

Teaching Plan  
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: March 4, 2018

Lesson Title: "United in Christ"

Lesson Passage: 1 Corinthians 1:10-25

### ABOUT THIS LESSON

In the letter that we know as 1 Corinthians, Paul deals with serious divisions within the church in Corinth. He attributes the conflict in their church to spiritual immaturity, their tendency to be controlled by purely human instincts rather than yielding to the leadership of the Spirit.

### TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

- (1) Describe the four factions dividing the Corinthian church.
- (2) Explain what Paul means by "spiritual men" and "men of the flesh."

### BEGINNING THE LESSON

*To introduce our three-month study of 1 & 2 Corinthians, share the following information:* Corinth was a thriving cosmopolitan city in Paul's day. Greeks, Latins, Syrians, Jews, Asians and Egyptians all came there to buy and sell, socialize and revel. The Corinthians were sharp, clever, proud and, like the Romans, excessively immoral. The populace had an appetite for the bloody games of the amphitheatre, where they amused themselves by watching gladiators butcher one another. Around the docks and in local shrines thousands of citizens, tourists and seamen engaged in licentious worship of Aphrodite, the pagan goddess of love. And trade guilds dedicated to foreign gods abounded in Corinth. These were like social clubs, whose members came together for dinners, funerals and fellowship. Of all the cities in southern Greece, Corinth was one of the last places where one might expect Paul to plant a new church; but he did just that.

### TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. Sketch the history of Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church: **(1)** When Paul arrived in Corinth in A.D. 50, he first taught the gospel in the local synagogue; but hostile Jews caused him to move to a new meeting place where he concentrated on winning Gentiles to Christ. (Acts 18:4-7). **(2)** Paul left Corinth in the spring of A.D. 52, after an 18-month ministry in the city (Acts 18:18); and his work there was later carried on by Apollos, a gifted Jewish Christian from Alexandria (Acts 19:1). **(3)** After Apollos left, serious divisions emerged within the church. They were quarreling with one another (1 Cor. 1:11-12), even taking one another to court (1 Cor 6:1,7). Various cliques claimed allegiance to their "favorite preachers" (1 Cor. 1:12). And they were at odds over social conduct, such as participating in banquets featuring food that had been dedicated to pagan deities (1 Cor. 8). **(4)** The eroding situation at Corinth had prompted Paul to send an earlier letter (*referred to in 1 Cor. 5:9-11*); but that letter proved to be ineffective, so he then wrote a more elaborate letter, the one we know as First Corinthians.

2. Comment on the problem described in 1 Cor. 1:10-13: The word "dissensions" in v. 10 refers literally to torn places in a garment. (The very fabric of the church was being torn apart by the factious spirit within the congregation.) Characterize the factions in v. 12: **(1) THE APOLLOS FACTION.** Since Apollos was eloquent and well-versed in the Scriptures (Acts 18:24), perhaps his followers were the "intellectually elite." **(2) THE CEPHAS FACTION.** These could have been Judaizers, like the "circumcision party" mentioned in Gal. 2:11-12. **(3) THE PAUL FACTION.** It is not unusual for a church to have people who remain devoted to a former pastor. Perhaps this fac-

tion boasted of having been “saved under Paul’s ministry.” (Note 1 Cor. 1:14-15.) **(4) THE CHRIST FACTION.** Perhaps these were the “super-pious” who thought themselves to be the only *true* Christians in the church, regarding Christ as their exclusive property. **ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** *The Corinthian Christians were physically divided. There were no large congregations meeting under the same roof during the New Testament period. There are multiple references to home-based church meetings in the New Testament. (Examples: Acts 16:14; Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15.) In fact, researchers have found no evidence of larger “church houses” before A.D. 300. So, it would have been easy for these various home-based church groups to become fragmented in their allegiance to various leaders.*

3. Note the three questions Paul uses as an argument against this factious spirit in 1 Cor. 1:13: **(1)** Has Christ been divided into groups? **(2)** Was it Paul who died on the cross for you? **(3)** Were you baptized in the name of Paul? (The point is, they all belong to Christ, and Christ is not divided into factions; so it is unthinkable that those who believe in Him should be divided into rival parties.) **FOR DISCUSSION:** Should we be concerned about the fact that world Christianity includes more than 33,000 distinct denominations and that the National Council of Churches lists 35 denominations just in the USA?

4. *Comment on Paul's remarks concerning baptism in 1 Cor. 1:14-17:* Paul wasn't minimizing the importance of baptism as a symbol of new life in Christ. He recognized the importance of baptism (*read Acts 18:8*), but didn't want anyone to boast that he had been baptized in the name of Paul.

5. *Suggest that v. 20 explains Paul's reason for writing 1 Cor. 1:18-25:* The Corinthian Christians have been misled by gnosticizing Greek thinkers, teachers of the Jewish law and professional debaters like the Aeropagites in Athens (see Acts 17:21). These competing philosophies had not only polluted the thinking of the Christians in Corinth, but had also divided them into competing camps.

## CLOSING THE LESSON

**FOR DISCUSSION:** Unity in the church should be a reality, not just an ideal. What are some practical ways to foster a spirit of harmony and unity in our own church?

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