

# Growing in True Spirituality

1 Corinthians Series

 ST. JOHN'S  
VANCOUVER

Companion Bible Study

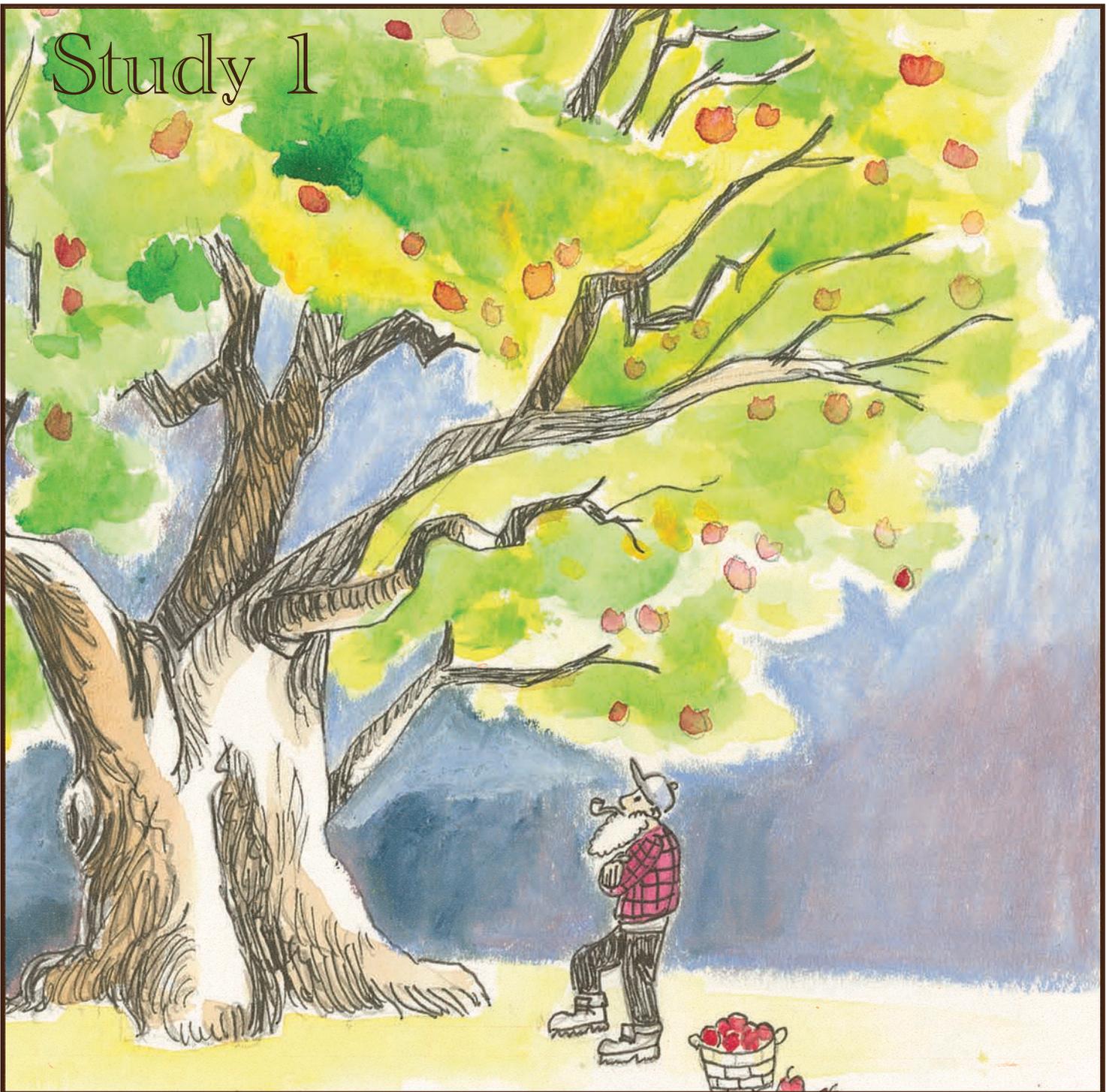


# Table of Contents

<b>Study One</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Study Two</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Study Three</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Study Four</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Study Five</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Study Six</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Study Seven</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Study Eight</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Study Nine</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Study Ten</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Study Eleven</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Study Twelve</b>	<b>93</b>



# Study 1



## 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Paul begins his letter with an opening (v. 1-3) and thanksgiving (v. 4-9). In this opening, Paul identifies himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ, identifies the church as those sanctified in Christ Jesus, and in so doing highlights the called nature of Christianity. Both Paul and the church have been called by God into a new identity and purpose. By highlighting this “called” identity Paul is both emphasizing the centrality of Christ for Christian identity and community as well as anticipating the problem of divisions within the Corinthian community (1:10-4:21).

Paul then continues in thanksgiving to give genuine thanks for the gifts God has given the Corinthian church and reminds them of the many benefits they have in Jesus Christ. Paul reminds the churches of these gifts because Christ’s gifts are meant to unite and build one another up, whereas in Corinth, those gifts have been used for selfish purposes causing fracture and divisions within the church.













# Study Notes

## 1. Sosthenes (1 Cor. 1:1)

We don't know much about who Sosthenes is. Some commentators think he was the scribe who wrote the letter, but it would be highly unusual for a scribe to insert his name in the greeting. Thistlethorn argues that Paul includes Sosthenes in his greeting because Paul does not want to be perceived as a solo maverick but instead as someone who always collaborates with others and part of a ministry team. Whoever Sosthenes is, he must have been known to the Corinthian church since Paul identifies him as brother.

## 2. Lord

Paul identifies Jesus Christ five times in this passage. In Corinth, to confess someone as one's "lord" is to recognize their superiority, dominance, and authority over one's life. It can be used of a master over slave, king over subject, or God over worshiper. This confession therefore binds the Corinthian church to Jesus Christ as Lord over all believers and severs them from those who insist that Caesar is lord.

