these verses, or does he continue to elaborate on the same point? If the latter, how does this section fit with everything else?
5. What are the two kinds of wisdom contrasted in 1 Corinthians 2:6-9? How do they differ? What are some areas today where the contrast between these two kinds of wisdom appears?
6. According to 1 Corinthians 2:10-13, what is the source of hidden wisdom? Why is this important?

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7. What does 1 Corinthians 2:13 tell us about the level of detail the Spirit uses when He instructs God's people? Why is this significant?
8. In 1 Corinthians 2:14-16, what's the difference between the way that the natural man and the spiritual man perceive divine wisdom? What does this have to do with the Corinthians? What does it have to do with us?

1 Corinthians 3:1-17

9. According to 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, how highly does Paul rate the Corinthians' spirituality? Why? What does this have to do with what Paul has been talking about?
10. What does Paul mean when he describes the Corinthians as "walking like mere men" in 1 Corinthians 3:3? Why is this significant to us?
11. Why does Paul start talking about Apollos and himself in 1 Corinthians 3:5?

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11. According to 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, what sort of form will we have after the resurrection?
12. How will this new form differ from our current form? Consider 1 Corinthians 15:42-49 in your reply.
13. According to 1 Corinthians 15:50-54, what will happen to those of us who are still alive at the coming of Christ?
14. What does 1 Corinthians 15:58 tell us about the point of all of this? Why is this important?

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7. Considering the language of the context, especially passages like 1 Corinthians 15:15-16, what does Paul mean by “baptized for the dead” in 1 Corinthians 15:29? How does this fit with the rest of the context?
8. What does 1 Corinthians 15:32-34 reveal, both about the behavior of some members of the Corinthian church and about their motivation for rejecting the resurrection?

1 Corinthians 1:35-58

9. What hypothetical objection does Paul raise in 1 Corinthians 15:35-36? What does he think of those who would raise this objection if they got a chance? What does this tell us?
10. In 1 Corinthians 36-41, Paul makes two analogies to explain the truth about the resurrection of the dead. What are these analogies? What point is Paul trying to make with each one?

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12. Whom does Paul regard as responsible for growth in 1 Corinthians 3:6-7? Why is this important?
13. What's the connection between 1 Corinthians 3:5-9 and 1 Corinthians 3:10-17?
14. According to 1 Corinthians 3:11, what is the only foundation upon which a man can build? Why is this significant in the context? Why does it matter to us?
15. When Paul describes two levels of building quality in 1 Corinthians 3:12, does this tell us anything about what the Corinthians were fighting about? If so, what?
16. To whom is 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 addressed? In context, what is Paul talking about?

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Lesson Three: Servants, Not Sovereigns

Humility

Many critics of the church, both within its ranks and outside it,

like to rail against the allegedly Pharisaical attitude we possess. They claim that we delight in making up little rules about things that don't really matter and then looking down our noses at those who don't obey the rules.

This is unfair. Although there are some in any church who behave in this way, most churches are primarily composed of Christians who lovingly, prayerfully seek God's truth and desire to deliver His message of salvation to the lost. This, not Pharisaism, is the norm in the body of the Lord.

However, these erroneous allegations do have a grain of truth. It's all too easy for us to reason that because we have a correct understanding of the word, we are innately superior to those who don't. Thus, we become spiritually arrogant.

In this portion of 1 Corinthians, Paul exposes the fallacy behind this kind of reasoning. Just like the Corinthian church, none of us have anything that we did not receive. We have the word only because God gave it to us. We are saved only because God reached down to us through that word when we were every bit as undeserving as the worst murderer on death row.

We must constantly recognize our indebtedness and ignore Satan's calls to pride. We are responsible for opposing error, but when we do, we must speak with compassion, not with contempt.

1 Corinthians 3:18-4:5

1. Considering the context, whom does Paul describe in 1 Corinthians 3:18 when he mentions men who are "wise in this age?"

