

The  
New  
Testament  
in a Year

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Week 17

1 Corinthians 1-5

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*This week's reflector is  
**Greg Smith-Young.***

*He is on the Ministry team at  
Elora-Bethany Pastoral Charge. He is  
also a Toronto Raptors fan, which  
means he is feeling somewhat  
depressed these days. Go Blue Jays!*

General Questions for Reflection

You might pick one part of each chapter and think about these questions.

- What does this tell me about God (including Jesus and the Holy Spirit)?
- What does this tell me about our world?
- What does it tell me about me?
- What does it say about following Jesus?
- Is there something here I'd like to learn more about?

Why not use these thoughts to shape your prayer today.

Monday

1 Corinthians 1

Corinth was booming! Big. Young. Vibrant. Cosmopolitan and diverse. Lot's of new money. Sex was big business there. So was religion. A great place to start a church! Paul did just that. Though he has since moved on, they've kept in touch. This is a follow-up letter to one they had sent Paul. He is not pleased!

For starters, they are a divided bunch. Different factions have lined up behind different leaders (including Paul himself). He will have none of that. The only one worth following is Christ Jesus.

*How are these words a challenge to all of us who pick sides in church disputes?*

For the Corinthian Christians, the spiritual life is about victory, power and wisdom. Yet at the heart of the Good News of Jesus lies a cross: defeat, weakness, folly. Jesus' death by crucifixion reveals to us a strange form of power, a different vision of wisdom, and a new kind of victory.

*How is Jesus' crucifixion a challenge to things you value and consider important?*

Tuesday

1 Corinthians 2

Paul was a smart guy. He aced his Bible courses, learned theology from the best teachers and knew philosophy. Yet here he downplays his wisdom. He is more interested in his readers knowing the wisdom of God's Spirit.

This chapter continues the wisdom theme that Paul started in ch. 1. I think Paul is contrasting two kinds of wisdom here. There is human wisdom – our knowledge, our well-chosen words, our insights. There is nothing wrong with this kind of wisdom. But we can't count on it.

The other is the wisdom of God's Spirit. That's the wisdom Paul counted on when he was first telling the Corinthians about Jesus. Only the Spirit can change hearts and produce faith.

For preachers like me, who love the craft of a well-written and delivered sermon, remember this: it is not our words but the work of the Spirit that makes all the difference!

For those of us who stumble over our words and can't keep our thoughts straight, remember this: it is not our words but the work of the Spirit that makes all the difference!

Wednesday

## 1 Corinthians 3

Again Paul nails their infantile practice of splitting into factions. It is not about Paul vs. Apollos. They are both on the same team. All credit for success belongs to God alone.

*How quick are we to rejoice when another congregation is successful? Another denomination?*

The only foundation that matters is Jesus Christ. Everything we build in the church must start with him. Still, what we build matters. Paul lists different building materials: gold, silver, jewels are contrasted with wood, hay and straw (reminds me of the little pigs). Which will endure when times of testing comes?

Of course, we are not talking about a building here. Paul says, “you yourselves are God’s temple and God’s Spirit lives in you.” The “you’s” here are plural. He is talking to the discipleship community. We are God’s Temple!

*In a congregation, what qualities and ingredients are like gold, silver and jewels – i.e., they last through tough times? What are like wood, hay and straw – i.e., they look good, but quickly collapse when pressure is applied? How would your church fare in a “building inspection?”*

Thursday

## 1 Corinthians 4

(Wouldn’t Paul’s discussion make a bit more sense if we knew what the Corinthians had written to him? It is harder to understand the answers if we don’t know the questions.)

More about unity in the Christian community. Different factions are judging each other, and judging the leaders too. Reputation seems to matter a lot to them. What really matters, though, is the judgement of Christ Jesus. After all, we are his servants.

Vv. 8-13 strikes me as very sarcastic. The Corinthians think highly of themselves. Paul contrasts this with the reality of suffering the apostles face.

*How do we judge success? In the church? What measures does Christ Jesus use?*

Nonetheless, Paul views them with compassion. He feels like their father. He is coming back, though, and asks them to consider what he might find.

*In what way does Paul want them to imitate him (v.16)?*

*How is God using those who are seen as weak and lowly to do Kingdom-work today?*

Friday

## 1 Corinthians 5

Paul was against legalism. Belonging to Christ frees us from the demands of the Law (Torah). Yet here he sounds very harsh and judgmental, doesn’t he! Is he in a grumpy mood? What is at stake?

The immediate issue is someone who has shackled up with his stepmother. Gentile Corinth had a reputation for sexual looseness, but this pushed even its limits. Yet the Christians are tolerating it, and rejoicing in their tolerance. *Does this attitude sound familiar?*

Does our freedom in Christ mean freedom from standards of morality and behaviour? This seems to have been the Corinthians’ view, and some Christians have echoed it ever since. Yet Paul will have none of it. He calls for the fellow to be tossed out of the church community. He fears that tolerance of such practices will contaminate the church’s life and witness. Even so, his hope is for the man’s eventual restoration (v.5).

*What are healthy and unhealthy ways for churches to address wrong behaviour by members?*

Life in the Spirit sets us free, but the Spirit is *Holy*. So if we are Spirit-filled, we will live holy lives.