# Study 2



## 1 Corinthians 1:10–17

1 Corinthians 1:10 begins not only the body of the letter, but also a block of text ending at 4:21, in which Paul deals with factions and divisions within the Christian community in Corinth. But these factions and divisions are symptomatic of an even bigger problem: the Corinthians' triumphalist attitude that fails to recognize the foolishness of the cross as the wisdom of God, and that gives them a flawed understanding of the church and its leaders—an attitude that threatens the unity of the church and endangers the gospel.

This passage states the presenting problem—factions and divisions—and ends with a sharp contrast between human wisdom and the cross, leading into the beginning of Paul's more detailed argument based on the nature of the gospel itself (Study 3), the Corinthians' own experience as the new people of God, and Paul's preaching that brought them there (Study 4), understanding true spiritual wisdom (Study 5), correcting a false view of church and ministry (Study 6), and apostles as models of the wisdom of the cross (Study 7).











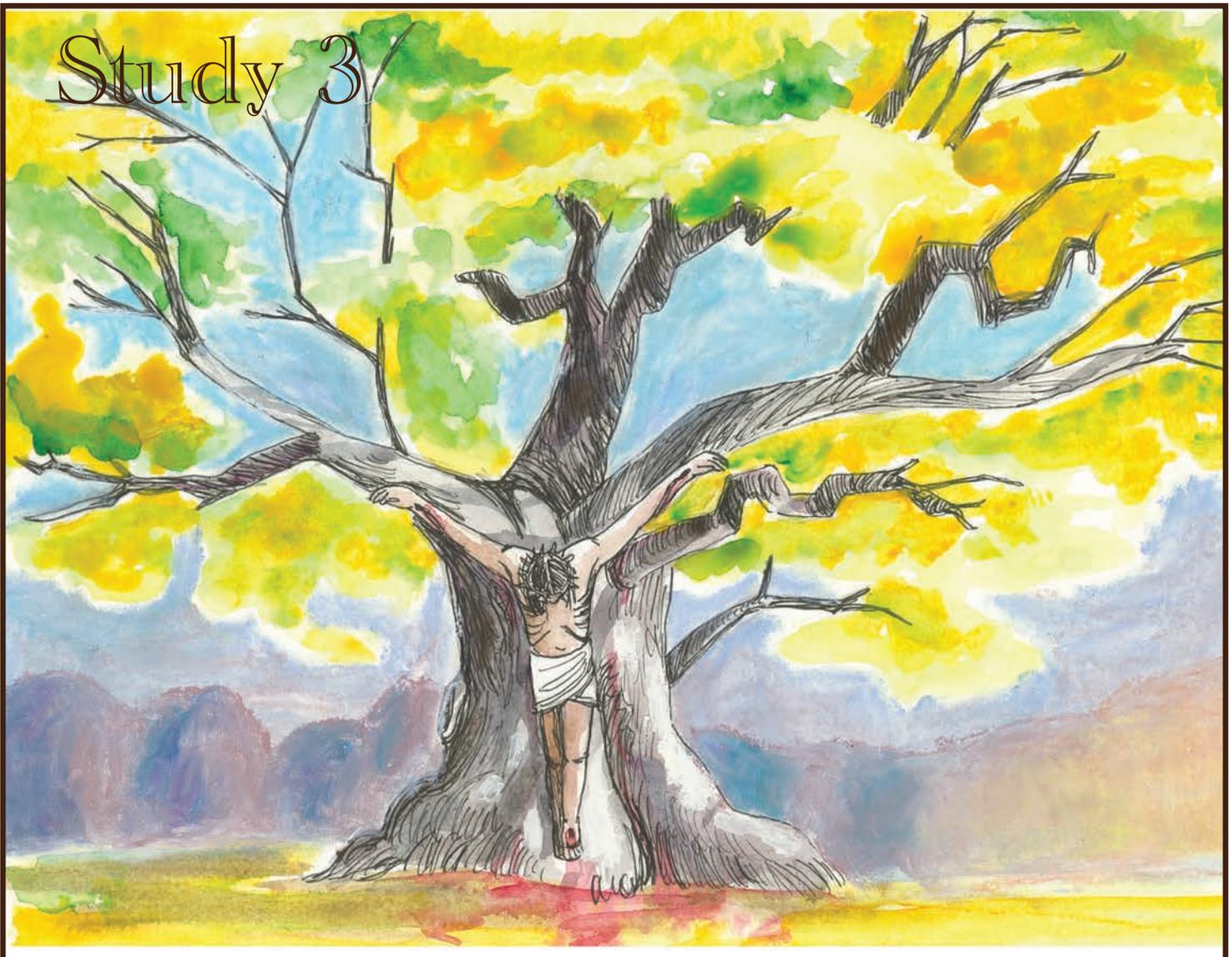


## Study Notes

### 1. "I follow Apollos" (1 Cor. 1:12)

While this passage makes it clear that the Corinthian church was divided concerning preferred leaders, there is nothing anywhere in 1 Corinthians to suggest that there was any division between the leaders themselves.

# Study 3



## 1 Corinthians 1:18–25

This passage represents the crux of the whole letter. It is the heart of the gospel, it is what the Corinthians weren't getting, and it is the root cause of most of the other issues dealt with by Paul in the letter.

The Corinthians cherish wisdom, and in the next three paragraphs—1:18-25, 1:26-31 and 2:1-5—Paul answers the question “where does wisdom lie?”.

The previous passage raised the issue of divisions over leaders, concluding with a sharp contrast between human wisdom and the cross (1:17). Paul was anxious for the Corinthian Christians to understand that human cleverness, sophistication and rhetoric could effectively empty the cross of its power—if the Corinthians were putting their trust in human wisdom.

In 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, Paul says the gospel message itself cannot be understood in terms of human wisdom—it's all about a 'crucified messiah', the ultimate contradiction in terms; in 1:26-31, Paul argues from the Corinthians' own experience, asking how God could possibly have chosen them as believers in Corinth if the gospel was related to human wisdom. Finally, in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, Paul describes his own experience proclaiming the gospel to the Corinthians, showing that he could in no way be viewed as an expression of human wisdom.













# Study Notes

## 1. "For it is written..." (1 Cor. 1:19)

Verse 1:19 is a quotation from Isaiah 29:14 dealing with Israel's 'wise' self-reliant leaders and their false counsel, who doubted God's capacity to save them. They honored God with their words but not their hearts. God's response was a promise to do new things: the people of God and the nations of the world were in a mess, but God was going to do something new and wonderful and unanticipated which would reduce to rubble the wisdom of the world.