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2. According to 1 Corinthians 15:12, how are some of the Corinthians contradicting this teaching? What does this imply about them?
3. As per 1 Corinthians 15:13, what consequence attaches to the Corinthians' mistaken idea?
4. In 1 Corinthians 15:14-19, Paul lists a whole host of secondary consequences of the Corinthians' false belief. What are they? If they are true, what is left of Christianity? How does this relate back to Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 15:3?
5. 1 Corinthians 15:20-22 describes a symmetry between Adam and Christ. Explain this symmetry. Why is this important to understand?
6. In 1 Corinthians 15:23-28, Paul sets out a sequence of events. Relate this sequence, and explain its importance.

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Lesson Twelve: The Resurrection of the Dead

Life

"He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set

eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning to the end."

So says Ecclesiastes 3:11, and the words of Solomon are just as true today as they were 3000 years ago. Man still has eternity in his heart. Unlike all other animals, even when we are in the pink of health, we know that we are going to die, and we will tax our ingenuity to the limits in an effort to discover immortality.

Every day, it seems that a new medical breakthrough invades the headlines. Many of the greatest killers of human history, from smallpox to polio, have been reduced to curiosities buried in the depths of a disease control center.

However, death itself is not so easily defeated. Despite all of our triumphs, we still die. For every disease we conquer, death produces two more, like the inexhaustible foes on the hardest level of a video game. No matter how skillfully we play, sooner or later, it's game over for all of us.

Perhaps the greatest beauty of the Bible's message for all of us is that if we are in Christ, death is NOT death. As Paul so aptly notes, we merely fall asleep, to be awakened upon our Master's return. We shall all rise to meet Him in the clouds, and we shall dwell with Him forever in that land where death is only a memory. Like a flower from a seed, from our own deaths, we shall receive eternal life, if only we are His.

1 Corinthians 15:1-34

1. What are the facts Paul describes himself as preaching in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8? How important does Paul consider this teaching?

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2. How does someone "become foolish" as 1 Corinthians 3:18 instructs? John 9:39-41 contains a similar thought. Why do we need to recognize this?
3. 1 Corinthians 3:19 informs us that the wisdom of the world is foolishness before God. Where do we see examples today of this worldly-wisdom, spiritual-foolishness contrast?
4. What does Paul mean when he says that "all things belong to you" in 1 Corinthians 3:21? What does this have to do with Paul's overall argument?
5. When Paul urges the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 4:1 to regard him and those like him as stewards and servants, what viewpoint is he contradicting? How does this fit in with the message of the book?
6. What does 1 Corinthians 4:3 tell us about the Corinthian attitude toward various teachers?

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7. What's the point of 1 Corinthians 4:4? Why is this significant today?
8. In 1 Corinthians 4:5, Paul instructs the Corinthians not to go passing judgment before the time. Does this mean that we aren't supposed to criticize others when we see sin in their lives? If not, what does it mean?

1 Corinthians 4:6-17

9. When Paul tells the Corinthians not to "exceed what is written" in 1 Corinthians 4:6, what excesses do you think he has in mind?
10. In 1 Corinthians 4:6, what ultimate result does Paul want the Corinthians to avoid? Why is this relevant to us?
11. What argument does Paul make against the Corinthians' arrogance in 1 Corinthians 4:7? Why is this significant?

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12. What does 1 Corinthians 1:26 imply about the assembly practices of the Corinthians, especially in context. How does this frame discussion for the rest of the chapter? Why do we need to understand this?
13. What's the message of 1 Corinthians 14:29-32? Why is it important for us to understand this?
14. From the immediate context, what can we learn about the women mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35? Why is this significant?
15. What's the purpose, then, of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35? How does this relate to other Scriptural statements concerning the role of women?
16. What's the message of 1 Corinthians 14:40? Why is this important? How should we apply it today?

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7. What course of action does Paul urge in 1 Corinthians 14:15? In 1 Corinthians 14:13, how does Paul say this may be accomplished? Why is this significant?
8. What does Paul describe as his desire in 1 Corinthians 14:19? Why? What does this tell us about the use of spiritual gifts generally?

1 Corinthians 14:21-40

9. What is 1 Corinthians 14:21-22 talking about? What Scriptural examples do we have of this occurring? Why is this important?
10. What does 1 Corinthians 14:23 say will happen if an entire assembly speaks in tongues? Is this a result that God desires? Why is this important?
11. According to 1 Corinthians 14:24-25, what will happen if an entire assembly prophesies? Where in Scripture does prophecy produce this result?

