



Good Different

LIFE GROUP
BIBLE STUDIES

1 CORINTHIANS 5-8

Living as a Christian in a non-Christian world
(A 1 Corinthians Series: 1 Cor 5-8)

August 2020

Prepared by Graham Buxton



CoroUniting
CHURCH COMMUNITY





Good Different

INTRODUCTION

1 CORINTHIANS 5-8

Living as a Christian in a non-Christian world
(A 1 Corinthians Series: 1 Cor 5-8)

In our first four-week Bible study series focusing on 1 Corinthians 1-4, we noted that the apostle Paul, who founded the church in Corinth, had been receiving alarming reports of unacceptable conduct amongst many of the Christians there, and so he wrote to them to admonish them and to correct their behaviour.

Before Paul sent the letter, though, he received further oral and written reports about their behaviour, so he extended his original letter by adding further instruction and responses on a range of matters in what is known to us as 1 Corinthians.

In our second group of chapters – 1 Corinthians 5-8 – the issues he deals with have to do with church discipline (5:1-13); lawsuits (6:1-11); gospel liberty (6:12-20); marriage (7:1-40); and meat offered to idols (8:1-13).

These Life Group Bible Studies in 1 Corinthians 5-8 remind us that we are, as someone has put it, ‘resident aliens’, in the world, but not of the world. Instead of conforming the world to the gospel or the gospel to the world, Christians should focus on conforming to the gospel themselves... so letting our light shine in the darkness.

This is precisely what Paul is declaring in these chapters, summed up in the title of this four-week series, “Good Different: Living as a Christian in a non-Christian world”.

Each study opens with a brief summary of Paul’s teaching in each of the sections covered in this series, followed by some questions and thoughts for reflection which those in Life Groups may wish to use as a framework for exploring Paul’s teaching further, applying it to their own lives.

HOLY
Good Different

WEEK 1
1 CORINTHIANS
5:1-13

Living as a Christian in a non-Christian world
(A 1 Corinthians Series: 1 Cor 5-8)

In chapter 5 Paul is denouncing not only the act of a man engaging in sexual relations with his step-mother, which was forbidden in the Torah as well as in Roman law, but also the arrogance displayed by the Corinthians (verses 2, 6), whose complacent open-mindedness on the matter reflects their permissive interpretation of Christian liberty (see 6:12-20 later). This leads into a fuller discussion of church discipline (where Paul alludes to an earlier letter to the Corinthians in verse 9), and the corrupting effects of sinful practices, as expressed in the leaven metaphor in verses 6-8.

- What does Paul mean when he tells the Corinthians to “hand this man over to Satan” (verse 5)? What effects might this have on the offender?
- What does Matthew 18:15-17 teach us about the practice of church discipline? Do you think that the church has lost its way with regard to disciplining its members?
- Paul’s repetition about pride and boasting in verses 2 and 6 suggests that he may view this as a worse sin than the sexual immorality that he condemns. What is your view?
- Why do you think Paul refers to the Jewish custom of clearing out all the old leaven, or yeast, from the house before Passover (Exodus 12:14-20)? What impact did he want this to have on the Corinthians?
- Consider Paul’s words: “With such a man do not even eat” (verse 11). Should a person known to us who manifests the vices in this verse be prohibited from the Lord’s Table? How might this be managed in the church?
- What does Paul mean by ‘judge’ in verses 12-13 (compare with Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:1 – “Do not judge, or you too will be judged.”)? How in practice might we distance ourselves from sexually immoral people in the church (verses 9-11)? Where do we draw the line between disassociation and pastoral follow-up?

Good Different

WEEK 2
1 CORINTHIANS
6:1-20

Living as a Christian in a non-Christian world
(A 1 Corinthians Series: 1 Cor 5-8)

This chapter embraces two distinct themes: lawsuits and liberty. In verses 1-11 Paul expresses shock and indignation that the Corinthians were running to the civil pagan courts to sort out their disputes. He then suggests that they go the second mile further by promoting a more excellent way, the way of love (anticipating his last words in chapter 12) – “why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?” (verse 7).

- What procedures within the local church does Paul recommend where disputes exist between believers? How do verses 4-5 compare and contrast with Matthew 18:15-17?
- It isn't easy to 'turn the other cheek' and suffer being wronged when another person cheats or takes advantage of us – we often want to retaliate or get even! Should we set limits on how far others may ill-treat us, and, if so, where and how do we draw the line?
- In verse 11 Paul reminds the Corinthians of the sort of life they lived before they were “washed ... sanctified ... justified”: “that is what some of you were” (verse 11). As you look back on ‘what you were’, what differences do you now see in your way of life?