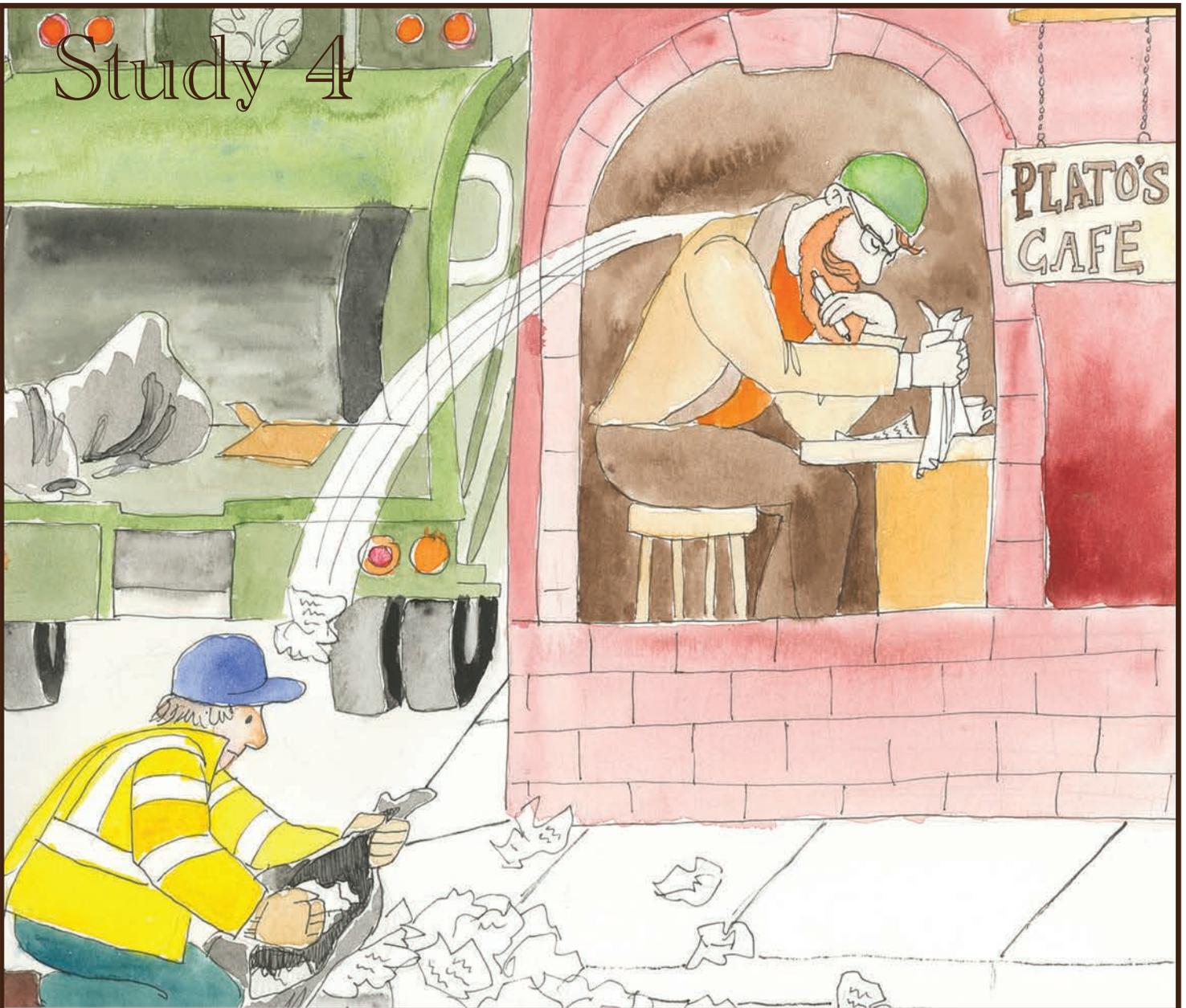
## 2. "wise...scribe...debater..." (1 Cor. 1:20)

The Greek word translated "scribe" is the technical term for the Jewish teacher of the law. And "the one who is wise" is, presumably, the Gentile wise one. So Paul is calling forth the wise Jewish teacher and the wise Gentile teacher. Both together are "the disputer of this age"; both are involved in disputes, one over law and one over wisdom. They are called out to be told that God has made foolishness the wisdom of the world.

## 3. "we preach Christ crucified..." (1 Cor. 1:23)

This is one of the few places in the New Testament where Christos should have been translated "messiah", not "Christ". Paul was clearly pointing to the historical reality that it was God's messiah who was crucified, a notion so thoroughly outrageous and offensive in human understanding as to be unthinkable. A "crucified messiah" is the preeminent oxymoron. Messiah means God's ultimate, powerful deliverer, the one who would bring signs, wonders, power, splendor, triumph and glory—the perfect expression of God's victory in this world. Crucifixion means weakness, humiliation, defeat. Apart from God's wisdom, the two words simply could not be juxtaposed. The Jews demanded signs, the Greeks sought wisdom, but what Paul gave them instead was a crucified messiah, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles.

# Study 4



## 1 Corinthians 1:26-2:5

Paul now completes his answer to the question, “where does wisdom lie?”. Back in 1:17 he contrasted human wisdom and the cross, suggesting the possibility that “words of eloquent wisdom” might empty the cross of Christ of its power.

In this passage, Paul gives two specific illustrations to demonstrate the truth of what he said in 1:18-25. In 1:26-31 he argues from the Corinthians’ own experience, asking how God could possibly have chosen them as believers in Corinth if the gospel was related to human wisdom. And in 2:1-5 he describes his own experience proclaiming the gospel to the Corinthians, showing that he could in no way be viewed as an expression of human wisdom.

So, taking the three paragraphs together, Paul is arguing that the Corinthians’ very existence as believers stands in contradiction to their stance on wisdom: the gospel message itself stands in contradiction to human wisdom, the recipients of the gospel message in Corinth stand in contradiction to human wisdom, and the preacher through whose words they received the Holy Spirit stands in contradiction to human wisdom.













