

July
New Testament (2020 study)
(Comments based on ESV text)

July 1 — Romans 13 — **Getting Dressed.** After talking about the Christian's responsibility toward human government, Paul ended this chapter speaking of our relationship with God. He pictured us waking up in the morning and getting dressed for a new day of walking toward our ultimate salvation (v. 11). We need to take off our dirty clothes and put on clean ones to face the day, or "*walk properly*" (v. 13). The dirty clothes represent sin we have tolerated or sin that tempts us "*to gratify its desires*" (v. 14). The clean clothes we put on are described as "*the armor of light*" (v. 12) and "*the Lord Jesus Christ*" (v. 14). Every morning as you get up and stretch, make a commitment to say "no" to desires of the flesh and "yes" to what pleases God.

July 2 — Romans 14 — **Should or Shouldn't?** In this chapter, Paul picks up on chapter 12's "Dos and Don'ts" theme but gives it a twist. Chapter 12 was about what *God* said we should do or not do; chapter 14 considers what *people* think we should do or not do. Big difference! First, Paul tackles the problem of judging others by our personal standards, like whether or not to eat certain foods (v. 2) or to celebrate certain days (v. 5). If God does not specify a certain standard, we should not judge others in those matters. The personal nature of these kinds of standards is pointed out by the use of expressions like, "*his own mind*" (v. 5), "*thinks it unclean*" (v. 14), and "*not from faith*" (v. 23). Secondly, Paul tackles the problem of negatively influencing others by what we do. This is particularly directed at those who are *not* "*weak in faith*" (v. 1). Those people must be careful to not influence others to act against their own conscience, which would be a sin for them (vv. 20, 23). The kingdom of God is not about conflict over extra-biblical standards, but it is "*righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*" (v. 17).

July 5 — Romans 15 — **Incorporating Gentiles.** Paul had been called by God "*to be a minister ... to the Gentiles*" (v. 16) in order "*to bring the Gentiles to obedience*" (v. 18). I love the progressive way the Gentiles are said to be included in the family of God as Paul shares three Old Testament quotes. The first is aimed at the Jews who would praise God "*among the Gentiles*" (v. 9)—Jews making contact with Gentiles. The second is addressed to the Gentiles who are challenged to rejoice "*with his people*" (v. 10)—Gentiles joining to worship with Jews. Then, the Gentiles are encouraged to "*Praise the Lord*"—Gentiles on their own praising God without dependence on the Jews. Most of us are Gentiles who worship God on our own but we still have the need and opportunity to progress. It is "*through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope*" (4). We are growing gradually in order to be self-motivated to read the Bible and pray privately on our own, although we also do it collectively with other believers, as we "*with one voice glorify*" God (v. 6).

July 6 — Romans 16 — **The Saints.** Paul named 35 people in this chapter as he wrote a temporary farewell to these Christians in Rome. He began with the names of 27 people whom he knew in Rome—a place he had not yet visited. What a wide impact he had made on the early church! He had encountered and worked with all of these people in other places and other churches. The first name, Phoebe, was a trusted lady who apparently carried this letter to Rome (v. 1). Prisca and Aquila (v. 3) were the husband-wife team Paul met and worked with in Corinth. They, along with other Jews had been kicked out of Rome by the Emperor (Acts 18:2). Each of these people had a story. Paul then named eight people who were with him as he dictated his letter to Tertius (v. 22). They were friends and fellow workers in ministry, people known by many of the 27 people mentioned earlier. They, like you, had life stories that were important to the rest of the church and that made a difference in the lives of others.

July 7 — 1 Corinthians 1 — **The Corinthian Mirror.** Paul established a church in Corinth on his second missionary journey, staying there for 18 months. He wrote this letter to them several years later from Ephesus near the end of his third missionary journey. He knew them well in a positive way as being “*sanctified*” and “*called to be saints*” (v. 2). They were “*enriched ... in all speech and all knowledge*” (v. 5) and were “*not lacking in any gift*” (v. 7). But he later learned that among other things, they now were lacking unity (v. 10) and were slipping into worldly thinking based on human wisdom. Much of this letter seeks to correct the ways they had deviated from the path of right-thinking and acting. We should look for ourselves in the mirror of this letter and heed Paul’s instructions.

July 8 — 1 Corinthians 2 — **True Wisdom.** Eight times in chapter 1 and seven times in this chapter, Paul speaks of wisdom, contrasting the human wisdom of this world (vv. 3, 6, 13) with the true wisdom of God (vv. 5, 7, 13). Human wisdom is our default. Our sinful nature causes us to focus on ourselves—on what we think. The culture around us also influences us in the same direction. But God offers us superior wisdom—His divine and perfect wisdom. The world without Christ doesn’t recognize the true value of wisdom (v. 14) but knowing Christ opens the door to His superior wisdom. We are drawing upon it right now as we read and reflect on His Word. We are gradually being taught the ultimate, true wisdom.

