The Heart of Paul's Theology

Study Guide

LESSON FOUR

PAUL AND THE CORINTHIANS

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HOW TO USE THIS LESSON AND STUDY GUIDE

This study guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video lesson. If you do not have access to the video, the study guide will also work with the audio and/or text versions of the lesson. Additionally, the lesson and study guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

- **Before you watch the lesson**
  - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
  - **Schedule viewing** — In the Notes section of the study guide, the lesson has been divided into sections that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
  - **Take notes** — The Notes section of the study guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each section and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
  - **Record comments and questions —** As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.
  - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
  - **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
  - **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

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Preparation

- Read Acts 18:23–21:17
- Read 1 Corinthians
- Read 2 Corinthians

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Notes

I. Introduction (0:26)

II. Background (2:40)

A. Third Missionary Journey (3:17)

Paul largely repeated the itinerary he followed on his second missionary journey beginning the trip around A.D. 52 or 53.

- Syrian Antioch
- Galatia
- Phyrgia
- Derbe
- Lystra
- Iconium
- Pisidian Antioch

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- Ephesus
- Macedonia
- Achaia
- Philippi
- Troas
- Assos
- Mitylene
- Chios
- Samos
- Miletus
- Cos
- Rhodes
- Patara
- Cyprus

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- Tyre
- Ptolemais
- Caesarea

Paul wrote the two canonical letters to the Corinthians during the third missionary journey, as well as two additional letters that have not been preserved.

B. Problems in Corinth (7:29)

Many of the problems that arose in Corinth stemmed from a misunderstanding of eschatology, how Christ had brought the age to come, the age of salvation and life. They believed that they had actually received more of the blessings of the future than anyone else.

1. Damaged Relationships (8:58)

a. Rival Factions

Paul received a report that the believers in Corinth were turning against each other by identifying themselves with whichever teacher they held in high esteem.

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b. Lawsuits

c. Poverty in Corinth

The lack of concern for one another was also evident in the way the poor were mistreated in the Lord's Supper.

d. Poverty in Jerusalem

The Corinthians had failed to collect relief funds they had promised to the needy Christians in Jerusalem.

2. Sexual Misconduct (13:25)

Some Corinthians believed that because Jesus had come, sexual matters were no longer significant.

Some in the church adopted the perspective of sexual license.

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Some went to the opposite extreme, preferring asceticism and sexual abstinence, even within marriage.

3. Abuses in Worship (16:04)

a. Gender Roles, 11:2-16

One corrective he gave pertained to the use of head coverings during prayers.

b. Spiritual Gifts, 12–14

Paul insisted that unless believers listen to one another and defer to each other, they do not benefit from the words the Spirit has given.

c. Idol Food, 8–10

Paul insisted that pagan worship practices did not taint the meat, and that Christians could eat this food as long as they did not do it as an act of pagan worship. But he also warned that believers committed idolatry when they ate with the wrong mindset.

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4. Rejection of Paul's Apostolic Authority (21:29)

The rejection of Paul's authority as an apostle was their greatest problem. The issue appears throughout both First and Second Corinthians.

Counterfeit apostles claimed to have the same authority that Paul and the other legitimate apostles carried. They taught a false gospel that was seducing many Corinthians into sinful ways of thinking and living.

If the Corinthians believed the false apostles and rejected Paul's teaching, then they would deny both Christ and the gospel.

III. Structure and Content (24:27)

A. 1 Corinthians (24:47)

First Corinthians is actually the second letter we know of that Paul wrote to the church in Corinth.

1. Salutation (25:53)

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2. Thanksgiving (26:09)

3. Closing (26:19)

4. Main Body (26:36)

The main body consists of two reports: Paul's responses to reports from Chloe's household. And, responses to the letter he had received from the Corinthian church.

a. Responses to Reports

- **Divisions within Church**

  If they had only looked to Jesus as their primary leader, and regarded the apostles and teachers as Christ's servants, the Corinthians would not have clashed over their preferences for certain apostles and teachers.

  Paul also wrote extensively on the total ineptitude of worldly wisdom at handling spiritual matters.

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Their worldly values had blinded them to spiritual truth.

- **Immorality**

  The Corinthians had apparently misappropriated the slogan: “Everything is permissible for me.”

  Paul qualified the slogan in 1 Corinthians 6:12-13: “‘Everything is permissible for me’ but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible for me’ - but I will not be mastered by anything… The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.”

- **Associations**

  Paul wanted the Corinthians to maintain their relationships with the unbelievers in the world, but to distance themselves from gross sinners who claimed to be believers.

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b. Reponses to Letters (7:1–16:12)

- **Marriage, 7:1-40**

  Paul dealt with marriage, remarriage and singleness.

- **Idol Food, 8–10**

  Paul addressed the subject of meat that had been sacrificed to idols.

  In chapter 9 Paul explained his own willingness to restrict Christian freedom, implicitly asking others to do the same.

- **Worship, 11:2-34**

- **Spiritual Gifts, 12–14**

  Paul explained that all spiritual gifts were to be used in love, and that if they were not used in this way, they were worthless.

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- **Resurrection, 15**

  Paul explained that Christ's resurrection was key to the gospel, and that in order for believers receive final salvation, they would have to be raised just as Jesus was.