## Study Notes

### 1. “consider your calling” (1 Cor. 1:26)

Paul is not asking them to think about the nature of their calling by God. He is asking them to think about their situation in life at the time of and following their calling.

### 1. “boast” (1 Cor. 1:29, 31)

We tend to equate boasting with bragging. The Greek word translated “boast” in this passage means placing one’s full confidence in something, and giving verbal expression to that confidence. It would be bragging if the something was oneself, but bragging is not the primary meaning.

# Study 5



## 1 Corinthians 2:6-16

As is repeatedly demonstrated in Scripture, God does not measure importance through the eyes of worldly standards. In the previous section we see that God chooses what is foolish in the world to shame the wise and Paul did not arrive in Corinth relying on clever rhetoric. Instead, he relied on the power of God, not the wisdom of men.

Paul continues this theme by exposing the limits of human wisdom. It is temporary and doomed to pass away. "Natural" human wisdom is unable to discern the things of God even declaring it foolish. In contrast, the gospel embodies true wisdom which can only be discerned by those who are mature; those who have been saved. True wisdom cannot be acquired. It is revealed by the Spirit of God leaving the recipient unable to claim superiority. This very notion stands opposed to the values held in esteem at Corinth.

## 1 Corinthians 2:6–16

**1 Cor. 1:6** Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. **7** But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. **8** None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. **9** But, as it is written,

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,  
nor the heart of man imagined,  
what God has prepared for those who  
love him”—

**10** these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. **11** For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. **12** Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. **13** And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

**14** The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. **15** The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. **16** “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

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## Study Notes

### 1. “rulers of this age” (1 Cor. 2:6, 8)

The rulers mentioned in these verses do not only refer to Caiaphas, Pilate, or Jewish authorities. This reference is multilayered and includes demonic powers who stand opposed to the gospel. All, however, are “doomed to pass away.”

### 2. “But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 2:7)

Secret translates ‘in a mystery’ and is not referring to a puzzle that we find difficult to solve. It is referring to a secret, that as humans, we are unable to penetrate. In his loving kindness, God’s Spirit has revealed his gift of salvation to us.

### 3. “the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:7)

This description has been previously used to describe God the Father. Here Paul uses it as the loftiest title he has ever ascribed to Christ. Paul regularly assigns the highest place of all to Christ.

### 4. “The spiritual person judges all things” (1 Cor. 2:15)

Many people in Corinth would have seen themselves as ‘spiritual’, therefore able to ‘judge all things’ but Paul redefines this understanding. The person guided by the Spirit is able to go to the source of all wisdom (Ja 1:5) but this does not mean that they are experts in life. Rather, guided by the Spirit they are able to discern / spiritually judge spiritual things. Those without the Spirit are unable to do so in return. They do not have the mind of Christ.

### 5. “mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16)

As Christ dwells in those who have received the Holy Spirit (the truly spiritual person), they have the mindset of Christ. That is, their outlook and viewpoint is conformed to the will or mind of God.

# Study 6



## 1 Corinthians 3:1-17

At the end of chapter 2, Paul contrasted the “natural person”, for whom the wisdom of God is folly, with the “spiritual person”, to whom the Spirit has imparted an understanding of the true wisdom of God. Paul’s concern was to demonstrate that our present existence as believers is an existence predicated on living in the Spirit. We live in a world where we are still encountering evil, but we live as Spiritual people in that world.

In this passage, Paul opens by calling out the Corinthians for their childishness—they are being infants as over against being Spiritual. They have been given everything they need to be truly Spiritual people, yet they insist on behaving like “people of the flesh”, still living the self-centred, self-sufficient, competitive lives characteristic of their pagan origins, as if they were still part of the old age of corruption and decay. That they had missed the point of the cross was evident in their taking pride in the personalities of the apostles and following the normal human practice of seeking reflected honor and status by associating with them—a notion that Paul now upends by calling all of the apostles “servants”, none of whom are anything.

Having chastised the Corinthians, Paul goes on to use farming imagery and then building imagery to show how their radical misunderstanding of the gospel has led to flawed understandings of both the church and its leaders.













# Study Notes

## 1. “spiritual people” vs “people of the flesh” (1 Cor. 3:1)

In the New Testament, the Greek word translated “spiritual” virtually always means “pertaining to the Spirit of God”, so the spiritual person is a person who has the Spirit actively working in his life, who is actively attempting to live a cruciform life. “People of the flesh”, in this context, are people who live without the Spirit, who live entirely on a human level, moved entirely by human drives. These are two kinds of human existence, not two kinds of Christian existence.

## 2. “we are God’s fellow workers” (1 Cor. 3:9)

The Greek of 3:9 is difficult to translate, resulting in an awkward phrase which appears to treat the leaders as fellow workers with God. What it actually means is that the leaders are fellow workers, all of whom belong to God.

## 3. “no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11)

The foundation is Jesus, the crucified messiah (2:2), whose work resulted in salvation, in redemption, in bringing in the Corinthians and making them God’s people. The superstructure must conform to that foundation; it must be made of the same stuff.

## 4. “gold and silver and precious stones, wood, hay, straw...” (1 Cor. 3:12)

Gold, silver and precious stones represent the temple (1 Chr. 29:2; Ex 25:3-7; 31:4, 5; 1 Chr. 22:14-16), while wood, hay and straw, all being flammable materials, represent the stuff that the Corinthians were into.

