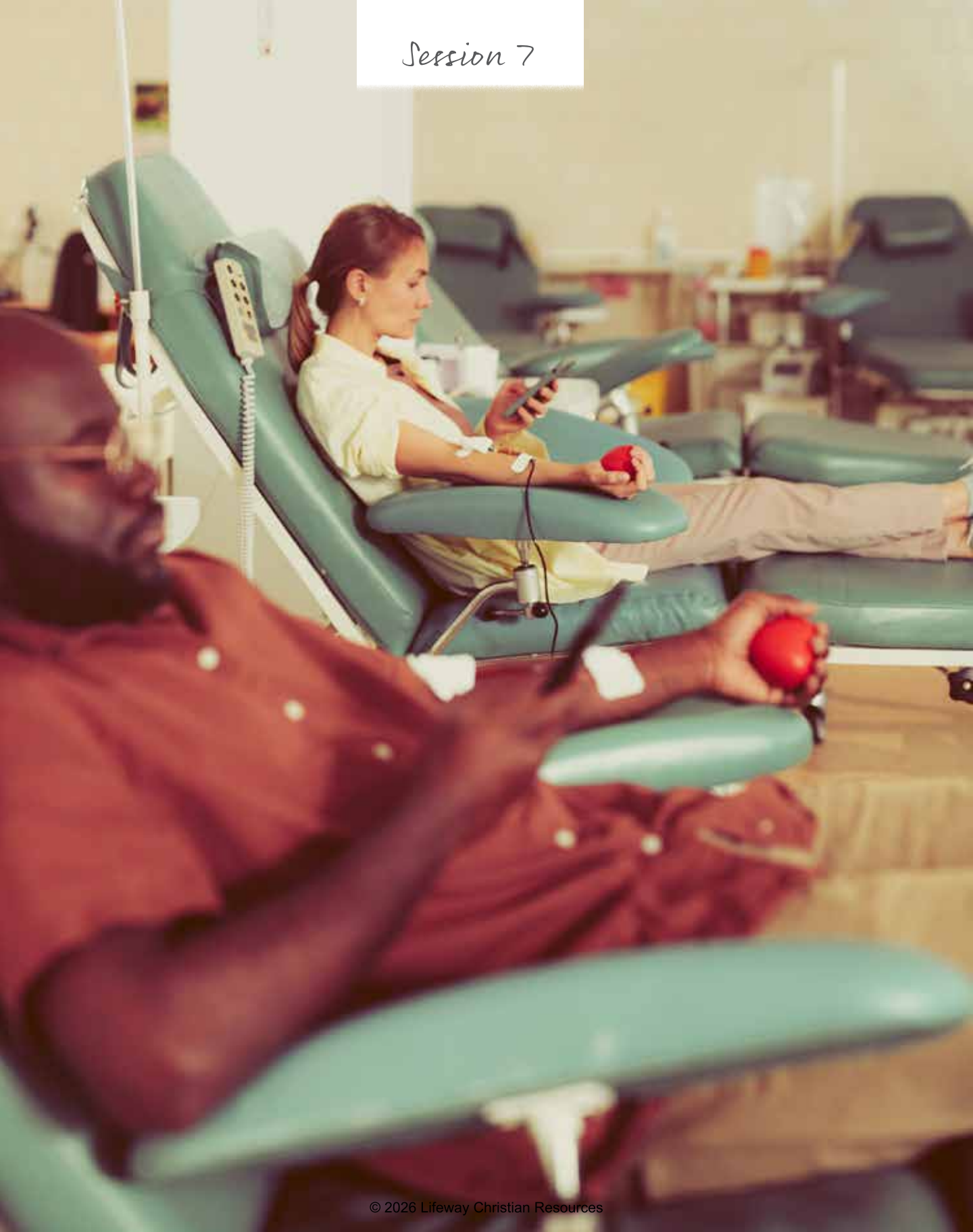


Session 7



A Love for Others

THE POINT

We are to love others as God loves us.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

When an epidemic hit the Roman Empire around 260 AD, it was bad. The only thing people could do to avoid getting sick and dying was to run away—literally. Dionysius, a third-century bishop, wrote this about “the heathen.”