July 9 — 1 Corinthians 3 — **From Toddler to Temple.** We Christians are in the process of becoming something. We started out as infants with our initial commitment to Christ and we began growing by feeding on spiritual milk (v. 2). That is not bad because that is where we all should start. Peter wrote that “*Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation*” (1 Pet. 2:2). We are drinking this milk by reading through the New Testament this year. But part of our growth involves not only taking in what is good but also throwing out what is bad. Paul mentions “*jealousy and strife*” (v. 3) and “*the wisdom of this world*” (v. 19) as examples of what needs to be discarded. That is the way we grow into spiritual adulthood. There is another way that we grow as Christians, however, and that is collectively, as the Church of Christ, which Paul describes as a temple (v. 16). An ESV footnote points out that all of the words for “*you*” in verses 16 and 17 are plural. “*God’s temple*” is the collection of people that come together to help each other grow. Let’s make growth a lifelong endeavor.

July 12 — 1 Corinthians 4 — **Ashamed or Admonished.** Paul sort of “spansks” the Corinthian Christians in this chapter. After all, he is their “*father in Christ*” (v. 15) and they are his “*beloved children*” (v. 14). They seem to have been judging Paul (v. 3) and comparing him to Apollos (v. 6), another effective teacher. Paul used sarcasm in verses 8 and 10 to admonish them for their pride (v. 18) but he said that his purpose was not “*to make you ashamed, but to admonish you*” (v. 14). None of us likes to be criticized, to have our faults pointed out to us, but we all experience it. Most of it will come from spiteful people, wanting to harm us, but some of it will be shared by godly people who want us to grow. The question is, will we allow godly criticism to shame us or to stimulate us? Being ashamed cripples us but being lovingly admonished should motivate us.

July 13 — 1 Corinthians 5 — **Purge.** We discover in this chapter that we are not actually reading Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, because in v. 9, he said, “*I wrote to you in my letter.*” There was an earlier letter that is lost. God did not choose it to be a part of our Bible. Paul does share one thing he wrote about in that letter, however, which is also the theme of our chapter, i.e., not to associate with professed believers who have shamelessly fallen into a life of sin (v. 11). Such a person is to “*be removed*” from the church fellowship (v. 2) in order to “*cleanse out*” (v. 7) and “*purge*” (v. 13) through a formal (“*when you are assembled*”—v. 4) ejection or ex-communication from the church. The purpose of this drastic treatment is for the hopeful restoration of such a person (“*so that his spirit may be saved*”—v. 5). All of this takes courage but it is of vital

importance to insist on moral purity among believers. Sin is too serious for us to be tolerant about it in our own life or in the lives of our church family.

July 14 — 1 Corinthians 6 — **Lawful Limits.** Most modern translations put two expressions in verses 12 and 13 in quotation marks. They are apparently statements offered by the Corinthians to justify their continuing sin. “*All things are lawful for me*” (v. 12) suggests that they considered that the freedom they had received from the grace of Christ also freed them from restrictions regarding sinning, basically saying, “I am free to do whatever I want!” The second quoted statement, “*Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food*” (v. 13), was apparently offered as an illustration for their general belief that, “Whatever my body craves, I am free to satisfy.” So, they were trying to justify being involved in sexual immorality, including being with prostitutes, which Paul soundly refutes. When we surrender our lives to Christ for salvation, it includes our physical bodies. They are no longer to be surrendered to the desires of our physical craving but to the will of God who dwells within us. Just as we can learn to say “No” to a second helping at the table, we also can learn to say “No” to sexual cravings that tempt us to satisfy ourselves outside the boundary of marriage.

July 15 — 1 Corinthians 7 — **Single or Married?** Paul begins this chapter in response to questions written to him by the Corinthians. He introduced his responses with the expression, “*Now concerning ...*,” which he does twice in this chapter (vv. 1, 25) and four other times later in this letter. Both questions in this chapter had to do with sex and marriage. The first question (v. 1) apparently wondered that if all sex was bad and should be avoided, it should apply within marriage as well. Paul answered that within marriage, sex was good and should be maintained. The second question (v. 25) was about the advisability of marriage for a single person. To this, Paul favored a single life, if one could maintain sexual purity. In both of these answers, Paul indicated that as good as marriage is, its focus introduces distractions to our efforts of wholeheartedly serving the Lord. The priority is clear: living with one’s focus on God is the higher good. So, if you are married, hang in there but remember to not let its cares pull you away from pleasing God.