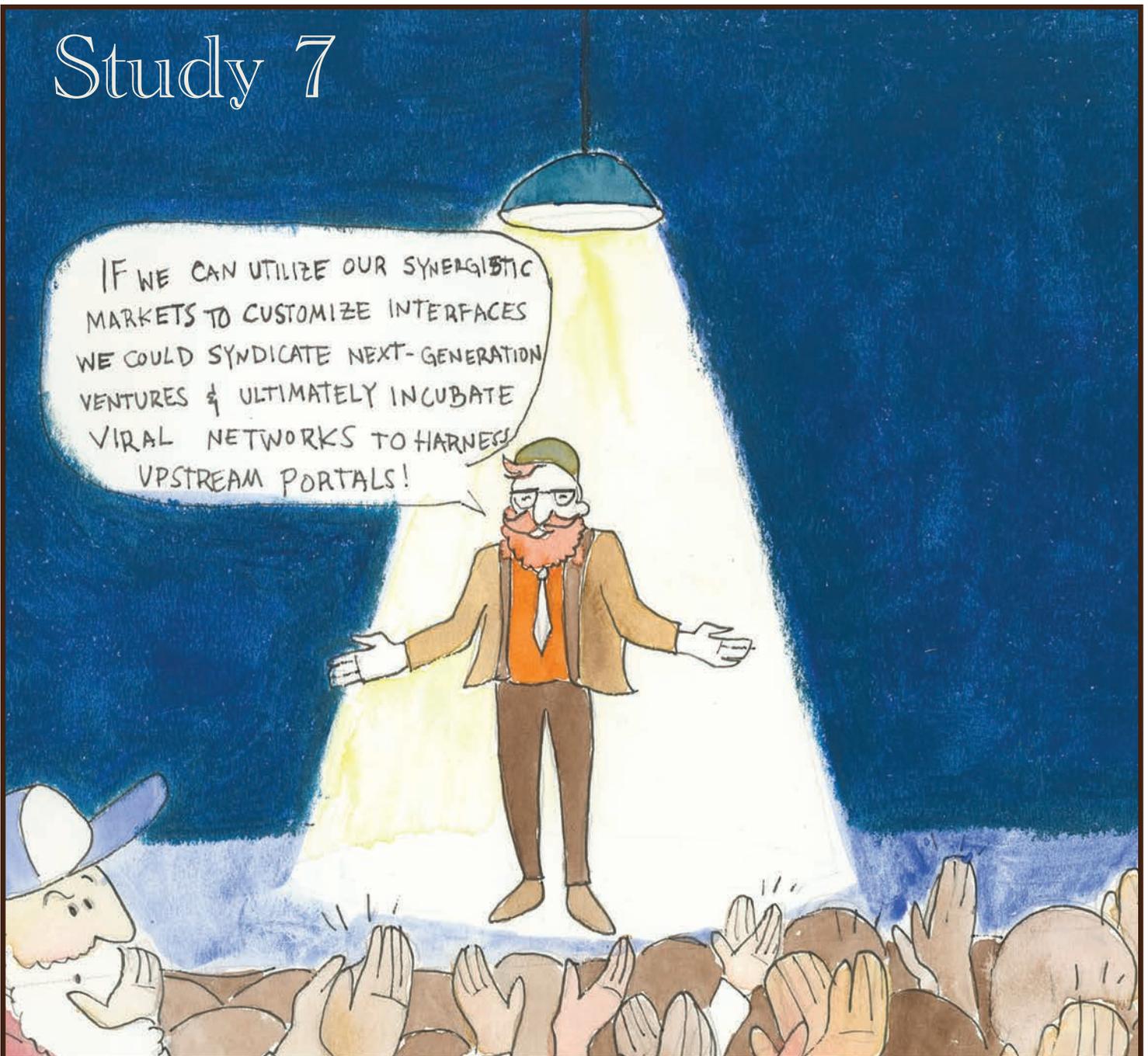
## 5. “as through fire...” (1 Cor. 3:15)

This may be a colloquial expression meaning being rescued at the last moment. In his commentary, Anthony Thiselton says it is likely that the phrase had become a metaphor like “brand plucked from the burning” (Amos 4:11), comparable to “saved by the skin of one’s teeth”.

## 6. “you...” (1 Cor. 3:16-17)

Each “you” in these verses is plural. Paul is directing his comments to the church as a whole.

# Study 7



## 1 Corinthians 3:18-4:5

This passage continues Paul's instructions in the context of building the church: 3:18-23 instructs the Corinthians as to how they should regard themselves; and 4:1-5 instructs them as to how they should regard God's servants.

The argument in 3:18-23 restates and further develops the themes from 1:18-2:16, where Paul connected wisdom and foolishness to factions and boasting in leaders. He cautions them not to be deceived by what appears to be wisdom but is not, and he offers a new reason why they shouldn't boast in human leaders.

Verses 4:1-5 restates the issues of apostles as servants and the coming judgment, with the language of the text putting the spotlight especially on Paul himself. It is thought that, because of Paul's lifestyle and particularly his suffering, his apostolic status is being questioned by some of the triumphalist Corinthians. This passage answers that challenge and speaks to the more general question of how Christians should regard leaders.













## Study Notes

### 1. “He catches the wise in their craftiness” (1 Cor. 3:19)

This quotation is from Job 5, which is a speech of Eliphaz, one of Job’s comforters. By the end of Job it is clear that God judges those comforters and says their ‘wise’ counsel was wrong. The crafty are too clever for their own good and always get trapped in their own schemes and ambitions.

### 2. “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile” (1 Cor. 3:20 )

This quotation is from Psalm 94, which asserts that the Lord knows our thoughts and they are futile—in spite of manipulative and corrupt leadership by those in authority, the schemes of these people fail because their best thinkers are fallible.

### 3. “boast” (1 Cor. 3:21)

The English word “boast” is generally used to mean “brag”, but that is not the primary meaning of the Greek word it translates, which carries the sense of ‘taking pride in’ or ‘glorying in’ or ‘put one’s confidence in’ something, and giving verbal expression to that confidence. It would be bragging if the something was oneself, but bragging is not the primary meaning.

### 4. “all things are yours...” (1 Cor. 3:21)

This may be a Corinthian slogan taken from Greek philosophical thought: the philosophers appealed to it to affirm human self-sufficiency; Paul redefines the phrase to affirm the Christian’s complete dependence on God. Paul makes the positive point that all things belong to the Corinthians because they are no longer their own but belong to Christ—everything is theirs because they are Christ’s, and Christians are sharers and inheritors with Christ. In contrast, the list in 1 Cor. 3:22 can separate them from God if the believers’ attention is diverted from God or to themselves. So, for example, by focusing on only one apostle or leader, they deprive themselves of access to the gifts of the apostles or leaders who they exclude.

### 5. “servants...” (1 Cor. 4:1)

The Greek word translated “servant” is unusual—it means helper or assistant.

