

connect 360

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Correction & Counsel

A STUDY OF
1 & 2 Corinthians

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 **BaptistWayPress**
Dallas, Texas

*Correction and Counsel (A Study of 1 & 2 Corinthians)—
Connect 360 Bible Study Guide*

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Printing: Data Reproductions Corporation

First edition: September 2018
ISBN-13978-1-938355-94-3

How to Make the Best Use of This Issue

Whether you're the teacher or a student—

1. Start early in the week before your class meets.
2. Overview the study. Review the table of contents and read the study introduction. Try to see how each lesson relates to the overall study.
3. Use your Bible to read and consider prayerfully the Scripture passages for the lesson. (You'll see that each writer has chosen a favorite translation for the lessons in this issue. You're free to use the Bible translation you prefer and compare it with the translation chosen for that unit, of course.)
4. After reading all the Scripture passages in your Bible, then read the writer's comments. The comments are intended to be an aid to your study of the Bible.
5. Read the small articles—"sidebars"—in each lesson. They are intended to provide additional, enrichment information and inspiration and to encourage thought and application.
6. Try to answer for yourself the questions included in each lesson. They're intended to encourage further thought and application, and they can also be used in the class session itself.

If you're the teacher—

Do all the things just mentioned, of course. As you begin the study with your class, be sure to find a way to help your class know the date on which each lesson will be studied. Here are some suggestions to guide your lesson preparation:

- A. In the first session of the study, briefly overview the study by identifying for your class the date on which each lesson will be studied. Lead your class to write the date in the table of contents on pages 9–10 and on the first page of each lesson.
- Make and post a chart that indicates the date on which each lesson will be studied.
 - If all your class has e-mail, send them an e-mail with the dates the lessons will be studied.
 - Provide a bookmark with the lesson dates. You may want to include information about your church and then use the bookmark as an outreach tool, too. A model for a bookmark can be downloaded from www.baptistwaypress.org under the “Teacher Helps” menu.
 - Develop a sticker with the lesson dates, and place it on the table of contents or on the back cover.
- B. Get a copy of the *Teaching Guide*, a companion piece to this *Study Guide*. The *Teaching Guide* contains additional Bible comments plus two teaching plans. The teaching plans in the *Teaching Guide* are intended to provide practical, easy-to-use teaching suggestions that will work in your class.
- C. After you’ve studied the Bible passage, the lesson comments, and other material, use the teaching suggestions in the *Teaching Guide* to help you develop your plan for leading your class in studying each lesson.
- D. Teaching resource items for use as handouts are available free at www.baptistwaypress.org under the “Teacher Helps” tab.
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- F. Additional teaching plans are also available in electronic format (PDF) by calling 1-866-249-1799. The price of these additional teaching plans for the entire study is \$5 per person. A church or class that participates in our advance order program for free shipping can receive the *Premium Teaching Plans* free. Call 1-866-249-1799 or see www.baptistwaypress.org for information on participating in our free shipping program for the next study.
- G. Enjoy leading your class in discovering the meaning of the Scripture passages and in applying these passages to their lives.

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Correction and Counsel

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Introducing

Correction and Counsel

A STUDY OF 1 & 2 CORINTHIANS

Teachers, coaches, employers, ministers, and parents often find themselves in the role of communicating correction and counsel to those for whom they are accountable. This is part of the responsibility of being a leader. The effectiveness of such instruction can often depend on the integrity of the leader and the condition of the relationship between the leader and those in need of the correction and counsel. As you may well know, sometimes these can be difficult conversations.

The Apostle Paul found himself in just such a situation with a church he had planted in Corinth during his second missionary journey. Corinth was a cosmopolitan city located on a major trade route, and happened to be one of the most wicked cities of the ancient world. It was famous for its pagan worship practices, especially the worship of the goddess Aphrodite. When it came to morality, Corinth was much like any large metropolitan city in the world today.

In the middle of this environment, these new church members (with many new converts from paganism), struggled with breaking the habits of their former lifestyles. Paul provide them with needed correction and counsel through the two letters we know as 1 and 2 Corinthians. He called them out for sinful practices, provided instruction regarding marriage, generosity, spiritual gifts, and church conflict, and wrote with eloquence regarding the true meaning of love. He also encouraged the Corinthians by reminding them they could live with resurrection hope and that God had promised his sufficient grace to meet their every need.

May we be encouraged as well to respond rightly to God's correction and counsel as revealed in the letters of 1 and 2 Corinthians. We can be confident that the words Jesus spoke to Paul are true for us as we seek to serve Christ in our world, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9a, NIV).