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12. When Paul describes the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 4:8, is he describing their actual physical condition or their attitude? Why can this attitude be a problem in any congregation?
13. How does Paul describe the apostles in 1 Corinthians 4:8-13? How does their condition reflect the difference between natural wisdom and spiritual wisdom?
14. When we consider the status of the apostles, how ironic is the party spirit of the Corinthians? Why?
15. How does Paul describe his purpose in 1 Corinthians 4:14? How should this change the way we instruct others when they err?
16. Why is 1 Corinthians 4:16-17 significant to our understanding of how we should obey God?

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Lesson Four: Discernment or Arrogance?

Arrogance

“Arrogance” is a very interesting word. We often use it as just

another synonym for pride, but it has a shade of meaning beyond that. Someone is arrogant when they claim something for themselves that they do not possess. The trash-talking basketball player who boasts of his skill but fails on the court is arrogant.

The problem afflicting the first-century Corinthian church is not merely pride, but arrogance. They proclaim that they have enough spiritual understanding to sneer at some of the greatest teachers of their time, but their actual judgment is so lacking that they allow shocking immorality within the church.

Are we in the same boat? One of the most widely misapplied Scriptures today is Matthew 7:1. People who have never set foot in a church building know enough to parrot “Judge not lest ye be judged” at us when we try to teach them the truth. We often reply with passages like John 7:24, and we do so rightly.

However, when we judge others, we must be careful lest we fall into the trap of arrogance. Our good judgment must be evident in our lives before it appears on our lips. If we try to tell others where they’ve gone wrong when our own decisions reflect a lack of wisdom, we’ll get the response we deserve.

In all things, we need to remember James 3:13. James urges, “Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.”

1 Corinthians 4:18-5:5

1. When Paul describes the Corinthians’ arrogance in 1 Corinthians 4:18, what *specific* arrogance is he talking about? How does this fit with the message of the book to this point?

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2. When Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 14:2, does the phrase “no one understands” include the speaker? How do we know? Why is this important?
3. Why does 1 Corinthians 14:5 say about the relationship between prophecy and tongues? According to the verse, why is this true?
4. In 1 Corinthians 14:6, what does Paul say about the profit of tongue-speaking that does not produce edification? How is it possible for Paul to speak in tongues without producing edification?
5. In 1 Corinthians 14:9, how does Paul describe “unclear” speech? How does Paul define this unclear speech in 1 Corinthians 14:11?
6. When Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:14 that his mind is unfruitful when he prays in a tongue, what is he talking about? How do we know?

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Lesson Eleven: The Point of the Assembly

Edification

In Isaiah 55:11, God says of His word, "It will not return to me

empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it." We typically read this verse as referring to the gospel and its effect upon the honest heart, but it speaks with equal force about every aspect of God's word.

God is a God of purpose. He does not act aimlessly or irrationally, nor does He tell us to do pointless things. There is a "why" behind every commandment of God, and it is important for us to seek out that "why" as well as the obvious what. The better we understand God's reasons, the better we can act to accomplish His purposes.

Throughout 1 Corinthians 14, Paul says repeatedly that spiritual gifts are to be used for the purpose of edifying the assembly. When we consider Paul's words in Ephesians 4:11-13, we grasp his meaning. God intends the assembly of His people to result in more complete faith, more complete knowledge, greater spiritual maturity, and spiritual stature that is more like Christ's.

Although we no longer possess gifts that are miraculous in nature, we still have the same obligation to see that our assembling together fulfills God's purpose. It's not enough for us to just show up at the church building three times a week; instead, we must actively seek to accomplish God's will within ourselves and help others to fulfill it also. Only if our assembly conforms to God's purposes both outwardly and inwardly is it pleasing to Him.