“At the first onset of the disease, they pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead and treated unburied corpses as dirt, hoping thereby to avert the spread and contagion of the fatal disease.”

Christians, on the other hand, took a wholly different approach. Dionysius wrote, “Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty . . . They took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease . . . Many, in nursing and curing others, transferred their deaths to themselves and died in their stead.”¹

A key difference between Christians and those of other faiths is the expression of love and the willingness to love no matter what. In this final session, we’ll see how we are to love even as Christ has loved us.

QUESTION 1:

When have you seen someone really go the extra mile in displaying love for others?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-3

If I speak human or angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so that I can move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ And if I give away all my possessions, and if I give over my body in order to boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.

The love chapter. We commonly hear it quoted at weddings and see it cross-stitched and framed at someone's house. No doubt it is an incredible piece of prose, but too often it's read with a focus on romantic love or family connections. Paul's words go much deeper than that, and to see that, we must keep it in its context. In the previous chapter, Paul addressed the matter of spiritual gifts and how church members were playing one gift against another. In chapter 14, Paul addressed the specific practice of certain gifts. And right between chapters 12 and 14 is a little "side trip" to talk about love. But this is no side trip or digression!

To properly exercise our spiritual gifts, Paul stressed the critical importance of love in the use of those gifts. That's why he closed chapter 12 with "But desire the greater gifts. And I will show you an even better way." Love is that better way. Let's not stop there, though. Love addressed each of the problems and issues the Corinthian church was struggling with. Paul had been building up to this climax in chapter 13.

Paul was clear in what kind of love he was referring to. In our culture, we often use love

in a sexual or romantic sense, a form of love the Greeks called *eros*. Paul was not using this Greek word, which carries the idea of a self-pleasing love. Nor did Paul use the word, *phileo*. *Phileo* could be defined as brotherly love, and unfortunately, we often treat it as an inferior love compared to *agape* love. There is nothing inferior about it. *Phileo* is the word used for the Father's love for Jesus (John 5:20), God's love for an individual believer (John 16:27), and of Jesus's love for a disciple (John 20:2).

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul used the word *agape*, which denotes a love that is unconditional. It's a love that seeks the highest good of the other person. It's a love that is willing to lay aside any personal comfort for the sake of the one loved. While *phileo* and *agape* both capture aspects of God's love for us, *agape* is the type of love we are called to exhibit toward God. The call to follow Jesus is a call to die to self (Luke 9:23). We give our lives in love to Him. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

Saying we love Jesus isn't enough. It must be seen in our actions. Our love for Jesus is seen in how we love others, and that love is seen in

the way we minister and serve. The exercise of our spiritual gifts must be grounded in love. As examples, Paul pointed to five spiritual gifts—tongues, prophecy, knowledge, faith, and giving (sacrifice). The exercise of these gifts does no good if love is absent.

Many of the Corinthians highly valued speaking in languages, even considering it a superior gift. Paul lifted up greater gifts, but for his example, he said the use of languages, whether speaking eloquently in other languages or even speaking as an angel would speak, was just a lot of noise if not practiced with love. But even the greater gifts like prophecy, knowledge, and faith are fruitless if they're not grounded in love for God

and a love for others. It would seem that the type of sacrifices and hardship mentioned in verse 3 could only be embraced when love was present, but such acts can be done begrudgingly and unwillingly. Without love, nothing is gained.

QUESTION 2:

How does our culture's view of love fall short of God's view?

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant, ⁵ is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs. ⁶ Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth. ⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

After highlighting the critical need for and importance of love in all we do as we exercise our spiritual gifts, Paul gave us a concrete picture of what love is—and what love isn't. People love the idea of love, but it's usually on their own terms. In other words, we love others until they're not lovable. These verses don't give us that option.

Paul was quite intentional in the phrases he used to define love. Each phrase coincided with one of the issues Paul had addressed in 1 Corinthians, which also helps us see why most of them are stated in the negative. *"Love doesn't act in the way you've been acting."* The behavior Paul sought to address was behavior that showed a lack of love.