Each fall our Connect 360 Bible Study series focuses on a New Testament offering. For a complete list our studies see www.baptistwaypress.org.

Background on 1 and 2 Corinthians¹

From what we read in 1 and 2 Corinthians, the Christians at Corinth were a rowdy bunch. They had issues that divided them and that caused problems among themselves and in their witness to the world. They needed some strong guidance in getting back on the right track. Of course, that could never happen in your church today, could it?

A few years before the Corinthian letters were written, the missionary Paul had come to Corinth proclaiming the good news that people could rise above the despair and debauchery of their first-century world through the power of God. Unlike the gods whom the Corinthians had heard about before, this God had entered directly into human history. In fact, this God had come to live on earth for a brief time a few decades before in a man named Jesus.

This Jesus had taught the way of life and given himself sacrificially in death—the worst kind of death, crucifixion as a criminal. Moreover, somehow the meaning of Jesus' death extended to them, making them sense both the depth of their need and the greatness of God's grace. Jesus provided a way to live that meant joy and peace. He called them to follow him in witness and ministry. Even more, this Jesus had been resurrected from the dead! This unbelievable but true event assured them that God would raise those who followed Jesus to life after their death, too. The small group had been bonded together by the meaning and hope they had found in Jesus.

Then Paul had gone away. Uncertainty began to develop within the group, and people who had come into the group from various backgrounds began to try to answer the group's questions. Sometimes they tried to say

what they thought Paul had really meant when he had said thus and so, and sometimes they tried to offer the religious and philosophical answers they had learned from the surrounding culture. Some of them were adamant in their statements of what they saw as the truth, even questioning, challenging, and rejecting Paul himself.

At the same time, some of the group evidently didn't get very far into the Christian faith. They began to return to the practices and patterns of life they had known in the past. They brought the kind of life they had known on the streets of Corinth into the life of the group. The consensus of at least some of the group was that living in such a manner was no problem now that they had become so spiritual.

Furthermore, bickering, disharmony, divisions, and quarreling began to characterize the group as people claimed to believe first this and then that. They formed cliques and parties based on what they thought they believed various human leaders—Paul, Apollos, Peter—had taught. Some even declared themselves to be above it all. They claimed that they simply followed Christ, looking down their first-century noses at the others.

Finally, someone suggested they should write Paul and ask him about the questions that were being raised. So they did, although the vote was far from unanimous. Perhaps the people who brought the letter to Paul—"Chloe's people"—also brought further news about what was really happening in the congregation (1 Corinthians 1:11).

So, Paul wrote the Corinthian Christians. In fact, he wrote several times. The church's problems were so great that one letter wouldn't do it. The letters that we have are our 1 and 2 Corinthians, and these letters are the basis for this study.

The Letters of 1 and 2 Corinthians in Our Day

The description of the challenges facing the church in Corinth sound as if they could be found in any number of churches today. Here are a few of the transferable principles:

1. **Divided Loyalties** . . . in the church often stem out of intellectual and spiritual pride, and can lead to disruption and division in the church.

2. **Immorality** . . . in the church must be addressed. To avoid doing so damages the church's witness and sends the wrong message to the world about following Christ. Church discipline must be applied as needed.
3. **Freedom** . . . must be exercised with responsibility. Just because something is permissible may not mean it is also beneficial. Christ-followers have a responsibility toward their brothers and sisters in Christ when it comes to matters of conscience.
4. **Worship** . . . must be conducted in an orderly manner, including the celebration of the Lord's Supper.
5. **Spiritual Gifts** . . . are all equally valuable, regardless of their characteristics, and are given to build up the church, the body of Christ.
6. **Resurrection Hope** . . . Paul proclaimed the reality of this event and the hope that believers can live with based on the certainty of Christ's resurrection.
7. **Trials** . . . Christ's grace is sufficient to meet our every need as we suffer trials.
8. **Generosity** . . . We have been blessed to be a blessing to others. Our generosity proves we view ourselves as stewards of God's blessings rather than "owners."²

The letters of 1 and 2 Corinthians provide many points of application for our personal lives as well as for the lives and ministries of our churches. Our prayer is that this study will challenge and encourage you through the loving correction and counsel of God's word.