1 Corinthians 14:1-20

1. How does 1 Corinthians 14 fit into the context of 1 Corinthians 12-13? Why do we need to understand this?

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2. In 1 Corinthians 4:19, Paul expresses his desire to find out the power of those who are arrogant. Is he talking about some kind of Holy Spirit duel? If not, what?
3. What is the "kingdom of God" mentioned in 1 Corinthians 4:20? What does it have to do with power?
4. What choice does Paul give the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 5:21? Does this tell us anything about the way we should behave?
5. According to 1 Corinthians 5:1, what immorality is a member of the church in Corinth practicing? Why is this such a big deal?
6. What does Paul say in 1 Corinthians 5:2 that helps us understand why he brings the immorality up here?

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7. What is Paul's response to this immorality? Why is this important?
8. What's going on in 1 Corinthians 5:5? What do Paul's words tell us about his attitude?

1 Corinthians 5:6-13

9. According to 1 Corinthians 5:6, what's the problem with the Corinthians' boasting? Does this have an application to us today?
10. What does Paul mean by "leaven" in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8? What comparison does Paul make that shows the significance of being unleavened?
11. What effect does being leavened have on a church? Why is this important?

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12. What sort of character do the attributes described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 describe?
13. How challenging is it to develop these attributes and this character? How do we get there?
14. In 1 Corinthians 13:8-10, Paul makes a second argument against valuing spiritual gifts above everything else. What is it?
15. What are some possible understandings of the partial and the perfect in 1 Corinthians 13:10? Which one is correct? Why?
16. How contextually related is 1 Corinthians 13:11-13 to 1 Corinthians 13:10? What implications does this have for our reading of the passage?

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7. What does 1 Corinthians 12:22-26 tell us about the way we need to deal with other members of our church? How can we do this?
8. What application of these ideas does Paul make to the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 12:27-30? Is there a way we should apply this? If so, how?

1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13

9. What does 1 Corinthians 12:31 tell us about the relationship between 1 Corinthians 12 and 1 Corinthians 13? Why is this significant? What does it have to do with Paul's message throughout the entire book?
10. Are the "if" statements in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 things that are literally true, even of Paul, or is Paul using hyperbole? That being the case, is it correct to use them to justify an actual practice? Why or why not? What's Paul's actual point here?
11. Does this mean that acts of obedience (or spiritual gifts, for that matter) are unimportant? Why or why not?

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12. As per 1 Corinthians 5:9-10, how did the Corinthians originally take Paul's instruction not to associate with the immoral? Why is this ironic?
13. Is Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 5:10 that we should associate with people in the world without restriction? Are there other Scriptures that modify the meaning of this passage? Ultimately, how should we behave toward non-Christians?
14. How does 1 Corinthians 5:11 require us to behave toward Christians who are living immorally? Practically, what do we need to do about it?
15. Are there other Scriptures that modify the meaning of this passage? How do they change the way we apply the basic rule?
16. When Paul mentions that the Corinthians already judge those who are within the church, what is he talking about? How does this relate to his overall argument thus far?

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Lesson Five: More Bad Judgment

Biology

One of the greatest "achievements" of Darwinism

has been to take man, the crown of God's creation, and reduce him in the eyes of many to just another clever animal. This transformation has had many ill effects, but one of the most dramatic has been in the sexual realm.

Back in the old days, when man was still special, sex was special too. Now, however, it has become a biological function practiced by those who are supposedly at the mercy of biology. Our teenagers can't possibly wait until marriage, those in the know tell us, nor can we ourselves remain faithful to our marriage vows until death. We're all just the hapless victims of hormonal tyranny.

The consequences of this viewpoint are many and tragic. No one knows who won the Sexual Revolution, but young people across the country are losing their battles every day. Nor do the divorce courts fail to bear witness to the deadliness of the worldview that sex is just biology. As family after family craters into the moonscape of infidelity, our nation continues to run up a spiritual debt that may never be paid off.

Thankfully, the Bible shows us a path that is incomparably better. It teaches us that sex really is special. Better still, sex is something that we can control rather than allowing it to control us. We choose what we will do with our lives; biology does not choose it for us. No matter where we've been, when we devote ourselves to following Jesus, our future is now in our hands.

1 Corinthians 6:1-11

1. What's the problem that Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 6:1?

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2. What does 1 Corinthians 12:3 mean, in light of the fact that we can say "Jesus is Lord" without possessing spiritual gifts?

