



boasting in the Cross

Studies from 1 Corinthians 1-4

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Study 1: Introducing the Corinthians

Welcome to Corinth...

Corinth has been described as one of the truly great cities of the Roman world. When Paul went there in about 50 AD it was on its way to becoming the largest and most prosperous city in all of Greece. It boasted numerous temples. It hosted the Isthmian games which rivalled the Olympics, and it had a booming economy. Corinth was a place for the trendy and the ambitious. Unlike many cities in the Roman empire, anyone could make their fortune in Corinth. You didn't have to be born as an aristocrat to be important; even freed slaves made it to the top to become rich and powerful. And those who suc-

ceeded loved to show it off. Archaeologists have found a huge number of stone inscriptions which people had made to record their success. Public boasting and self promotions were an art form in Corinth. It was into this fashionable, prosperous and ambitious society that Paul went to preach the Gospel.



Corinth and the Cross...

As you might suspect, Paul's message about the cross didn't fit easily with the prevailing Corinthian culture. Grace wasn't a concept that came easily to the self made Corinthians. The boasting and self promotion which was so common in the city was also common in the church and was causing divisions. Even after a few years as Christians, the Corinthians were still thinking and living with the values of their city rather than with the values of the Gospel. 1 Corinthians is all about how trusting in Jesus should make a difference to the way they treat each other as Christians.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Dear Corinthians...Love Paul

The way we write letters today, you only find who's sent them at the end. But back in Paul's time things were a bit different. Letters normally had an opening that identified the writer, the recipients, and then finally gave a greeting. Can you identify these elements in the opening of 1 Corinthians?

v____ Writer _____

v____ Recipients: _____

v____ Greeting: _____

From Paul's greeting, what do we learn about the Corinthians and their Christianity?

Thanking a generous God

Paul addresses the Corinthians as real Christians who have been made holy and who call on Jesus. But that's not all God has done. Paul goes on to thank God for other things too.

What things does Paul thank God for?

What picture of God do you get from Paul's thanksgiving?

What picture of the Corinthians do you get from Paul's thanksgiving?

How do the Corinthians compare?

Use the table below to compare Paul's thanksgiving in 1 Corinthians with his thanksgiving in some of his other letters.

Passage	Similarities to 1 Corinthians	Differences with 1 Corinthians
Rom 1:8		
Eph 1:15-16		
Phil 1:3-5		
Col 1:3-5		
1 Thess 1:2-3		
2 Thess 1:3		

What are the main differences between Paul's thanksgiving for the Corinthians and his thanksgiving for most of the other churches? Why do you think they're different?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Gifted, but Divided...

In his thanksgiving Paul picks up on all the good things that God has given to the Corinthians—in particular that he's enriched them with speech and knowledge and all the gifts they need to stand firm until Jesus returns. But unlike in most of his other letters, Paul doesn't thank God for the Corinthian's faith, love or hope. That's because there isn't too much to be thankful about in those areas. The Corinthians are certainly gifted. But they're not using their gifts in a helpful way. And in v 10 we see that's causing a big problem.

What Does Paul want the Corinthians to do?

What does Paul's exhortation imply about the way the Corinthians are acting?

What's causing the divisions?

The Corinthians are being divided because they're boasting about their leaders. They're making it sound like their leader is the best and most gifted leader and if anyone isn't following their leader then they're missing out. But according to Paul that kind of attitude is crazy.

From v 13, what does a divided church suggest about Christ?

Why can't most of the Corinthians boast about a special bond with Paul ?

What Was Paul's main mission? Where was he trying to get people to focus?

The Corinthians had taken on board the culture of their city, rather than the culture of the cross. They had all kinds of gifts and abilities, and they wanted leaders like that too. They thought that having the right gifts and the right leaders was what Christianity was all about. But they had missed a vital point. They needed to use their gifts with attitudes of faith, love and hope - the kind of attitudes that Jesus showed when he died on the cross. Because they weren't using their gifts properly, all they were doing was causing arguments and boasting and divisions.

Gifts and you

What gifts can you thank God for - for yourself and for our church?

How are you using your gifts - would Paul be able to thank God for your faith love and hope as well as your giftedness?