### 6. “stewards...” (1 Cor. 4:1)

“Steward” is a confusing translation of a Greek word which referred to the manager of a household or estate. In the Greco-Roman world, that person would normally have been a trusted slave, who was responsible for the operation of the household, and who was accountable only to the master. Paul refers to the apostles in this capacity because they manage the household of God, they are responsible for bringing the guests of the household into knowledge of the mysteries of God, and they are accountable only to God.

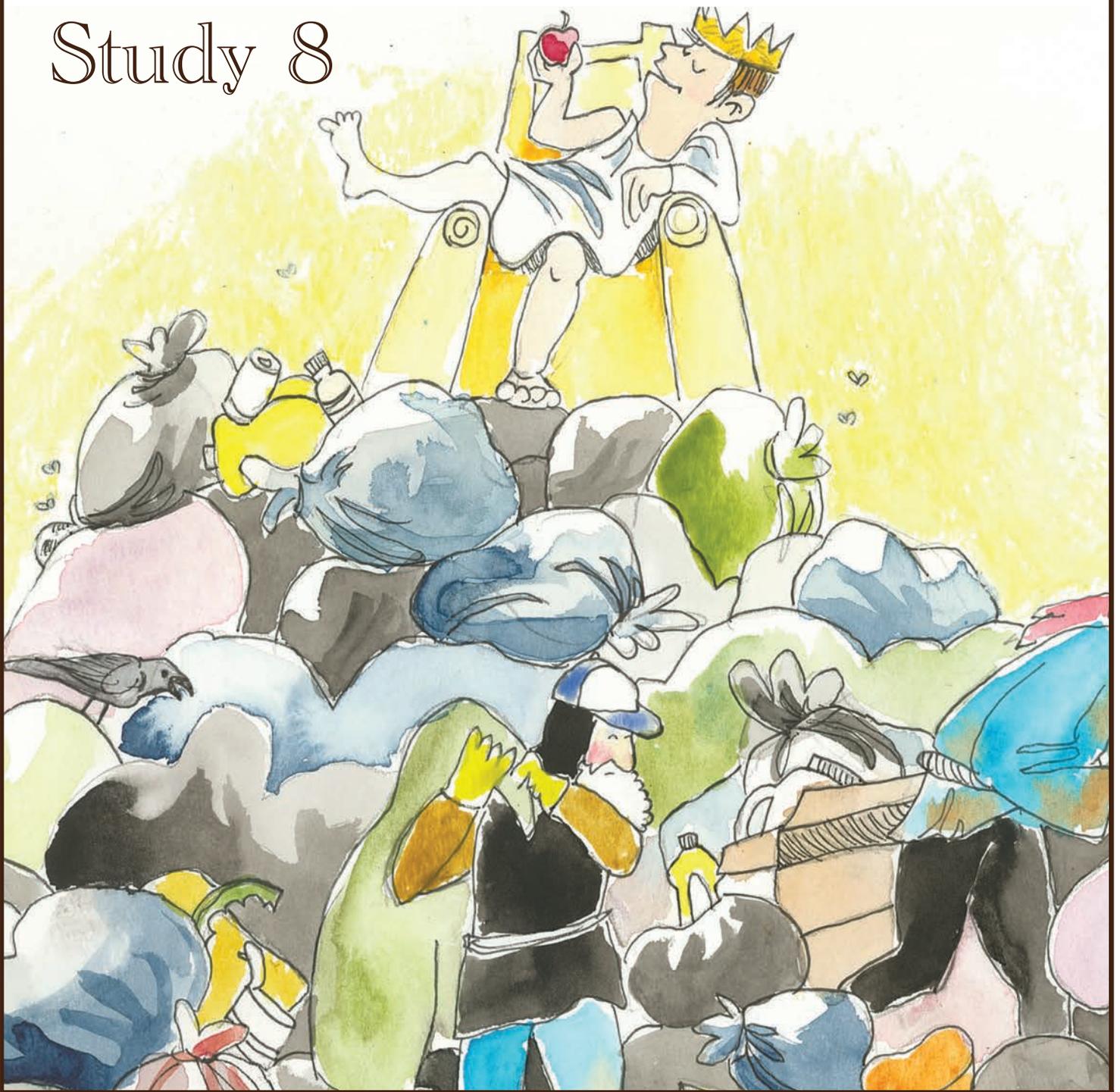
### 7. “mysteries of God...” (1 Cor. 4:1)

Refers to God’s plan of salvation, long hidden to human minds, but now revealed in the gospel, known through the Spirit and especially entrusted to the apostles to proclaim.

### 8. “Therefore do not pronounce judgment before time...” (1 Cor. 4:5)

Paul has just stated that as the Lord’s steward/servant, it is to the Lord that he owes responsibility. Human judgment has little value and is unreliable; even self evaluation is suspect. Some of the Corinthians seem to be judging Paul’s faithfulness and credibility compared to others. Paul says to stop judging. He is accountable to God and only God is able to judge the inner motivations of people.

# Study 8



## 1 Corinthians 4:6-21

The previous passage continues Paul's instructions in the context of building the church: 3:18-23 instructs the Corinthians as to how they should regard themselves; and 4:1-5 instructs them as to how they should regard God's servants.

This passage represents the conclusion of the opening section of (1:1 – 4:21) with 4: 8-13 being described as the climax as it provides a final step in a critique of human boasting. The Corinthians are particularly addicted to the sin of pride and Paul reminds them of the futility in their boasting; there is nothing special that sets them apart as everything they have comes from the Lord. This arrogance has led to a sense of self-sufficiency which Paul addresses in v.8. Paul's rebuke is firm in this section but comes from a place of love as he implores them to imitate him as he follows the way of Christ.













## Study Notes

### 1. “not to go beyond what is written” (1 Cor. 4:6)

Refers to what is written in scripture but more specifically to what Paul has already been teaching the Corinthians. They must not elevate human leaders or human wisdom above God. (1 Cor. 1:29–31; 1 Cor. 1:19; 1 Cor. 3:19–20).