July 16 — 1 Corinthians 8 — **True Knowledge.** Here is another “*Now concerning ...*” introduction to a question posed in the Corinthians’ letter to Paul (v. 1). They apparently felt that since “*an idol has no real existence*” (v. 4), they should be free to eat meat that had been part of a ceremony of sacrifice to idols. Although this knowledge was correct, it was lacking because it had not considered the harmful effects it might have on other Christians who felt that it was a sin to eat that “spiritually tainted” meat. A person with an inconsiderate attitude toward spiritual brothers and sisters didn’t “*yet know as he ought to know*” (v. 2). It was a knowledge that “*puffs up*” rather than a loving attitude that “*builds up*” other believers (v. 1). We naturally feel that what we *know* is right and those who *think* differently are wrong. That is true in some cases but false in others. This reminded me of something the Lord impressed on me when we read in Romans 12:16, “*Never be wise in your own sight.*” Think twice about what you “know” today. Is it God’s truth or only your own?

July 19 — 1 Corinthians 9 — **Sacrifice.** This is a chapter about sacrifice for the good of others. Paul’s model for sacrifice was Jesus, and Paul urged others to copy the way he lived (see 11:1). Paul had the right to be supported by those to whom he ministered but he chose to work with his hands to support himself in order to avoid the “*obstacle*” (v. 12) of being accused of having monetary motives for preaching. He had been “*entrusted with a stewardship*” of sharing the gospel, so he felt that “*necessity is laid upon me*” (vv. 16-17). He became “*all things to all people*” in order to “*save some*” (v. 22). That was being sacrificial rather than selfish. This would be a good time to evaluate our own lives. What is your sacrifice quotient? One good mark is that you are still reading through the New Testament as you committed to doing. Like the athlete who “*exercises control in all things*” (v. 25), you have shown discipline. Keep it up and grow!

July 20 — 1 Corinthians 10 — **Partake or Refrain?** Some of the Corinthians were struggling with whether it was okay to eat meat that had been sacrificed to pagan idols. Paul's answer was basically that it was okay depending on the circumstances, including the consciences of others. If someone with you thought it is wrong, then for their sake, you ought to refrain. Like in the previous chapter, that is an unselfish sacrifice for the benefit of others. Part of Paul's conclusion is that "*I try to please everyone in everything I do*" (v. 33) but he preceded that with, "*whatever you do, do all to the glory of God*" (v. 31). Which is it, pleasing God or pleasing people? Pleasing God is primary but being sensitive about the feelings of others is also important. It is often challenging but we *can* do both.

July 21 — 1 Corinthians 11 — **Controversial Corinthians.** The church in Corinth seems to be the most controversial of all the churches Paul founded. Several of their problems are presented in this chapter. The first one is controversial to us also because the women in most evangelical churches today no longer practice covering their heads during worship. The second problem was that they were not properly observing the Lord's Supper (also called Communion or the Eucharist). They had turned it into a community feast but their food was not shared with everyone present. A related problem was the "*unworthy manner*" (v. 27) in which they observed this ceremony. The believer who partakes of this special service must first "*examine himself*" (v. 28) and then be "*discerning the body*" (v. 29) of Christ's sacrifice. There should be humility and worship, confession and thanksgiving.

July 22 — 1 Corinthians 12 — **Spiritual Gifts.** This chapter is packed with interesting and important information about how Christ's church should function. These gifts are termed "*spiritual*" because they are from God and they involve His supernatural effectiveness. They are "*given*" by Him (v. 7), "*by the same Spirit*" (vv. 8-9), and are "*empowered by one and the same Spirit*" (v. 11). Every Christian is given at least one: "*God ... empowers them all in everyone. To each is given ...*" (v. 7). Paul lists 11 of them in this chapter and more in Romans 12:6-8. The purpose of these gifts is also given here: "*for the common good*" (v. 7). Have you discovered the special way that God has gifted you to minister to others beyond the natural gifts you received at your physical birth? You only discover them by serving others. You can get clues by receiving feedback from others who tell you how something you did or said made an impact on them. Another clue is that you find great satisfaction and joy in exercising your spiritual gift.

July 23 — 1 Corinthians 13 — **Love.** This is the famous love chapter in the Bible—the 13th chapter with 13 verses. It first talks about the *importance* of love. If I "*have not love*" I am "*a noisy gong ... am nothing ... [and] gain nothing*" (vv. 1-3). Love must be present in all that we do. Next, is the *definition* of love: there are seven positive things it does and eight negative things it does not do (vv. 4-7). It must be balanced, not loving only those close to us like our family, friends, and church members. Lastly, it emphasizes the *endurance* of love (vv. 8-12). It is not only beneficial in this life but will characterize our eternal relationship with others in heaven. Love is the greatest (v. 13). How will you practice it today?

