

Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians

(March to June 2021 Y.C.Ip)

Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians contains topics of great theological significance and touches on issues of vital importance. The topics are: the nature of love, and Christ's resurrection as well as the future resurrection of those who believe in Him. The issues are: divisions in the church, pride and spiritual arrogance, sexual immorality, wisdom of this age versus wisdom of God, proper conduct in public worship and during Lord's Supper, and proper use of spiritual gifts. In these thirteen-week lessons, we will look into these topics and issues in details:

Lessons 1 and 2 are based on chapter 15: 1-58. These verses contain a sustained discussion on the resurrection of Jesus and the future resurrection of those who believe in Him. Within those 58 verses, Paul describes the reality of Christ's resurrection; how our resurrection body will be like; and why Christ's resurrection is so important for the Christian faith.

Lesson 3 is based on chapters 1:1-31 to 3:4. We will look into the reasons for divisions in the Corinthian church and Paul's solution in solving those conflicts.

Lesson 4 is based on chapter 3:5-23. Paul points out that the Corinthians are God's building. God's spirit dwells in it. Paul has laid the foundation, namely Jesus the Messiah himself, and others who build on it must do so carefully, as their works will be tested on the Judgement Day.

Lesson 5 is based on chapter 4:1-21. Paul urges the Corinthians to think of him as a servant of Christ, whose life and teaching reflect the humiliation of Christ crucified.

Lesson 6 is based on chapters 5:1-13 and 6:1-20. Three important issues are discussed: Sexual immorality (5:1-13), Law suits among believers (6: 1-11), and the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit (6:12-20).

Lesson 7 is based on chapter 7:1-40. It touches on the issue of marriage, celibacy, divorce and widowhood. The principles of marriage is stated in 7:1-9; the keeping

of marriage vows in 7:10-16; the need to lead a life as the Lord has assigned (called) in 7:17-24; and the benefits of remaining unmarried in 7:25-40.

Lesson 8 is based on chapters 8:1-13 and 9:1-27. Paul deals with the issue of food sacrificed to idols, an issue which is especially important for recent gentile converts who were former idol worshippers (8:1-13). Another important issue is the proper support which should be given to those who proclaim the gospel (9:1-27).

Lesson 9 is based on chapters 10:1-33, and 11:1. Paul urges the Corinthians to flee from idolatry, drawing examples from the Israelites who, while in the wilderness, lusted after evil things (idolatry, sexual immorality and tempting God), and were punished for their actions. The Corinthians were also warned not to use their freedom for self indulgence, but instead for building each other up.

Lesson 10 is based on chapter 11:2-34 and touches on abuses in worship. Paul addresses the issues of head coverings and how to properly honour God in public worship. Another important issue is the Lord's supper: what is the proper attitude and behaviour for the participants so as to avoid God's judgement on them.

Lesson 11 is based on chapters 12:1-31 and 13:1-13. Paul points out that the grace-gifts (prophecies, speaking in tongues and healings) are the work of the Holy Spirit, given to build up the church. But the greatest gift of all is love. Paul described in great details the nature of love in 13:1-13. Love is important because it will continue into eternity, while grace-gifts are temporary and will be done away.

Lesson 12 is based on chapter 14:1-40 and deals with priorities in worship. Paul provides a contrast between the gift of speaking in tongues with that of prophecies. While the former is commendable, it does not have the same edifying power as the latter, which can strengthen, encourage and comfort other worshippers. The spiritual edification of God's people in public worship requires orderly use of grace-gifts.

Lesson 13 is based on chapters 16:1-24. In this final chapter, Paul touches on the importance of tithes and free will offerings. His travel plans illustrate God's sovereignty, and among his final exhortations is "to do everything with love".