3. What point does Paul make in 1 Corinthians 12:4? What does this point imply about the way that the Corinthians viewed spiritual gifts?

4. What does 1 Corinthians 12:12 tell us? What makes this verse so significant?

5. Some teachers use 1 Corinthians 12:13 to argue that baptism of the Holy Spirit is the baptism that saves the believer. Is this a correct use of the verse? Why or why not?

6. What does 1 Corinthians 12:15-20 tell us about the way we need to consider ourselves? Why is this important? What applications should we make?

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Lesson Ten: The Body of Christ

Love

There is no more misunderstood word in the Bible than the word

“love.” To many in our day, love is synonymous with license. They reason that because God loves us and we supposedly love God, we get to do whatever we want.

In reality, love imposes more restrictions on our conduct than any other Scriptural idea. Love is why the Pharisees zeroed in on the tithing of garden herbs. They saw that it was easier to follow a million tiny rules of their own devising than to obey the all-consuming law of love.

Love doesn't do away with a single one of God's commandments. Instead, it elevates their meaning to a higher plane. The Law of Moses said, “Don't murder.” The law of love says, “Don't hate.” Under the law of love, our hearts as well as our actions must be God's.

Far from allowing us to do whatever we naturally want, this law of love very often keeps us from it. It is not enough to serve with a heart full of weasel-words and legalism that allows us to obey the letter while side-stepping the intent. We must obey with a heart that truly desires to serve others and to serve God. Love is not license. It is the force that drove Jesus to the cross.

2 Corinthians 3:14-15 gets to the point. “For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.” There is nothing else.

1 Corinthians 12:1-30

1. What transition does 1 Corinthians 12:1 indicate? Why do we need to understand this?

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2. According to 1 Corinthians 6:2-4, why is it strange to Paul that the Corinthians have this problem? How does this fit with Paul's overall argument?
3. This passage tells us, among other things, that Christians will judge the world (6:2) and angels (6:3). In what sense is this true?
4. According to 1 Corinthians 6:5-6, what should the solution to this problem be? What application does this have for us today?
5. 1 Corinthians 6:7 tells us that it's a defeat for a Christian to sue another. How is this true?
6. What behavior does Paul condemn in 1 Corinthians 6:8? What does this say about the Corinthians' mindset? How does this condemnation fit into Paul's central point?

A Still More Excellent Way: Lesson Five

7. What does 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 tell us about those it describes? Why is this important to recognize?
8. According to 1 Corinthians 6:11, what can those described earlier choose to do? How important is this to the way that we understand serving God? Why?

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

9. What does Paul mean in 1 Corinthians 6:12 when he says that all things are lawful? What makes this understanding important to the way we live?
10. How does the point that Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 6:12 relate to the first part of this chapter?
11. What distinction does Paul make in 1 Corinthians 6:12-13? What does this have to do with the central concern he has about the Corinthians?

A Still More Excellent Way: Lesson Nine

12. According to 1 Corinthians 11:20-21, what behavior is this problem producing in the Corinthian church?
13. What ritual does Paul describe in 1 Corinthians 11:23-28? What does this ritual involve outwardly? What does this ritual involve inwardly? How is this relevant to us?
14. What failure in carrying out this ritual does Paul indicate in 1 Corinthians 11:29-30? What does Paul mean by this? What does this have to do with Paul's overall point in this section?
15. What is Paul talking about in 1 Corinthians 11:31-32? Does the action he attributes to the Lord still occur today? How?
16. According to 1 Corinthians 11:33-34, what does Paul direct the Corinthian church to do? How do we need to apply this direction today?

A Still More Excellent Way: Lesson Nine

7. What principle does Paul reassert in 1 Corinthians 11:11-12? How should this principle inform our understanding today?
8. In 1 Corinthians 11:13-16, what second argument does Paul advance in favor of his position? What is the implied basis of this argument?

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

9. In 1 Corinthians 11:17, Paul changes gears again. Based on 11:17 and 11:22, how does he feel about the Corinthians' actions that he's describing?
10. What basic problem does Paul set out in 1 Corinthians 11:18? Does this sound familiar?
11. In 1 Corinthians 11:19, to what does Paul attribute this problem? What application should we draw from this today?