### 2. “Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings!” (1 Cor. 4:8)

The Corinthians are feeling secure. Unlike those Jesus describes in Matthew 5:6 (“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied”), they do not need anything. The Stoic catch-cry taught by Diogenes is in view here. “I alone am rich, I alone reign as king.” They appear to be adopting a Stoic ideal of self-sufficiency.

### 3. “For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers.” (1 Cor. 4:15)

‘Countless guides’ represents the highest imaginable number of people who have a responsibility to teach or train but are motivated by payment. Paul, however, founded the church and his affection for them runs deep. His motivation is for their benefit and they should listen to his warnings.

### 4. “be imitators of me.” (1 Cor. 4:16)

The focus is Christ, not Paul. ‘Take your cue from me’ in that Paul is demonstrating a life dead to sin and alive in Christ. (Rom. 6:6-7; 1 Thess. 1:6)

### 5. “For the kingdom of God does not consist of talk, but of power.” (1 Cor. 4:20)

The Kingdom of God is more than clever talk and good advice, it brings salvation. The power of the Kingdom of God was demonstrated in the gospels and this power is what will enable the Corinthians to live a life worthy of their calling.

# Study 9



## 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

Paul continues his challenge in this section to rebuke a spirit of pride and boasting. Previously we see that the Corinthians are puffed up and self-sufficient. In this passage pride has embraced sexual sin in the body of Christ.

Arrogance rather than humility is governing their behaviour and unwillingness to deal with sexual sin will allow for the permeation of decay to spread within the church. In addition, the sexual sin that is being tolerated goes beyond even the pagan norms of morality! Paul takes this very seriously and firmly demands accountability and although he refers to the evil doer, he is more concerned with the shocking response to the sin by the church. He reminds them to become who they are in Christ.













## Study Notes

### 1. "and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans for a man has his father's wife" (1 Cor. 5:1)

If this sin had involved the man's mother, Paul would have said. It is more likely that it means step-mother, a woman divorced from his father, or even a step-mother where his father had died. This behavior, not unheard of, was nevertheless repulsive and condemned even by the pagans.

### 2. "I am present in Spirit" (1 Cor. 5:3-5)

Paul does not mean that he is simply keeping them in mind or 'as if' he is present. Thisleton explains that "It is the power of the Holy Spirit that Paul is present." Paul is an important part of the Corinthian church that is now threatened with corruption but is, "sanctified by the common bond of the Spirit, who indwells the corporate body."

### 3. "deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh" (1 Cor. 5:5)

Being removed from the church (excommunicated) is to be given over the sphere or realm of Satan, the place where Satan has influence. This may lead to physical consequences. (Acts 5:1-10; Acts 13:8-11; 2 Cor. 12:7)

### 4. "Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor. 5:7)

Paul does not use the word lamb in the original Greek, but does use the imagery of the Passover to convey that in Egypt, God's people were to remove all yeast before the sacrifice. (Exod. 12:15; Exod. 13:7) Christ, our Passover has already been sacrificed, it is time to get rid of all yeast - all sin.

### 5. "I wrote to you in my letter" (1 Cor. 5:9)

Paul had written previously to the church in Corinth and although we get an idea about the subject matter, there is no copy in existence.

### 6. "For what have I to do with judging others? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?" (1 Cor. 5:12-13)

The emphasis here is on discipline in the church; on those who bear the name of Christ. There is a difference between the two and although God will ultimately be the one to judge those on the outside, the church is not required to remain silent about injustice and what God has ordained for humanity.

# Study 10



## 1 Corinthians 6:1-11

In our previous study Paul rebuked the church for their moral laxity over a member sleeping with his father's wife. Now Paul addresses the church because instead of dealing with internal disputes within the church, they are hauling one another off to court.

These lawsuits breed mistrust and tribalism. In the long run, such factions will destroy their ability to witness God's love. Paul then writes to shame the Corinthian church because who they are called to be is not reflected in how they act. It's worth mentioning that Paul's criticism is not directed at the wrongdoer but is instead directed at the church for going to the authorities rather than exercising their role as a community to judge and adjudicate.

## 1 Corinthians 6:1–11

**1 Cor. 6:1** When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? **2** Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? **3** Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! **4** So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? **5** I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, **6** but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? **7** To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? **8** But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers![a] **9** Or do you not know that the unrighteous[b] will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, **10** nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. **11** And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

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# Study Notes

## 1. Judging world and angels (1 Cor. 6:2-3)

There is some disagreement about the precise meaning of this judgment. It seems unlikely, however, that we should think of people judging the world and angels as independent individuals. Rather, we need to think corporately as those who are heirs of God and co-heirs of Christ (Romans 8:17; 6:5). Judgment remains Christ's but Christians are united with him. With this in mind, human litigation is trivial in light of the final judgment. With God's wisdom, they should be mature enough to handle these smaller disputes.

## 2. To have lawsuits (1 Cor. 6:7)

Paul doesn't specify what these lawsuits are, but he does consider them trivial (1 Cor. 6:2). Instead Paul looks at how damaging these lawsuits are, and considers them a loss. No matter who wins or loses, Paul sees the litigious spirit of Corinth as a moral deficiency and reveals the triumph of selfishness over love.

# Study 11



## 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

In this passage, Paul returns to the issue of sexual immorality by taking on another ethical failing by the Corinthians: prostitution, sex for hire.

In general, prostitution in the Greco-Roman world was not viewed negatively. It was a common and accepted part of the daily life of adult males. Brothels and sex workers, both male and female, were legal, and widely viewed as a necessary social institution.

In our passage, it seems that some of the Corinthian Christians were arguing for the right to continue the normal pagan practice of visiting prostitutes. They made their argument by asserting their Christian freedom, and by drawing on the analogy of food, where Paul's basic position would have been well known—God doesn't care about food, so it doesn't matter what we eat. The Corinthians viewed themselves as Spirit-people, and believed that spiritual issues ranked far above anything pertaining to the body, about which God also didn't care.

Given the magnitude of the Corinthian error, Paul's response seems remarkably gentle. And imagine what Paul's message about being 'bought with a price' would have meant to the slaves within the Corinthian church.





