



**FIRST
CORINTHIANS**

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**JOHN P.
SCHARLEMANN**

**LIVING WAY
BIBLE STUDY**

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Living Way Bible Study, Inc.
16218 E. Olivemill Rd. La Mirada, CA 90638
562.947.2005 888.383.8119
info4LWBS@aol.com
www.livingwaybiblestudy.org
 facebook.com/livingwaybiblestudy

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LWBS is a practical course of study with a special emphasis on the application of God's Word to the life of the individual. While emphasizing practical application, LWBS presents each book of the Bible as the holy, inspired, Word of God, the confessional position of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Our purpose is to help equip believers to live joyfully in God's redeeming love and to share with others God's plan of salvation.

It is our prayer that the Holy Spirit will use this study to help you grow in your knowledge and appreciation of our God and His Word. *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."* 2 Peter 3:18

STUDY STRUCTURE

LIVING WAY BIBLE STUDY SUGGESTS THIS FOUR-STEP METHOD

1. **PERSONAL** – The student prays for guidance from the Holy Spirit and answers the Personal Application (P.A.) questions at home using only the Bible (no commentaries).
2. **SMALL GROUPS** – The class meets for an opening and divides into small groups of 8–10 people. The small group leader guides the group through the P.A. questions, encouraging each to share their answers and discuss further as time allows.
3. **THE MESSAGE** – The lecture or message is given by a pastor or layperson who has researched the material and presents the study, giving personal insight and augmenting, but not duplicating, the author's comments.
4. **THE NARRATIVE** – The author's comments or narrative, along with the P.A. questions for the next lesson, are given out at the end of the class. At the next class meeting, before answering the P.A. questions, the small groups may choose to review the author's comments of the last lesson, and share what each has highlighted as meaningful or important.

With this four-step method the student has the opportunity to study the particular section of Scripture covered by the lesson from four different approaches. This emphasizes the Bible text and gives the student an understanding and ownership for each section studied.

Each lesson should be stapled together according to the number of the lesson in the right-hand corner of the page. The P.A. questions for the next week should be attached after the author's narrative for the current week, as they will be the home study for the next class session.

The first meeting of the class is an introduction to the study. Since the members of the small groups have no P.A. questions to discuss at the first meeting, they may use the time to get acquainted or to tell what they hope to receive by studying this course. At the first meeting, the lecturer presents background information about the course, using the Introduction lesson as a guide.

FIRST CORINTHIANS

JOHN P. SCHARLEMANN

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AUTHOR INFORMATION

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AUTHOR INFORMATION

JOHN P. SCHARLEMANN

LWBS Courses: *The Book of Revelation*

Paul's Letter to Ephesians

Great Miracles of the Bible – Old Testament

Great Miracles of the Bible – New Testament

Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

Attended the University of Missouri where he received his B.A. in English Literature and Political Science

Received his M. Div. from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO in 1982

Graduate studies in pastoral counseling and creative homiletics

Adjunct professor at Concordia University, Irvine, CA (1990s)

Former member, Editorial Review Committee, Living Way Bible Study, Inc.

Author of several Bible Studies from Concordia Publishing House

1983–2004 Pastor, Grace Lutheran Church, Long Beach, CA

 Pastor, Grace Lutheran Church, Rialto, CA

 Pastor, St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Lees Summit, MO

2004–present Pastor, Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church, Diamond Bar, CA

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“May the Word of God speak through Paul and inspire us to follow more closely the will of Him who has saved us from sin, death and the devil.”
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Pastors find themselves wallowing in self-pity as frequently as anyone else. We whine about the problems of our congregations, the burdens of counseling those who have made a mess of their lives, the frustration of finding faithlessness among some of our members. But, whenever the tasks of ministry seem unjustly difficult, one need only read Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, his heart must have been breaking in two. The Corinthian Christians were plagued by so many difficult spiritual problems that Paul surely must have contemplated throwing his hands up in despair. The members were split into warring factions; some were suing one another in the secular courts; the celebration of the Lord’s Supper had disintegrated into an excuse for drunken carousing; one individual was having sexual relations with his stepmother. There were those who were disrupting worship services with their use of the Spirit’s extraordinary gifts. Some even disputed the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And the members of the Corinthian church were confused about a number of practical issues such as the role of marriage among believers and unbelievers, and concerns about the eating of food which had been offered to idols.

Paul had to answer their many questions and admonish those within the church who were tearing it asunder. The result is a letter which has much to say to us today because the problems facing our congregations are similar to those faced by the Corinthians. Without this letter, our understanding of how Christians demonstrate their faith within the community of the church would be greatly impoverished.