July 26 — 1 Corinthians 14 — **Building Up.** There are some hard-to-understand and controversial subjects in this chapter that could promote a lot of discussion. As I was reading through it today, however, I was struck by one positive, repeated theme: the matter of building others up. Four times Paul used the same Greek word for "*building up*" (vv. 3, 5, 12, 26), which is translated "*edify*" or "*strengthen*" in some other translations. The emphasis here is that the purpose of all that is done in a church gathering should be aimed at building up the believers who attend. How may we do that in our own churches? When you hear or see something good there, make an effort to communicate appreciation for it. Make a note of something meaningful that your pastor said in his sermon and write a message to him thanking him for what he said and telling him why it was helpful for you. Thank him for his faithfulness in communicating God's Word to you and

others. It would be very encouraging to him if you did that once a month. Let's be construction-Christians, building others up!

July 27 — 1 Corinthians 15 — **Not in Vain.** The resurrection of Jesus is critical to the Christian faith. Paul said that if Christ was not raised from the dead, then we won't be raised either (v. 13). And if we are not raised at "*the last trumpet*" (v. 52), then our "*faith is in vain*" (v. 14). But Paul convincingly argued throughout this chapter that the resurrection is real and true, both the resurrection of Jesus and our future resurrection. Paul also wrote twice in this chapter about something that is "*not in vain*" (vv. 10, 58). In both places, it is speaking about working for Christ. Paul said that "*by the grace of God ... I worked harder than any of them*" (v. 10), referring to other church leaders. The grace given to him by God was "*not in vain*" because he had been diligent and faithful in fulfilling the task of evangelism and leadership given to him. He ended the chapter by talking about our task, which is broadly referred to as "*the work of the Lord*" (v. 58). What part of God's work has been given to you? God has given you natural and spiritual gifts to do a certain kind of ministry that fits you. That ministry must be "*steadfast, immovable, always abounding*" (v. 58) so that it will not be in vain.

July 28 — 1 Corinthians 16 — **Relationships.** Paul closed this letter to Christians in Corinth with many comments about inter-relationships between believers. First, there was a group of men chosen to collect and carry the churches' financial gifts to help believers in Jerusalem and Judea who were struggling with famine conditions. These men were people chosen not by Paul but were "*those whom you accredit*" (v. 3). Paul was careful to protect not only the money but also his reputation for integrity. The relationship of the Corinthians with Paul's messenger, Timothy, was also important. They were to "*put him at ease*" rather than "*despise him*" and "*help him on his way*" to return to Paul (vv. 10-11). They had asked about Apollos ("*Now concerning...*"—v. 12), hoping that he would return to them to teach. There was also Stephanus, to whom they were to "*be subject*" (v. 16) and "*give recognition*" (v. 18). Their old friends, Aquila and Prisca (or Priscilla) asked Paul to send their greetings. Paul summed up the importance of these relationships with, "*Let all that you do be done in love*" (v. 14). What believer could you choose to love today in a practical way?

July 29 — 2 Corinthians 1 — **Trouble to Triumph.** Today we begin Paul's most personal and emotional letter. There had been a lot of trouble in Corinth during the two-plus years Paul worked in Ephesus (Acts 19:8-10). He heard about some of this trouble and wrote 1 Corinthians in response, sending it with Timothy (1 Cor. 16:10-11). Timothy apparently returned with news about even more trouble, so Paul made a short "*painful visit*" (2 Cor. 2:1) to Corinth, intending to go north from there through Macedonia and then back through Corinth (2 Cor. 1:16). Instead, Paul decided to return immediately to Ephesus, which some of the Corinthians interpreted as vacillation (v. 17) on his part. Later, Paul wrote another now-lost letter to Corinth in which he expressed his "*abundant love*" out of "*anguish of heart*" (2 Cor. 2:4). He sent this letter with Titus, instructing him to travel from there north through Macedonia so Paul could meet him in Troas. We will read about this in the next chapter. Titus brought great news about the Corinthians and Paul happily wrote 2 Corinthians in response while he was in Macedonia and on his way south to Corinth.

July 30 — 2 Corinthians 2 — **Why Forgive?** Whatever the problem was in Corinth, it was resolved by forgiveness. Some say the problem involved forgiving the now-repentant excommunicated man in 1 Cor. 5 who was sleeping with his stepmother. Others say it may have involved forgiving a now-repentant excommunicated man who was an opposition leader against Paul. If the Corinthians' forgiveness was genuine, they would "*comfort him*" (v. 7) and "*reaffirm [their] love for him*" (v. 8). An interesting and important reason for forgiveness is given in v. 11: "*so that we would not be outwitted by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his designs.*" Satan uses an unforgiving spirit to harm us. Our natural reluctance to forgive

is actually harming ourselves. Are you harboring resentment toward someone? Are you intentionally not speaking to someone? Do yourself a favor by forgiving them!