## STEP 2: What Does It Mean?

### A Look at the Context

This step is for linking your observations together to get at the purpose(s) of the passage. How are the different parts connected? How does it connect to the rest of the book? What is the historical context? What do you think the original intention of the passage was?

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### B A Few Questions to Consider

1. What would Paul have understood the expression “sexual immorality” to include?

2. Why did the Corinthians use the slogan, “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food—and God will destroy both one and the other”? What is Paul’s answer to it?

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### D Stop to Pray







## Study Notes

### 1. **“all things are lawful for me” (1 Cor. 6:12)**

Paul is quoting this as one of the Corinthian slogans. Any new Christian who had heard Paul’s teaching about being justified by faith without works of the law might well have understood him this way. And it is a slogan with which Paul may have agreed, but never as an unqualified absolute. We are free to live out our full human potential in Christ; we are not free to do whatever we please.

2. **“and God will destroy both one and the other” (1 Cor. 6:13)** This is thought by many commentators to be part of the Corinthian slogan that Paul is quoting, because it makes more sense in the mouths of the Corinthians than it does in the mouth of Paul. So the quoted phrase should be: “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food—and God will destroy both one and the other”. That is, it doesn’t matter what you eat and it doesn’t matter what you do with your body because, in the end, both are destined to die.

3. **“sexual immorality” (1 Cor. 6:13)** There was no Greek word for “sexual immorality”. When the Old Testament was translated into Greek in the 3rd century BC, the translators needed a word for the Hebrew concept of sexual immorality and they settled on the Greek word *porneia*, which was really the standard Greek word for “prostitution”, and was not pejorative.

4. **“will also raise us up” (1 Cor. 6:14)** What we do with the body is important, not least because it is destined for resurrection. This would seem to highlight the incompatibility of union with a prostitute who might not herself be a member of Christ, and whose own body therefore might not be destined for resurrection.

5. **“The two shall become one flesh” (1 Cor. 6:16)** Paul quotes Gen 2:24 to apply the one-flesh union created by marriage to sex with a prostitute. It appears to be Paul’s view that there is no such thing as casual sex without enduring consequences. Every act of sexual intercourse joins the partners together into one body. If a Christian joins himself to a prostitute, and if the prostitute represents forces opposed to God, this immoral act has aligned the Christian over against God.

6. **“he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him” (1 Cor. 6:17)** The union between believers and Christ is of an altogether different kind than that created by a sexual relationship and can be expressed only in terms of the Spirit. As Gordon Fee says in his commentary, “Paul’s point is that the physical union of a believer with a prostitute is not possible because the believer’s body already belongs to the Lord, through whose resurrection one’s body has become a “member” of Christ by his Spirit.”

7. **“Every other sin...” (1 Cor. 6:18)** Paul’s emphatic command to “Flee from sexual immorality” is clear, although elaboration on the meaning of “sexual immorality” would have been welcomed. The rest of the verse, however, is notoriously difficult, and has been interpreted in various ways. Anthony Thiselton, in his commentary, suggests that Paul perceived “the sexual act as one of intimacy and self-commitment which involved the whole person; not the mere manipulation of some ‘peripheral’ function of the body.” This view suggests that sexual sin is unique in that one fully gives oneself to one’s partner, potentially removing one’s body from union with Christ by putting it under the mastery of a prostitute, and thereby calling into question one’s redemptive status.

8. **“you were bought with a price...” (1 Cor. 6:20)** This is imagery of a purchased/redeemed slave. You are not your own to do with as you please. Christ paid for you with his blood, and now you belong entirely to him, and are accountable to him.

# Study 12



## 1 Corinthians 7:1-24

In Chapter 7, Paul gives practical advice about sex and marriage. In verse 1, it is clear that Paul is addressing an issue which the Corinthians wrote to Paul in a separate letter. The Corinthian church thought celibacy, even within marriage, was a sign of a higher spiritual state; a way for them to become more 'holy.' Paul writes to correct the church's understanding both of sexuality as well as of marriage and singleness.













# Study Notes

## 1. “concerning the matters about which you wrote” (1 Cor. 7:1)

The Corinthian church had written a letter to Paul, and Paul is now either quoting this letter or summarizing the gist of it.

## “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.”

This seems to be a teaching or slogan that many in the Corinthian church adopted. Due to both their desire to be seen as “spiritual” or more holy, as well as following Paul’s own example of singleness, the Corinthian church seemed to encourage sexual abstinence among married couples. Paul is going to correct this view and offer his own views as well.

## 3. “For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.” (1 Cor. 7:4)

Paul is saying that wives and husbands do not have the right to use their bodies at will. Morris notes that they have obligations to one another. Not only does Paul see the sexes as having absolute equality, he will not allow a view that a) leaves the sex act in control of the husband and b) sex within the context of marriage is defiling.

## 4. “For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband.” (1 Cor. 7:14)

The point being made here is that the spouse who becomes a Christian is no less holy because they are married to a continuing pagan. They do not need to seek a divorce in order to elevate their spiritual state. Further, holiness is a dynamic concept ie. the fruit of God’s love in action. Leon Morris stresses that, “it is a scriptural principle that the blessings that flow from fellowship with God are not confined to the immediate recipients but extend to others.” The non believing spouse will experience the benefits of God’s goodness to their believing spouse though not become sanctified.

## 5. “I wish that all were as I myself am.” (1 Cor. 7:7)

Paul is single and celibate, but Paul recognizes that not everyone is like him or has received the gift as he has. He is also making it clear that he has not reached a higher spiritual state because he’s single.

## 6. “not I but the Lord” and “I, not the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:10, 12)

Paul now gives a sharp command in verse 10. He is summarizing the teachings of Jesus on marriage. In verse 12, Paul is applying Jesus’ teaching to the Corinthian church but is careful to make clear that this is his own injunction. It appears the early church would, at times, produce sayings and ascribe them to Christ to provide authority. Paul is not prepared to do so.

## 7. “Only let each person lead the life”

We are to live the life that God sets before us. “A Christian does not have to seek ‘the right situation’ in order to enjoy Christian freedom or to serve God effectively.” (Thistleton) This is Paul’s expectation in all of his churches.

## 8. “bondservant” (1 Cor. 7:21)

A bondservant was a slave in the Greco-Roman world.