- **Patient.** We can be thankful that God, in His love, is patient with us! Patience may seem passive because we don't necessarily react to an offense like we want, but patience is not the same as indifference. It's bearing with an offense without ignoring it.
- **Kind.** Our patience is to be paired with kindness. Patience—that longsuffering perseverance in the face of an offense—may appear to outsiders as doing nothing, but kindness brings in the action. However the person treated us, we don't respond in kind, but we respond with kindness!
- **Does not envy.** In squabbling over leadership (chap. 1), lawsuits (chap. 6), and their

divisions during the Lord's Supper (chap. 11), the Corinthians were not showing love to one another. "For since there is envy and strife among you, are you not worldly and behaving like mere humans?" (3:3).

- **Is neither boastful nor arrogant.** Throughout this letter, Paul called out their arrogance and pride. We don't need to cover up our accomplishments or avoid compliments, but love means we refuse to exalt ourselves over others. Love seeks to build others up (8:1).
- **Is neither rude nor self-seeking.** Rudeness goes deeper than our culture defines it. The Greek word referred to shameful behavior, such as the incestuous man (chap. 5), the lawsuits (chap. 6), the improper treatment of a fiancé (chap. 7), and the treatment of the poor (chap. 11). To love as Jesus loves calls us to always seek what's best for others.
- **Is not irritable and does not keep a record of wrongs.** Instead of angrily holding on to offenses, we are to forgive. "Above all, maintain constant love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8).

- **Finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in truth.** We are not to be happy when others stumble; instead, we are to rejoice when others are living according to the truth.

- **Bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things.** To bear and endure all things in love speaks to the present, and to believe and hope in love speaks to our future, which is secure in Christ. We never lose faith, and we never lose hope because of Christ.

We are to be like Jesus (1 Cor. 11:1; Eph. 5:1). Read the gospels and you'll see how Jesus modeled love as Paul described it. Admittedly, it can be hard to live up to Jesus's example, but when we remember this is the very way He loves us, we can let His love overflow through us.

QUESTION 3:

Which aspect of love in this passage do you find most challenging to live out?

1 CORINTHIANS 13:8-13

⁸ Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. ⁹ For we know in part, and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will come to an end. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put aside childish things. ¹² For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, as I am fully known. ¹³ Now these three remain: faith, hope, and love—but the greatest of these is love.

Engage

WHAT LOVE IS

For each of these descriptions of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-5, paraphrase them to state what love is rather than what it is not. Share your descriptions with others.

Not envious:

Not boastful:

Not arrogant:

Not rude:

Not self-seeking:

Not irritable:

Does not keep a record of wrongs:

Paul ended verse 7 with the statement that love endures all things. In verses 8-13, he continues by emphasizing the enduring nature of this love: “Love never ends.” What will come to an end is the need for spiritual gifts. Let’s keep in mind the context—the church had apparently been arguing over the merit of some gifts over others. Paul had already addressed the value and need for all the gifts, and he began this chapter by pointing out that, without love, gifts like tongues, prophecy, and knowledge are pointless. He now pointed to these same gifts, highlighting their temporary nature. These aren’t the only spiritual gifts that will cease, but because of the emphasis the Corinthian church gave to these, he used them to point to the temporal nature of gifts.

All this will change for us “when the perfect comes.” While many contend that “the perfect” refers to the completion of the New Testament, others see the perfect as a reference to the return of Christ when He sets up His perfect, eternal kingdom. It’s important to keep in mind that Paul isn’t dealing solely with the question of when the gift of languages will cease, but he’s using these three highly-touted gifts as examples to show that we won’t need these gifts—or any of the spiritual gifts—when we are face-to-face with Jesus in His kingdom.

