

## *Introducing the New Testament*

### Worksheet for Week 4

#### 1 Corinthians

We know that Paul wrote at least five letters to the church in Corinth, Greece. 1 Corinthians is one of two such letters kept for us by the early Christian community. Read the introduction to the book in your study bible and, if you have one, the entry on the book in your Bible dictionary. Then read through the daily passages suggested on this worksheet. Before tackling the worksheet, you might want to read the entire letter in one sitting, using an easier translation like the New Living Translation.

#### *Background*

Corinth, near Athens in southern Greece, was founded in 44BC by Julius Caesar as a colony for Roman veterans. By the time of Paul, Corinth had grown to be a large, commercial port with a reputation as a rough, wild town. Paul first visited Corinth in about 50AD on his second missionary journey. In 1 Corinthians, Paul is responding to a letter(s) that he has received from Corinth, detailing significant problems in the young church. At this time, Christian churches met in the public areas of private homes. Many of the Christians would have been illiterate, so Paul's letters were read aloud and circulated among the homes where Christians met to worship.

#### *Problems in Corinth*

Why did Paul write this letter? Evidently, Paul has a pretty long list of problems in the churches in Corinth. Interpreting 1 Corinthians would be easier if we had the letters to which Paul was responding – so we have to be careful how we handle portions of the letter. Overall, there were four overarching problems in the Corinthian church:

- Major divisions in the Corinthian church (chapters 1-4 & 6)
- Disputes about major ethical problems (chapters 7-10)
- Instances of flagrant immorality (chapters 5 & 6)
- Problems in the worship services, driven by the efforts of some members to demonstrate their spiritual superiority (chapters 11-14)

Paul works through all these problems, one by one. As you read through his admonitions and advice, remember that Paul's vocation was to go throughout the Gentile world, founding colonies of a new human race – all those born anew in Jesus Christ. Paul's instructions are always aimed at strengthening the Christian community and spreading the word. Thus, Paul encourages those activities and behaviors that build up the community or are a good witness to non-Christians and he prohibits those that tear down the community or are a poor witness to the faith.

For example, in chapters 12-14 Paul writes about speaking in tongues and other problems in worship. Notice that he doesn't prohibit speaking in tongues, he simply wants order brought to the church. He says that if a person speaks in tongues then someone else must interpret it, otherwise how can it build up the community of faith. He says that only two or three people may speak in tongues, in order, at a worship service. Why? Because, if too many do so, chaos will ensue and non-Christians will think these Christians are crazy! He also cautions that speaking in tongues is not a sign of spiritual superiority and must not be the basis for divisions in the church. Notice that Paul's famous chapter on love (ch. 13) falls right in the middle of his discussion of spiritual gifts. It is love for which we are to strive, not some sort of supposed spiritually superior experience! We are all one in Christ Jesus and we share among us many spiritual gifts that we are to use to build up the body of Christ.

#### *The resurrection!*

In chapter 15, Paul responds to some who, like the Sadducees, claim that there will be no resurrection of the dead. Instead, Paul makes it clear that as Christ was raised, so shall all be raised – and raised bodily! And if Christ was not bodily raised, then Christians have believed a lie and are to be pitied more than any. Further, this future resurrection has serious implications for the present. We live not in an age of glory and grandeur, but in an age of weakness and suffering, as we await the arrival of God's kingdom in all its fullness. As we wait, we must lead humble, loving, and moral lives. We must build up and grow the community of God's people – exchanging discord for harmony.

## Bible Readings for Week 4

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage. What do you find most surprising in this letter?

<p><b>Day 1</b> 1 Cor 1:10-2:13; The opening appeal for unity</p>	<p><b>Day 2</b> 1 Cor 8 &amp; 10:23-33; What is Paul saying about the eating of meat sacrificed to idols and our freedom as Christians?</p>
<p><b>Day 3</b> 1 Cor 11:17-33; The Lord's supper in Corinth</p>	<p><b>Day 4</b> 1 Cor Chapter 12 - 14; Spiritual gifts</p>
<p><b>Day 5</b> Chapter 15; The resurrection of the body</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Weekly Prayer Concerns</b></p>