A Still More Excellent Way: Lesson Five

12. 1 Corinthians 6:15 describes Christians as "members of Christ." Why is this significant? How should it change the way we live?
13. In 1 Corinthians 6:16-17, Paul sets out how one can become one flesh with a harlot, but one spirit with the Lord. What point is Paul making with this distinction?
14. According to 1 Corinthians 6:18, there's something unique about sexual immorality. What is it? How does this difference fit in with what Paul has been saying in the past couple of chapters?
15. In light of the previous question, what applications can we legitimately make from 1 Corinthians 6:19? Be careful!
16. 1 Corinthians 6:20 tells us that we are to glorify God in our body? What does this mean? How should we apply this understanding?

A Still More Excellent Way

Lesson Six: Adding to God's Law?

Pharisaism

Men typically leave the truth behind in one of two ways, both of

which we find illustrated in the history of the children of Israel. Before the captivity, the Israelites engaged in every kind of idolatry and immorality. They abandoned God's way, and God punished them for it.

The second Israelite apostasy, however, appears in the time of Christ. Paradoxically, it arose out of a desire to become even holier and more pleasing to God. Moved by this, the Pharisees began to enact their own binding spiritual regulations in addition to God's law.. As this movement grew, they began to emphasize those man-made regulations even over the divine commandment. Their search for man-made holiness led them to offend the holiness of God.

1 Corinthians 7 chronicles a similar event. The church at Corinth decided that sexual relations, even within marriage, were somehow impure, and that they could become holier by abstaining from them altogether. Paul fears that this misplaced search for holiness will even lead them to break the marriage covenant by divorcing one another, all supposedly to "please" God!

We need to be careful today, lest we fall into the trap of trying to invent our own path to holiness. God has told us everything we need to do to serve Him, and we need to be dedicated to observing all of His commandments. However, we must not add our own to the list. As history shows, that will only lead us to be less, not more, pleasing to Him.

1 Corinthians 7:1-16

1. What does 1 Corinthians 7:1 tell us about the structure of the book? Why is this important?

A Still More Excellent Way: Lesson Nine

2. What "tradition" in particular does Paul have in mind in 1 Corinthians 11:2 (Be careful!)? What does this tradition mean?
3. If a Christian woman in the modern-day U.S. became married but did not take her husband's last name, would it violate this tradition? Why or why not?
4. In 1 Corinthians 11:5-6, what action did some prophetesses in Corinth want to take that would also violate this tradition? Why would this action have violated the tradition?
5. In 1 Corinthians 11:7-10, how does Paul argue in favor of upholding this tradition?
6. What conclusion does Paul reach in 1 Corinthians 11:10? Is there any evidence in the Old Testament of Israelite women acting in accordance with this conclusion? Why is this important?

A Still More Excellent Way

Lesson Nine: Understanding God's Purposes

Context

In every area of our lives, we analyze data according to their

context. The way we perceive something very much depends on where we perceive it. When we see one man screaming insanely in the Wal-Mart parking lot, we are alarmed. When we see fifty thousand men screaming insanely at a football game, we think nothing of it.

This same idea of context is equally important to our understanding of the Bible. Each verse of God's word does not exist on its own in a spiritual vacuum; instead, its meaning is modified by the different contexts in which it exists.

The first context we need to consider is the section of Scripture in which a verse is found. This section may be just a few verses long; it may extend through several chapters. However, it typically is making an overall point, and the verse must be read according to that point.

Second, we must attend to the context of the book that includes the verse. The various books of the Bible were written over thousands of years, by dozens of different authors, to people in myriad places, for a number of different purposes, and all of those things should shape our understanding of a verse.

Finally, we must also read verses in the context of the Bible as a whole. Verses that appear to teach one thing may actually teach another when read in harmony with other parts of Scripture. Only when we master these three contexts can we gain the most understanding from God's word..