1 CORINTHIANS: QUESTIONS, PROBLEMS, AND SOLUTIONS

Lesson 1	The Cross: Wisdom or Foolishness?	1 Corinthians 1:18–31
Lesson 2	Spiritual Maturity: The Cure for Church Conflict	1 Corinthians 3:1–17
Lesson 3	Confronting Cultural Compromise	1 Corinthians 5
Lesson 4	Permissible or Beneficial?	1 Corinthians 8; 10:22–33
Lesson 5	Gifted for the Common Good	1 Corinthians 12:4–31

Lesson 6	The Most Excellent Way	1 Corinthians 13
Lesson 7	Live with Resurrection Hope	1 Corinthians 15:3–20, 35–44, 50–57

2 CORINTHIANS: REFUTE, RESTORE, AND RAISE HOPE

Lesson 8	Serving Through Suffering	2 Corinthians 1:1–11
Lesson 9	Tough Love to Stand the Test	2 Corinthians 1:12–24; 2:1–11
Lesson 10	Maintain an Eternal Perspective	2 Corinthians 4
Lesson 11	Giving and Receiving Criticism	2 Corinthians 7:5–16
Lesson 12	Dealing with Disputes	2 Corinthians 10
Lesson 13	The Promise of Sufficient Grace	2 Corinthians 12:1–10

Additional Resources for Studying *Correction and Counsel*³

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- Paul Barnett. *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997.
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Notes

1. This background information first appeared in the introductory material of *Letters to the Corinthian Church: Imperatives for an Imperfect Church*, 2011, BaptistWay Press.
2. Barton, Comfort, Osborne, Taylor, and Veerman, 646–49, 709–10.
3. Listing a book does not imply full agreement by the writers or BAPTISTWAY PRESS® with all of its comments.

Introducing 1 Corinthians

Questions, Problems, and Solutions

“Questions, Problems, and Solutions” serves as an outline to describe the Book of 1 Corinthians. In this letter to the church he planted in Corinth, Paul addressed several issues. Lesson one explores how the gospel confounds human wisdom, and lesson two shows how spiritual immaturity can lead to factions in the church. Lesson three reveals why the church must confront cultural compromise among her members, and lesson four advises Christians to seek the good of others as they exercise their freedom in Christ. Lesson five explains the nature and purpose of spiritual gifts, while lesson six describes true, biblical love. Lesson seven provides a word of encouragement for living in confident hope because of Jesus’ resurrection.

1 CORINTHIANS: QUESTIONS, PROBLEMS, AND SOLUTIONS

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lesson **1**

The Cross: Wisdom or Foolishness?

MAIN IDEA

The gospel confounds human wisdom.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Why does the gospel seem like foolishness to some people?

STUDY AIM

To place my trust in God's wisdom and the provision of the cross

QUICK READ

Paul explained how the gospel message seems foolish to most people and how those who respond to its call look foolish to the world. The gospel confounds human wisdom.



Introduction

I've seen multiple television shows that present smart people—geniuses—as miracle-working problem-solvers. The brainy person saves the day by preventing a catastrophe or rescuing lives in an impossible situation. Also, numerous movies depict superheroes who rescue people and the world from disaster. These media declare that human effort—brain power or special abilities—can overcome any difficulty and save us. They display the world's wisdom and its idea of a savior.

The gospel offers a wholly different image of a Savior: a crucified Messiah despised and rejected by others, whose life portrayed sorrow and terrible suffering. Most of Jesus' contemporaries thought of him as a "nobody" and viewed his actions as impudent and foolish. Today, many continue to label the gospel as foolishness. Why? The gospel confounds human wisdom. It does not appear to make sense. However, the Servant who suffered on the cross became the resurrected, living, exalted Lord. Only he can actually rescue people and save the world from disaster. Placing our trust in God's wisdom and the provision of the cross is the best—and wisest—action we can take. The Apostle Paul helps us to understand this truth.

Understanding the Context of 1 Corinthians

Occasionally, I hear Christians say, "We need to be a New Testament church." However, I have never heard someone say, "We need to be like the church at Corinth." The Corinthian church had heaps of problems. Paul's letters to that immature congregation, however, help us learn how to be the Lord's people in today's world.

Paul arrived at Corinth in the early A.D. 50s on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1–18). [See sidebar: "A Picture of Corinth."] As was his custom, the apostle first preached in the synagogue. The synagogue ruler, Crispus, and his household believed the gospel. Jewish opposition, however, led Paul to focus his ministry on the Gentiles. Those converts to the Christian faith brought into the church their Greek-Roman worldview and attitude toward moral behavior. Both slaves and freedmen joined the new

group of believers, yet the congregation also included the wealthy, such as Erastus, Corinth's city treasurer (Romans 16:23). Paul spent eighteen months in Corinth until Jewish persecution forced him to leave.

Before writing 1 Corinthians, Paul had already written a letter to the church at Corinth (see 1 Cor. 5:9–11). That first letter encouraged the believers not to associate with those who claimed to be believers yet indulged in sin. The apostle was in Ephesus on his third missionary journey. Some members of the Corinthian congregation from Chloe's household had come to Paul with a report, informing him of problems among the Corinthian believers (1:11; 5:1; 11:18). The apostle also received a letter from the church that asked specific questions (7:1).