Corinth was one of the major cities in Greece. The population of the city may have approached more than a half-million people; the majority

of them were slaves. The city was a crossroads for travelers and traders, incorporating a harbor on either side. Tradesmen came from all over the world, from Egypt and Phoenicia, Spain and Italy, bringing their goods and native religions and philosophies. Since Corinth was such a large commercial city, it tolerated open and unrestrained immorality. As a matter of fact, the term "to Corinthianize" became a euphemism for "to practice immorality." The city contained at least twelve different temples, the most infamous being the temple of Aphrodite (the goddess of love). In this temple over one thousand prostitutes were available for those who wished to "worship" the goddess with acts of sexual immorality. Somewhere along the line, however, the Jews were able to establish a rather unimpressive synagogue within the city. The Corinthians prided themselves on their Greek culture, particularly with its emphasis on wisdom and philosophy.

So, you see, the Corinthian Christians were pressured by some rather overwhelming influences. They were exposed to pagan religions from around the world, they were being enticed to compromise their faith with the sensual joys of Aphrodite, and all the while they were being brainwashed to think they were part of the world's intellectual and philosophical elite. The result was a group of immoral intellectual snobs who had a difficult time accepting any spiritual authority.

They sound like Americans!

The apostle Paul had established the Corinthian church during his second missionary journey, probably around AD 50. It was here that Paul met his friends Aquila and Priscilla, two Jews exiled from Rome under the Emperor Claudius who occasionally exiled both Jews and Christians because he believed they were the cause of constant tumult within the city. Paul started his ministry to Corinth in the Jewish synagogue, but was soon expelled for his radical teachings.

He remained in Corinth for a year and a half converting both Jew and Gentile to Christianity (see Acts 18:1–18).

Around AD 55, when Paul was on his third missionary journey and nearing the end of his three year ministry in Ephesus, he received word from various Christians "from the house of Chloe" that there were serious troubles affecting the Corinthian church. Now, interestingly, it seems that Paul had already written a letter to the Corinthians admonishing them about their moral laxness. He writes in 1 Corinthians 5:9–10: "I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people — not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat."

What happened to the first letter? No one knows. Will we find it someday? I doubt it. But think of the implications if some archaeologist uncovers it!

So, onward into the study of 1 Corinthians. May the Word of God speak through Paul and inspire us to follow more closely the will of Him who has saved us from sin, death and the devil. And remember Martin Luther's summary of this particular letter:

"In short, things got so wild and disorderly that everyone wanted to be the expert and do the teaching and make what he pleased of the gospel, the sacrament, and faith. Meanwhile, they let the main thing drop — namely, that Christ is our salvation, righteousness, and redemption — as if they had long since outgrown it. This truth can never remain intact when people begin to imagine they are wise and know it all."

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1 CORINTHIANS 1:1–17

Heavenly Father, as we begin a study of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, send us Your Spirit, not only to guide us through life but also to unite us in faith. We pray that You would heal any division within our church by upholding Your Word as the sole authority for our faith and life. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

1. With what word does Paul describe his selection as an apostle of Christ Jesus? (1:1)

How was the prophet Isaiah selected? (Isaiah 6:8–9)

How about Jeremiah? (Jeremiah 1:4–5)

To what are we as disciples of Christ “called”? (1:2, 8; Romans 1:7)

What do the examples of Paul, Isaiah, and Jeremiah suggest about the source of our “call”? (Ephesians 1:4–6, 1:11–14; Romans 8:29–30)

2. What can we tell about the identity of “Sosthenes”? Who was he? (1:1; Acts 18:12–17)

How would that event have made Sosthenes a “brother” to Paul?

3. Paul states the Corinthians “do not lack any spiritual gift.” How are Christians directed to use their gifts according to Romans 12:6–8?

4. Who let Paul know there were serious divisions within the Corinthian church? (1:11)

5. Why do you think some members of the Corinthian church would demonstrate spiritual allegiance to Paul? (Acts 18:1–11)

6. What kind of preacher was Apollos according to Acts 18:24–19:1?

In contrast to Apollos, how did people describe Paul's preaching? (1 Corinthians 2:3; 2 Corinthians 10:7–10)

How does this explain why some people would claim Apollos as their spiritual leader rather than Paul?

7. Who was Cephas? (John 1:40–42)

So, who must have been responsible for converting the "Cephas faction" to Christ?

What religious background did those of the "Cephas faction" probably possess? (Galatians 2:7–8)

8. Why might Paul also criticize the "Christ faction" in Corinth? (1:12; Matthew 7:21–23; Luke 13:24–27)

9. List possible ways that serious divisions within your congregation could hurt the ministry of the church.

10. In whose name alone are we to be baptized? (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38)

Whose likeness do we put on when we are baptized? (Galatians 3:26–27)

11. Despite the divisions within the Corinthian church, of what is Paul confident? (1:8–9; Philippians 1:4–6; 1 Thessalonians 3:13)

12. How are we made "blameless" before God? (Zechariah 3:3–4; John 1:29; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 9:26; 1 John 1:7)