1 Corinthians 11:1-16

1. According to 1 Corinthians 11:1, is Paul's next subject something the Corinthians are doing correctly or not? Why?

A Still More Excellent Way: Lesson Six

2. On the basis of 1 Corinthians 7:5, what unwise practice were the Corinthians engaging in? Why might they have done this? How does this practice fit with what we've seen of them so far?
3. According to 1 Corinthians 7:1, 7-9, what was Paul's basic attitude toward Christians who chose to be celibate? What can we glean from this?
4. In 1 Corinthians 7:2-4, what does Paul prescribe for those who are unwilling to be celibate? What relevance does this idea have to us?
5. What's the connection between 1 Corinthians 7:1-9 and 7:10-16? How does understanding this help us to understand 7:10-16?
6. In 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, what basic principle does Paul give regarding divorce? Where does he say this instruction came from?

A Still More Excellent Way: Lesson Six

7. What does Paul mean in 1 Corinthians 7:12 when he says, "I say, not the Lord?"
8. Describe the two situations outlined in 1 Corinthians 7:12-15. Explain what the Christian is to do in each circumstance. Does anything in this passage say anything about the right to remarry after divorce?

1 Corinthians 7:17-40

9. What does 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 have to do with the immediate context?
10. What applications can we rightly draw from 1 Corinthians 7:17? What implications can we not draw? Why is this important?
11. Explain the point of 1 Corinthians 7:17. Why is this relevant to us today?

A Still More Excellent Way: Lesson Eight

12. What is Paul talking about again in 1 Corinthians 10:23? How does this relate to the larger context?
13. In 1 Corinthians 10:24-28, Paul sets out a number of practical guidelines for dealing with meat sacrificed to idols. Explain these guidelines. Where might we need to follow similar guidelines today?
14. What is Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 10:29-30? Why is this important both to his overall argument and to our understanding of it?
15. What's the basic point of 1 Corinthians 10:31? How do we need to apply it today?
16. What kind of "offense" is Paul talking about in 1 Corinthians 10:32? Why is this significant to our understanding of the text?

A Still More Excellent Way: Lesson Eight

7. Considering the context, how did Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 10:12 apply to the Corinthians? How can it apply to us today?
8. What's the message of 1 Corinthians 10:13? How should this be significant in our lives?

1 Corinthians 10:14-33

9. What connection does 1 Corinthians 10:14 have to 10:13? What connection does it have to the context of 1 Corinthians 9?
10. Why does Paul appeal to the Corinthians "as wise men" in 1 Corinthians 10:15?
11. Explain Paul's argument against idolatry in 1 Corinthians 10:16-21. What applications should we make from this argument today?

A Still More Excellent Way: Lesson Six

12. Considering the first-century context in which Paul is writing, what's his point in 1 Corinthians 7:19?
13. How should we understand Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 7:25?
14. What are the two reasons that Paul gives in this context for Christians to remain celibate? How does this discussion fit in with the entire chapter? What relevance do these reasons have today?
15. What is Paul talking about in 1 Corinthians 7:29-31?
16. What is the difference between what Paul advocates in this context and what many religious groups today practice? Why is it important for us to recognize this difference?

A Still More Excellent Way

Lesson Seven: Applying Christian Liberty

Peace

As Paul has emphasized repeatedly throughout 1 Corinthians,

“me” should not be a word that appears in the Christian vocabulary. Sadly, this was a lesson that the Corinthians needed to hear repeatedly. In this instance, many of the Corinthians recognized correctly that they had the liberty to eat meat sacrificed to idols, but in their exercise of this liberty, they encouraged those without their understanding to do something they thought was sinful. Even when the Corinthians were right, they still got it wrong.

Paul’s solution to the problem is both subtle and powerful. He points out that eating meat is not something that leads to pleasing God. If someone with a conscience problem partakes, though, their sin against their own conscience leads them to displease God. Paul then resolves never to eat meat again, if his action will lead a brother to sin. His entire argument is couched in terms of concern for the souls of others.

Sadly, there are numerous ways to misunderstand Paul’s reasoning. The Christian who tells another, “I don’t like what you’re doing, so you have to stop doing it” is missing the point. Nor does this passage put things that contribute to serving God on the table. A church does not need to burn its hymnals to satisfy one brother who disapproves.

However, it is equally wrong for us to look down on our brethren, even when they are misled. God’s truth should never lead us to arrogance. Let us only pursue the things that make for peace.