In response to the oral reports and the letter from Corinth, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus in the spring of A.D. 54 or 55 to help the believers at Corinth know how to live for Christ in a pagan, corrupt society. The apostle wrote to correct their wrong practices, answer their questions, and offer correct teachings about the resurrection.

After his usual greetings and thanksgiving for the Corinthians, Paul addressed the factions in the church. From 1:18 to 4:21, the apostle tackled the causes of the divisions. He contended the schisms were birthed from an over-estimation of human wisdom and unfounded pride about the makeup of the Corinthian Christian community.

1 Corinthians 1:18–31

18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. **19** For it is written,

"I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE,
AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE."

20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? **21** For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. **22** For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; **23** but we preach Christ

crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

²⁶ For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷ but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no man may boast before God. ³⁰ But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, ³¹ so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

Understanding the Foolishness of the Gospel's Message (1:18–25)

The dictionary defines "foolishness" as *silliness, stupidity, absurdity, or ridiculousness*. Paul used a form of this word five times in eight verses. In the first century, many viewed the word of the cross, that is, the gospel message, as foolishness. The cross had a negative meaning in that era. It referred to a despised and cruel manner of death, a punishment for criminals and rebels. Why would anyone want to embrace a Savior who had endured such a shameful death? Still, God chose the cross as the means of salvation for sinful humanity. He transformed a symbol of terror and humiliation into one of love and power.

The Apostle Paul affirmed that the cross divides humanity into two groups: the perishing and the saved. Those who view the cross as nonsense are on the path of ultimate disaster. For believers, however, the cross is the power of God. Through the cross, God defeated evil, made his love known, and redeemed sinners. Rather than brash foolishness, the cross represents absolute power.

To support his argument, Paul quoted Isaiah 29:14 to show that God destroys and sets aside human wisdom as a means of salvation. He does not need human help to accomplish his plan of salvation. In Isaiah's day, the political cleverness of Jerusalem's leaders failed. Their human wisdom ("Ask Egypt for help.") prompted the exact thing they wanted to prevent—Assyrian invasion (2 Kings 18:13–25).

Paul used a series of rhetorical questions to emphasize his point (v. 20). He was saying, "Where are all the experts—the wise man, scribe, and debater of this age? Can these professionals do what the cross has done?" God makes those who think they have all the answers look foolish. The phrase "of this age" extends to the experts of the present age whom God has judged; their watery wisdom is also passing away. The humble and self-sacrificing wisdom of the cross also dominates that of experts in generations to come. Paul was not rejecting the use of intellect, but he warned of a prideful and self-serving mindset.

God saves those who believe. In his wisdom, God planned for people to come to him through faith. Human reasoning or effort cannot bring individuals into a relationship with God. The wording "well-pleased" refers to God's free and sovereign choice in salvation. God chooses to use "the foolishness of the message preached"—a crucified Savior. Salvation does not come through human wisdom but from Jesus Christ's "foolish" (in the world's opinion) death on a cross. God's wisdom makes salvation available to all people.

The Jews knew God's past mighty acts on their behalf. They expected a political Messiah who would perform those "signs." They wanted visual proof, refusing to trust. Instead, Jesus gave them the sign of Jonah (Matthew 12:39–40) as a testament to his death and resurrection. The Greeks rejected that and chose instead to search for wisdom, wanting to find God through the power of human reasoning.

In contrast, Paul preached "Christ crucified." A crucified Messiah was a "stumbling block," a scandal to the Jews because anyone who hung on a tree was cursed (Galatians 3:13). The crucified Christ did not fit their model of an exalted, victorious king. To the Gentiles, the idea of anyone who died a criminal's death on the cross being a Savior was "foolish." Only those whom God calls, both Jews and Greeks, understand the true meaning of Christ crucified as "the power of God and the wisdom of God." God's power and wisdom save.

A Picture of Corinth

Corinth flourished as a Greek city for centuries until the Roman Lucius Mummius destroyed it in 146 B.C. After remaining ruined and mostly uninhabited, Julius Caesar rebuilt Corinth as a Roman colony in 44 B.C. and colonized the city with freed slaves, soldiers, and urban laborers. The rebuilt Corinth soon regained the importance it had once possessed as a Greek city and served as the capital of the Roman province of Achaia. With two harbors, its strategic location on the Isthmus of Greece made it a major, wealthy trade center.