Paul now turns in verses 12-20 to the distinction between true Christian liberty and the shameless behaviour of the Corinthians, challenging the church that true freedom does not mean that we are free to do whatever we please. Rather, freedom means being free to do what God pleases because we have been “bought with a price” (verse 20): we are new creations in Christ. (*Note: in 3:16 Paul alludes to the church community in temple language; in verse 19 he uses ‘temple’ to refer to an individual believer’s body as “a temple of the Holy Spirit”).*

- Why does Paul repeat the words “Everything is permissible for me” in verse 12, and immediately qualify them with two ‘buts’?
- Paul emphasises the sanctification of our bodies with reference to our being “members of Christ himself” (verse 15), or limbs of his body. What is your reaction to Paul equating the Corinthians’ sin with being united with a prostitute?
- Notice the force of Paul’s language in this section: “Never!” in verse 15 and “Flee from” in verse 18. In what ways should we “honour God with our body” (verse 21)? In what ways might God be speaking to us personally through this verse? ... Never! Flee from ... *what?*

HOLY
Good Different

WEEK 3
1 CORINTHIANS
7:1-40

Living as a Christian in a non-Christian world
[A 1 Corinthians Series: 1 Cor 5-8]

In Paul's day, there were those who favoured an 'anything goes' attitude to morals, a stark contrast to those who were more ascetic and world-denying, like those who claimed that "it is good for a man not to marry" (verse 1). Having confronted those who promoted a more libertarian way of life, Paul now turns his attention to those who were advocating a more puritanical lifestyle. And he does so in the context of a range of questions on marriage raised by the Corinthians.

Paul himself was unmarried and preferred to remain that way (verse 7), but he does not impose that on anyone. Chapter 7 includes advice to the married and the unmarried to avoid sexual temptation (verses 2-9); a brief comment on divorce (verses 10-11); advice to those marriages where only one partner is a believer (verses 12-16); some general teaching about remaining true to one's calling (verses 17-24); advice to virgins, or those who have chosen celibacy as a way of life (verses 25-38); and finally advice on widows (verses 39-40).

Note: some of Paul's teaching in this chapter is ambiguous, at times difficult to understand, and subject to different interpretations.

- Paul is clearly deeply concerned about the dangers of falling into sexual temptation in verses 2-9. How might his teaching in these verses be received in today's cultural climate?
- You may be, or know, someone whose partner is not a Christian: what encouragement can you draw (or offer to another) from Paul's teaching in verses 12-16?
- In verses 17-24 Paul teaches about being faithful to our existing way of life and develops this general principle in the context of circumcision and slavery. Why does Paul introduce this principle here, and how does his teaching in this section relate to marriage?
- In his discussion about virgins in verses 25-38 Paul considers the radical impact of faith on those who are not married, particularly in the light of his statement that "the time is short" (verse 29). Does celibacy mean that we are able to serve the Lord with more devotion than those who are married?
- In verse 37 Paul repeats his emphasis in verse 9 on the importance of sexual self-control, supporting marriage where willpower is lacking. How realistic is self-restraint in today's sex-obsessed cultural and media environment?
- Paul clearly wants to spare widows the cares of remarriage (verses 39-40)! Why do you think he specifically invokes the Spirit in his advice here?

HOLY
Good Different

WEEK 4
1 CORINTHIANS
8:1-13

Living as a Christian in a non-Christian world
[A 1 Corinthians Series: 1 Cor 5-8]

In his teaching about eating food offered to idols, Paul’s concern for the unity of the church at Corinth is paramount. Those who had no scruples about eating meat sacrificed to idols – after all, idols are nothing because there is only one God (verse 4) – could easily be a stumbling block to the so-called ‘weak’, for whom eating such food was idolatrous. Here Paul anticipates his teaching on love in chapter 13.

- Read 1 Corinthians 13 as you consider Paul’s teaching on food offered to idols. What does Paul mean when he writes that “the man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know” (verse 2)?
- In what sense is a person ‘weak’ in Paul’s example of eating food offered to idols? What does Paul’s teaching say to us about the different ways Christians think about matters of faith and how to please God?
- In Romans 14, Paul addresses this same question of ‘the weak and the strong’, exhorting his readers to do everything that leads to peace (Romans 14:19). What sacrificial peace-making steps have you noticed in your own life or the lives of others recently?
- What does this chapter teach us about the relationship between freedom and love in the Christian life?
- Paul reminds us that sinning against our fellow believers is tantamount to sinning against Christ (verse 12). Reflect on this insight in the light also of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 24:45 – “whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.”
- As we exercise our freedom in Christ, can you think of any common practices today that might be a stumbling block to some Christians? How might you handle them?