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

1. What does Paul credit the Corinthians with understanding in 1 Corinthians 8:1? Why does Paul mention this?

A Still More Excellent Way: Lesson Eight

2. Considering what we know of the Corinthian church, why does Paul include this discussion of self-control in the middle of a context on Christian liberty?
3. What point is Paul trying to make in 1 Corinthians 10:1-4? How is this point significant to his overall argument?
4. Why is 1 Corinthians 10:5 a surprising conclusion to what Paul is saying? What’s his point? What should we get out of it?
5. What four activities does Paul describe the Israelites as participating in in 1 Corinthians 7-10? Why does Paul warn the Corinthians against doing the same thing? What should this tell us?
6. What does Paul say about the record of the Israelites’ sin in 1 Corinthians 10:11? Why is this important to the way we understand the Old Testament?

A Still More Excellent Way

Lesson Eight: Striking a Spiritual Balance

Overreaction

For whatever reason, humanity seems to run to ideological extremes.

If we like an idea, we embrace it wholeheartedly. If we don't like the idea, we rush to the opposite extreme to embrace that idea. Those who remain in the middle often do so out of apathy rather than analytical balance.

This dynamic operates with particular force in the religious realm. Consider the ages-long dispute about faith and works. During the Renaissance, the Catholic Church held a very works-based doctrine, in which sins could be forgiven for the exchange of enough money.

When Luther appeared on the scene, he correctly recognized the falseness of this doctrine. However, he responded by abandoning the idea of works entirely and teaching that only faith produced salvation. He spotted error, ran right by the truth, and ended up falling into another error. Luther's overreaction is largely responsible for the mistaken beliefs many denominations hold about the purpose of baptism.

In 1 Corinthians 9-10, Paul shows us the way to a nuanced understanding of truth. An idol is nothing, he notes, but Christians should not overreact on the basis of that idea and join in idolatrous worship. This is the way that we should always meet error. We must remember that the opposite of a false doctrine is often not truth, but another false doctrine. Our conception of truth must remain based not on knee-jerk prejudice, but on a proper understanding of God's word.

1 Corinthians 9:23-10:13

1. 1 Corinthians 9:23 is a transition sentence. What does it mean in the context of 1 Corinthians 9? What does it mean in the context of 1 Corinthians 10:1-22? Why did Paul do this?

A Still More Excellent Way: Lesson Seven

2. What does Paul mean when he says, "Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies?" What application does this have to us?
3. What does 1 Corinthians 8:2 mean?
4. In 1 Corinthians 8:4-6, why does Paul argue that eating meat sacrificed to idols should not be a Christian concern?
5. In 1 Corinthians 8:7, what problem does Paul identify with eating meat sacrificed to idols?
6. What does 1 Corinthians 8:8 say about the spiritual significance of eating? Why is this idea important to Paul's argument?

A Still More Excellent Way: Lesson Seven

7. In 1 Corinthians 8:9-12, how does Paul instruct the Corinthians to behave? How does Paul explain the reasoning behind this command? What application does this have for us today?
8. What exactly does Paul say he is worried about the weak brother doing in 1 Corinthians 8:10-13? Why is it important for us to understand this?

1 Corinthians 9:1-22

9. What, if any, connection does 1 Corinthians 9 have with 1 Corinthians 8?
10. What rights does Paul describe himself as possessing in 1 Corinthians 9:3-6?
11. In 1 Corinthians 9:7-14, what right does Paul single out to defend? What three arguments does he make in his defense? Why is it important for us to understand these arguments?

A Still More Excellent Way: Lesson Seven

12. What does Paul say in 1 Corinthians 9:12, 18 about his reasons for not making use of his right in the gospel? Why do we need to understand this?
13. According to 1 Corinthians 9:15, why is Paul NOT making this argument? Why is this statement interesting/significant?
14. How does Paul describe himself in 1 Corinthians 9:19? What attitude does this reveal in Paul?
15. How does Paul describe his resulting actions in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22? How does this fit in with his argument in 1 Corinthians 8?
16. What does the principle Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 9:22 lead him to do? What does it NOT lead him to do? How should we apply this principle today?