

# **The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians**

**Instructor:** Antipas Desai

**Time:** Saturdays 11:30 AM – 12:30 PM ET

**Class Size:** No limit

The beginning of a new church is an exciting time. Those who have believed in Jesus Christ, and experienced the new birth in Christ, are a new creation. As they come together with other believers to worship and serve the God whom they love, they are filled with hope and expectation to be a light to their community, to reach the unsaved, and to grow numerically and in the knowledge and stature of Jesus Christ. How many churches have begun in this way? How many churches continue in this way? How many churches stumble and eventually split? We have only to read church history, and look at the situation of many churches today, including our own, to realize that the church life is not as idyllic a life as we imagine it to be. The apostle Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, like no other letter, brings us down to earth, to challenge each church with stages that must be gone through in order to become the testimony that satisfies Christ and shines to the world.

This is a one year (three semester) course. However, each semester will be self-contained, even though only five or six chapters of the book will be covered each semester. Thus, during the fall semester, we will look closely at the first stage that a church needs to pass through: its relationship with apostles, or those servants of God who have raised up the church. Firstly, who are apostles? What is their ministry? What is their message? How do they relate to the believers in that church? Secondly, what is the standing of the believers in a particular city, as the church? How does God view them? How are they related to the apostles? A healthy church must lay hold of such a vision in order to deal with any division, the bane of Christian unity and harmony, and enjoy a proper relationship with Christ as the Head of His body, the church, and with His servants or ministers whom He has raised up to plant and water, and with God who gives the growth.

## **SYLLABUS (WEEK BY WEEK):**

Following the chapters in the first epistle to the Corinthians:

Week 1: Chapter 1:1-9: The epistle begins with a clear relationship between the apostles and the church. Who is an apostle and how is an apostle chosen? What is the church? What is the relationship between the church and God? What is the calling of the church?

Week 2: Chapter 1:10-31: The first stage through which a church must pass: the matter of divisions, strife. The reason for divisions is the trusting and boasting of our own wisdom and understanding, and despising what we perceive to be weak and foolish. Paul presents the solution: the word of the cross, Christ crucified, which nullifies what we think we are, and transfers us into Christ who has become wisdom to us from God.

Week 3: Chapter 2:1-6: Paul describes the way in which he came to the Corinthians, not in excellency of speech and wisdom, in contrast with the Corinthians who boasted in their wisdom, speech and even spiritual accomplishments. Rather, Paul presented himself to them through the demonstration of the Spirit and the power of God, speaking God's wisdom. in a mystery, hidden from the world, but predestined for our glory.

Week 4: Chapter 2:7-16: God's wisdom is in stark contrast with man's wisdom. Man proclaims and trumpets his wisdom unashamedly. God, on the other hand, hides His wisdom through the ages, but predestines it to the church for her glory. This wisdom is called a "mystery." Glory is not the elevating of man and his accomplishments for God, but the work of God, by the Spirit through the cross, to nullify the works of man and reveal Christ and His work in man.

Week 5: Chapter 3:1-6: The nature of the Corinthians is exposed. They are infants in Christ, fleshly, elevating certain ministers of God above others, and boasting about them. All the ministers of God either plant or water, but it is God alone who gives the growth.

Week 6: Chapter 3:7-12: Two striking metaphors are presented in these verses, to portray the true identity of the church, in contrast to the divisions and arguments concerning ministers and apostles. The church is God's farm and God's building. Paul, as a wise master builder, laid the foundation, which is Jesus Christ. Each believer builds upon this unique foundation, either with imperishable materials (gold, silver and precious stone), or perishable material (wood, hay, straw).

Week 7: Chapter 3:13-23: There is a serious warning concerning the outcome of our building work. In relation to our building work, Paul presents a third metaphor: the church of believers as the temple of God, in whom the Spirit of God dwells. The church here can be destroyed by our trust in our own wisdom. The consequence is the destruction of the work of the believer who worked, trusted and boasted in his own wisdom and work.

Weeks 8 & 9: Chapter 4:1-21: On the one hand, we see graphically the ministry of the apostle or servants of Christ, and the characteristics and living out of such a ministry. Such a ministry is worked into the believers who have received it. However, the Corinthian believers were full and acted as if they no longer needed the ministry of the apostles. They grasped what they had received and reigned as kings, using and even talking about what they had received, but living in a fleshly way. Paul concludes this section by saying that the kingdom of God is not in speech, but in power (a living out in our daily life and our church life).

## **COURSE OBJECTIVE**

Every church, and, indeed, every believer, is in debt to God. At the same time, every believer is in debt to another believer who has either preached the gospel, or helped that person love the Lord. We are not sufficient in ourselves. Our growth in Christ is not independent. We owe everything to God, and we owe much to those who have ministered to us. The first four chapters of 1 Corinthians show us who the apostles or servants of God are, and what we, as believers in a church, should be in relation to the servants of God. A healthy Christian life, and a healthy church life, begins with a healthy recognition of our debt to God, the giver of all gifts, and to His servants, those who plant, water and enable those gifts to grow. Without this relationship, our Christian life will suffer. The first manifestation of an unhealthy relationship is divisiveness, a holding onto what God has given us through His servants, and a forsaking of the giver of those gifts, believing that we are self-sufficient and self-made. This course, through the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians, will seek to bring us, or restore us, to a healthy relationship, and even cause us to consider those servants of God (brothers and sisters) to whom we owe so much, not with a view to elevating them, but with a view to appreciating the different ministries that God has given to His church for the building up of His one body.

## **RESOURCES**

*The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, The Bible*

## **STRUCTURE**

Lecture with a 10-15 minute question/discussion period

## **HOMEWORK**

Participants will be expected to invest 30 minutes each week in reading assigned verses and giving short answers to assigned questions. Group work is encouraged. Some questions may ask participants to share their thoughts in the discussion period, thus facilitating group discussion.

*The timing and content of this class has been specially considered in view of participation of saints from Africa. For those from Africa who wish to join, please register through the church in Accra or the church in Kampala. Even though this class has been designed with Africa in view, all saints from everywhere are welcome to join them. All other registration is still through this website.*