The life we now live in Christ pales in comparison to life in His kingdom. Paul gave two examples, and the first was the difference between living as a child and living as a full-grown adult. He also used the metaphor of a mirror. The city of Corinth was renowned for its highly polished mirrors, and even today, we have mirrors that give us a good reflection of a person. But a reflection isn’t the same as the real thing! Perhaps a good example for us

today is a photograph. I’ve seen many photos of the Grand Canyon, but it was a whole different experience when I stood on the south rim of the canyon and saw it in person. The apostle John also pointed to the greater reality we’ll experience when we’re face to face with Jesus. “Dear friends, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he appears, we will be like him because we will see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

When perfection arrives, though, love will still be present. For that reason, even now, our focus should be on maintaining and exercising love, regardless of what spiritual gifts we have. So, what remains? Faith, hope, and love. Faith is needed because it’s our faith in Christ that brings us to salvation. Hope is tied to our faith, in that it is our trust-filled and confident expectation of what awaits us in Christ. But love sits over and above it all. Faith and hope are gifts God gives us, but love is His very nature. “God is love” (1 John 4:16). Therefore, “the greatest of these is love.”

QUESTION 4:

Why does love surpass all other spiritual qualities?

QUESTION 5:

How does this passage whet your appetite for heaven?

LIVE IT OUT

Since we are to love others as God loves us, how will you live out that truth this week? Choose one of the following applications:

- **Review.** Make a list of the traits listed in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Identify times when you have not loved others as defined in these verses. Confess that to God, thank Him for His love and forgiveness, and commit to loving as Jesus loves.
- **Embrace.** In whatever way God has gifted you, evaluate how a self-giving agape love would make a significant difference in how you exercise that gift. Embrace your gift and service with a renewed vigor to do it with love.
- **Act.** Look for a specific way you can love someone this week without any thought of how it might benefit you. Choose to honor Christ by loving those God places in your path.



1. Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (New York: Harper, 1996), 82–84.

PAUL AND THE CORINTHIANS

by Scott Hummel

These Corinthian columns are at Temple E, which is west of the forum and on the ridge above the west terrace temples. This may have been a Capitolium temple, meaning it served as the center for the imperial cult at Corinth.



During Paul's first and second missionary journeys, he established numerous churches across Asia Minor and Greece. He typically visited a city for only a short time before he moved on or his opponents ran him out. After having been forced out of Thessalonica and Berea on his second missionary journey, Paul briefly traveled to Athens where his preaching met with mixed success and produced few converts. From Athens he traveled to Corinth, the then-largest city in Greece and one of the most important cities in the Roman Empire. Corinth was strategically located for establishing a church and spreading the gospel. It had a large and mixed population and held political importance as the capital of Achaia. Its location made it a strategic commercial crossroad for both land and sea routes.

After near constant travel and opposition, Paul arrived in Corinth in desperate need of encouragement, for he had arrived "in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3; see Acts 18:9). Over the course of a year-and-a-half ministry (v. 11), and through years of correspondence and return visits, Paul established here his deepest and most emotional relationship with a church.

CULTURALLY DIVERSE

The population of Corinth represented a cross-section of the Roman Empire, and the church represented a cultural cross-section that included Romans and Greeks, Jews and God-fearers, rich and poor, and slaves and free. Prominent Jews in the church included former synagogue leaders, Crispus and Sosthenes.¹ As opposition increased, Paul withdrew from the synagogue and moved next door to the home of Titius Justus, a Gentile God-fearer (v. 7). Thus, from the beginning, the Corinthian church was a mixed congregation. Each segment of the church brought its own background—Jews with their knowledge of the Old Testament and doctrines, and Gentiles with their pagan traditions,

philosophical thinking, and immoral behaviors. In 44 BC, Julius Caesar had rebuilt Corinth, which had been destroyed by an earthquake in 146 BC, and resettled it as a Roman colony. Readers thus should not be surprised that eight of the seventeen surviving names from members of the Corinthian church are Latin.² The majority of the church members were poor and of lower status. In fact, Paul stated that "not many were wise from a human perspective, not many powerful, not many of noble birth" (1 Cor. 1:26). Nevertheless, some members were wealthy. To provide a home large enough to serve as the church's gathering place meant the owner must have been wealthy (16:19). The wealthiest among the Corinthian believers was probably Erastus, the city treasurer.³ Unfortunately, the church was not only diverse, it was divided (11:18). Even though some aligned themselves with Apollos or Cephas instead of Paul, he always pointed the whole church to the gospel's unifying message (1:10 17).