- **Collection and Apollos, 16:1-12**

B. 2 Corinthians (38:13)

1. Salutation (38:53)

The salutation states that the letter is from Paul and Timothy, and identifies the church in Corinth and the saints in the surrounding region of Achaia as the intended audience.

2. Introduction (39:09)

This introduction describes the intense suffering Paul underwent for the sake of the ministry, as well as the comfort he received from God.

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3. Closing (39:52)

4. Main Body (40:01)

a. Paul's Conduct, 1:12–2:11

Paul defended his conduct in two matters. First, he explained why he had not visited Corinth as he had previously planned.

Second, he addressed a wrong that had been done to him by one of the Corinthians.

b. Paul's Ministry, 2:12–7:1

Paul addressed a serious issue: certain individuals within the Corinthian church continued to doubt Paul's apostleship.

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Paul provided an extensive defense of the nature of his ministry, proclaiming that his call and his power both came from God and making it clear that to reject his apostleship had grave consequences.

c. Collection, 7:2–9:15

The Christians in Jerusalem were in great need because of a famine in Judea. The Corinthians had failed to finish collecting their contribution.

d. Paul's Ministry, 10:1–12:13

The Corinthians valued trained speakers, and expected their leaders to draw a salary. Paul did not practice professional rhetoric and because he chose to support himself financially while in Corinth, so as not to burden the church, he was considered inferior.

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e. Upcoming Visit, 12:14–13:10

Paul was planning to come to Corinth regardless of whether or not it would mean judgment upon the church.

Paul earnestly preached the gospel of repentance, faith and salvation to the Corinthian church in the hopes that his opponents would become genuine followers of Jesus Christ.

IV. Theological Outlooks (48:12)

Paul used his doctrine of the last days, or his "eschatology," to correct his audience.

The Corinthians also had greatly misevaluated the plan of the ages. In their minds, the present age of sin and death had largely ceased to exist, leaving them free to enjoy the full bounty of the age to come. Their error was one of over-realized eschatology.

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A. Faith (52:35)

1. Christ as Lord (53:03)

The Corinthians had lost sight of the exaltation of Christ as Lord over all and Christ as Savior of all.

Paul emphasized the fact that the age to come had not yet been realized in all its fullness. No one had “begun to reign”; everyone still awaited Christ’s return.

2. Christ as Savior (56:16)

The Corinthians also failed to exalt Christ by devaluing his role as savior.

In the minds of many Corinthians gifts and honor were earned by individual believers.

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Paul responded by emphasizing the doctrine of the union between Christ and believers.

Paul insisted that believers not evaluate themselves or others according to fleshly or worldly standards. Rather, he wanted them to view all believers as people who are united to Christ, and to show one another the honor and love that they would show to the Lord himself.

Throughout his letters to the Corinthians, Paul continually pointed to union with Christ as a basis for honoring, valuing and ministering to other believers.

B. Hope (1:00:58)

Paul reminded the Corinthians of the provisional nature of their blessings in the present world.

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The longest argument Paul made that applies directly to the doctrine of hope can be found in 1 Corinthians 15.

Paul made it very clear that some huge events must still occur, and some incredibly significant changes must still take place, before the age to come arrives at all its fullness.

C. Love (1:04:24)

It is true that for Paul love was what we might call an eschatological virtue. Paul's argument about the abiding value of love is found in his famous "love chapter," 1 Corinthians 13:8-10.

Of all the spiritual gifts and Christian virtues that Paul mentions in this chapter only love will continue to be manifested and treasured in the fullness of the age to come.

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Paul pointed out that all gifts, spectacular and otherwise, are useless and annoying if they are not exercised in love.

V. Conclusion (1:09:30)

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Review Questions

1. Where did Paul travel and what was the purpose of his third missionary journey?

2. Explain the four main problems plaguing the Corinthians, and the ramifications that resulted.

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3. Explain how Paul's third missionary journey and the problems in Corinth shed light on why Paul wrote to the Corinthians.

4. Explain Paul's purpose in writing his first letter to the Corinthians and the main points he sought to communicate to them.

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5. Explain Paul's purpose in writing his second letter to the Corinthians and the main points he sought to communicate to them.

6. Compare the purposes for Paul's writing 1 and 2 Corinthians. How are they similar and how are they different?

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7. What error had the Corinthians made regarding faith and the preeminence of Christ?

8. How did Paul instruct the Corinthians regarding hope?

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9. Explain how Paul described love as an eschatological virtue, and how it should impact relationships in this life.

10. Summarize the key ways in which Paul called the Corinthians to reevaluate their over-realized eschatology.

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Application Questions

1. Why do you think people tend to elevate certain leaders over others? What is the danger that may result from this practice? How does submission to and identification with Christ remedy this danger?

2. Compare Paul's teaching on our conduct in worship to Leviticus 10:1-3. How should a healthy fear of God influence the way we conduct worship with each other?

3. Explain Paul's teaching on sexual conduct in 1 Corinthians 6:12-13. How do Paul's qualifications of benefit and mastery guide us in appropriate sexual relationships?

4. How can understanding Paul's suffering, as he expressed it in 2 Corinthians 1, help you handle trials and suffering in your own life?

5. Why should the future resurrection of our physical bodies give you hope as a believer? How should this hope influence the way you live today?

6. How should a proper understanding of love affect your relationships with people both within and outside the church? Why do you think love is the lasting eschatological virtue?

7. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this study? Why?

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