Corinth's population was diverse and transient with many cultures and religions. The city became a center of art, philosophy, and religion. Corinth had many pagan temples, including those of Apollo, the Greek god of music, truth, and prophecy, as well as Aphrodite, the goddess of love. In the first century A.D., Corinth was an active, proud, and intellectual city with immigrants from far and wide. Also, as with many seaports and commercial cities of its time, immorality flourished.

This “foolishness of God”—saving humanity through the death of his Son on the cross—is wiser than any human wisdom. This “weakness of God”—allowing Jesus to die, taking the penalty of sin for undeserving sinners—is stronger than any human strength. Human wisdom and power fail to rescue people from sin and its punishment. God's supposed foolishness and weakness are the only way to salvation.

Why does the gospel appear as foolishness to many today? It is not the way humans would have done it! Don't we prefer to do things our way, without any help? People still respond to the gospel either by stumbling, laughing, or believing. God calls us to trust in his wisdom—even if it contradicts the wisdom of the world and even if we don't understand it.

Understanding the Foolishness of the Gospel's Recipients (1:26–31)

Churches sometimes develop a character or reputation based on the composition of their membership, such as the professionals' church, cowboy

church, multi-ethnic church, mega-church, and millennials' church. Paul turned his attention to the makeup of the church at Corinth. Pagan outsiders would have viewed the unimportance of the Corinthian believers as another example of the gospel's foolishness.

The apostle encouraged the Corinthians to consider what they were when God called them to salvation—and still were. Most of them had no significant standing in society. Not many of them were considered “wise”—educated and clever. Not many were “mighty,” holding positions of power and influence. Not many were “noble,” born into the elite families of the wealthy, ruling class. By human standards, the Corinthians were unintelligent, weak, and unimportant. Salvation is not, however, based on human criteria. God's call is grace-based.

By repeating the words “God has chosen” three times (vv. 27–28), Paul emphasized God's sovereignty in salvation. God chooses “the foolish things, the weak things, the base and despised, and the things that are not.” From the world's viewpoint, these are the “nobodies” of society. God's choice “shamed” the “wise,” the “strong,” and the “somebodies” of the world. The wise think the cross is a ridiculous way to save the world. The strong believe they are self-sustaining and have no need for God to rescue them. The noble will not lower themselves to follow a crucified Savior. The word *shamed* in this context refers to coming under God's judgment. God reverses the values of the world. He uses what the world classifies as worthless, useless, and zilch to nullify (destroy) what the world values. The self-proclaimed elite can do nothing to save themselves regardless of their wisdom, power, and influence.

Paul explained the purpose of God's plan in choosing the foolish, weak, and despised: so that no person “may boast before God.” We cannot brag that our efforts merit a right relationship with God. Our salvation depends on God's call, his choosing—his grace. God chooses those who have nothing to brag about—humble seekers. And he receives all the glory.

God's work alone gives believers new life, uniting them with Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God. The Apostle Paul explained the fruits of this wisdom or salvation. The word *righteousness* means Christ's work on the cross enables us to have a right relationship with God, ourselves, and others. Jesus shares with us his righteous character. *Sanctification* means that through Christ, God sets us apart, makes us holy, and allows us into

Case Study

Mike is a brilliant businessman, inventor, investor, and philanthropist. His intellect has led to a net worth in the billions. Mike does whatever he wants to do. He enjoys life and lives it to the fullest with enthusiasm. Mike does not practice or embrace any religious beliefs. Why would the gospel seem like foolishness to Mike? Why would the cross offend his pride? How would you communicate the gospel to Mike?

his holy presence. The character of Christ is being formed in us. *Redemption* means Christ's death on the cross purchased our freedom from slavery to sin, as well as its power and penalty. Paul quoted from Jeremiah 9:23–24. If we want to boast, we should boast only in the Lord and his redemptive work on our behalf.

Are you boasting in what the Lord has done for you?

Implications and Actions

Two hymns came to my mind as I studied 1 Corinthians 1: “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” by Isaac Watts and “The Old Rugged Cross” by George Bennard. These two hymns reflect an understanding of verses 18–31. The cross is not foolishness. It is the center of the gospel message, representing the supreme event of human history. The cross makes God's gift of salvation unique and powerful. It gives us hope and confidence. Though the world views it as the emblem of suffering and shame, we should love and cherish the cross and proclaim its message to all those who are perishing.

The power of the cross transforms broken lives. It gives fresh life and a new direction. It provides a valid reason for boasting. The cross signifies how God's grace offers salvation freely. Every person comes to God through faith in the crucified—yet risen—Christ.

The cross indeed confounds human wisdom. Will you place your trust in God's wisdom and his provision of the cross? Will you boast only in the