After a productive but difficult ministry in Corinth, Paul left for Syria in AD 52, concluding his second missionary journey (Acts 18:18 23). During his third missionary journey, Paul ministered in Ephesus for three years, where he continued his relationship with the Corinthian church through letters and messengers. Distance, problems, and opponents in Corinth, however, strained the relationship. Nevertheless, Paul remained steadfast in his love and concern for the divisive Corinthian church.

FOUR LETTERS

Through at least four letters, Paul maintained his relationship with the Corinthian church. He referred to an earlier letter in First Corinthians, and in Second Corinthians he referred to a painful letter. To avoid confusion, let's designate the four letters Corinthians A, B, C, and D.

When Paul received reports of immorality in the church, he sent a letter (Corinthians A), likely by way of Timothy, admonishing them to avoid

immoral Christians in the church. Paul did not just plant the Corinthian church and move on, he remained engaged in their spiritual maturity. This letter, Corinthians A, which was written before 1 Corinthians, is now lost (1 Cor. 5:9).

Communication traveled in both directions as Paul received a letter from the Corinthians (7:1) and reports from Chloe's people, as well as from Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (1:11; 16:17-18). Their visit brought more than information, they "refreshed" his spirit and strengthened his relationship with the church.

In response to their visit, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (Corinthians B) to address questions the church

In the ruins of ancient Corinth, the most prominent structure is the Temple of Apollo in the agora, seen left, center. The Doric temple, built in the 6th cent. BC, is one of the oldest temples in Greece.



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/BOB SCHATZ (11/7/18)

raised, encourage unity, and promote discipleship. Unfortunately, 1 Corinthians did not settle all of the problems or eliminate the festering opposition and challenges to Paul's authority, so Paul made a short visit to Corinth that is not recorded in Acts but is clear from his correspondence (2 Cor. 2:1; 12:14,21; 13:2). When he returned to Ephesus and discovered the visit failed to produce results, Paul sent a harsh and painful letter (Corinthians C), which he did not want to send, but knew was necessary (2:4; 7:8). This letter too has been lost.⁴ Titus had carried the letter to Corinth (8:17-23), and Paul was so anxious to hear how the letter had been received that he could not wait in Ephesus and hurried to Macedonia to meet Titus on his return. Paul was happy to hear "that the majority in the church had repented from their rebellion against Paul and disciplined the leader of opposition to him" (2:12 13; 7:4 16; 12:18).⁵ Immediately, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians (Corinthians D) to rejoice in their reconciliation (chaps. 1–7) and to address remaining issues, including the collection for the poor in Jerusalem (chaps. 8–9). Paul likely visited Corinth a third and last time before concluding this third missionary journey and returning to Jerusalem (20:1 3).⁶ From Corinth, Paul may have written Romans.

While Paul ministered in Ephesus longer than he did in Corinth, we know more about Paul's relationship with the Corinthians than any other church because of the extent of his correspondence with them. The letters reveal Paul's relationship with the church as an apostle who loved and disciplined the church like a parent loves and disciplines a child (1 Cor. 4:15 21; 2 Cor. 6:13). As an apostle, Paul exercised his authority to answer questions, solve problems, and to chastise in order to bring repentance. Acting like a child, the Corinthian church challenged Paul's authority and wounded him with their behavior and attitude. As a pastor, Paul responded with love and encouragement anyway.



The Lechaion Road in ancient Corinth, Greece. This was the main north-south artery of Corinth and ultimately linked the agora of Corinth with the harbor of Lechaion on the Gulf of Corinth—which was about 2 miles to the north.



A 6th-century BC road called *diolkos* traversed the Isthmus of Corinth, connecting the Gulf of Corinth with the Saronic Gulf.

The Romans would unload cargo at one gulf, transport it across the isthmus on the road, and then load it back on ships on the opposite gulf. When it was militarily advantageous, leaders would actually have their soldiers or sailors remove a ship from the water and move it intact across the *diolkos*.

A FINAL VIEW

Paul's challenges and frustrations were transformed into encouragements when division finally became unity (1 Cor. 11:18). This occurred when immoral members became disciples with integrity (6:11,20) and when members of low social status came to realize their high status before God (1:26-31; 4:10). The church fulfilled its purpose, and Paul thereby completed his purpose and calling with this congregation. Therefore, Paul's greatest satisfaction and encouragement came when the Corinthian church exhibited the fruit of his labor and demonstrated that he had not labored in vain (15:9 11,58). Paul was especially encouraged that the church had matured to the point that it had become "the seal of [his] apostleship" (9:1 2) and his "letter" of recommendation (2 Cor. 3:2).

Scott Hummel is executive vice president and provost and professor of religion at William Carey University, Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

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1. Clearly Crispus converted to Christianity (Acts 18:8), but Sosthenes may also have converted. Sosthenes (v. 17), who was an *archisynagagos*, like Crispus, and brought charges against Paul, may have been the same Sosthenes who was the co-sender of 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:1).

2. J. R. McRay, "Corinth" in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 230. Corinth was destroyed by an earthquake in 146 BC and rebuilt by Julius Caesar in 44 BC as Roman colony.

3. Rom. 16:23; McRay, "Corinth," 229.

4. After reconciliation, the harsh letter was no longer necessary to preserve. Some argue 2 Corinthians 10–13 is the severe letter and should precede 2 Cor. 1–9. Lindsey Pherigo, "Paul and the Corinthian Church," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 68 (Dec. 1949): 341–50, argues against identifying 2 Cor. 10–13 because it reflects a context chronologically later than 2 Cor. 8:16–14.

5. Robert Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 270.

6. Pherigo, "Paul and the Corinthian Church," 346–47, argues Paul returned to Greece, probably Athens, but not to Corinth.

THE PATHWAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

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COMING NEXT QUARTER

HOW GOD SPEAKS

- Session 1 **God Speaks to His People** • Exodus 3:1-5, 11-15; 4:28-31
- Session 2 **God Speaks Through the Bible** • Psalm 19:7-14
- Session 3 **God Speaks Through His Holy Spirit** • 1 Corinthians 2:6-16
- Session 4 **God Speaks Through Circumstances** • Romans 8:26-35
- Session 5 **God Speaks Through His Church** • Ephesians 4:11-16, 25-29
- Session 6 **God Speaks and We Respond** • Psalm 119:30-40

THE BEAUTY OF FORGIVENESS

- Session 1 **The Cry for Forgiveness** • Psalm 51:1-13
- Session 2 **The Source of Forgiveness** • Psalm 103:1-13
- Session 3 **The Picture of Forgiveness** • Leviticus 16:6-10, 15-19, 20-22
- Session 4 **The Reason for Forgiveness** • Isaiah 43:1-7, 21-25
- Session 5 **The Path to Forgiveness** • Ephesians 2:1-10
- Session 6 **The Declaration of Forgiveness** • Acts 10:44-48; 16:30-34; 19:1-5
- Session 7 **The Evidence of Forgiveness** • Matthew 18:21-35

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CONNECTING WITH OTHERS.

Even though we're living in a post-pandemic world, culture continues to encourage social distancing. More stores utilize self-checkout, restaurants are set up for less interaction with employees, and customer service calls are increasingly automated. Social media interaction is done from a distance and emboldens a lack of civility. But life is meant to be lived in connection with others. Believers are called to pursue connection, and Jesus has given us the example to follow. This study was written by Robbie Peay, pastor of First Baptist Church, Ray City, Georgia.

ESSENTIALS FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING.

The doctrines taught in Scripture are essential to knowing God, but too many people just give a head nod to these truths and think that if they simply believe the right things, that's all they need. When we let these "essentials" permeate our lives, our walk with Christ becomes far more than a set of beliefs. It becomes visible—compelling. People notice. And when our lives point others to Jesus, we're living a life that truly matters. And that's essential. This study was written by Lynn H. Pryor, Discipleship and Senior Adult Pastor for Faith Haven Baptist Church, Shelbyville, Tennessee.

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