

"One Body, One Spirit"
An Orthodox Christian Sunday School Curriculum based on the Books of I and II Corinthians
Antiochian Orthodox Christian Education Ministry

Feedback on this lesson plan is welcome and encouraged [HERE](#).

Title of Lesson:	Lesson Number:	Key Verse(s)	Grade Level
Introduction to First Corinthians: The Church is a Community of Christian Love	1	1 Corinthians 1:1-2 1 Corinthians 13:4-7	PreK K-1st Grade 2nd-3rd Grade 4th-6th Grade Junior High ✓ Senior High

Lesson Length: 30 minutes (main) + 15 minutes (extension)

Key Ideas in this Lesson:

1. St. Paul the Apostle – Uniquely called by God as an apostle of Jesus, Paul was graced with the same authority as is held by our bishops today. Although Paul was not one of the original twelve, and Judas the betrayer was replaced by St. Matthias through the casting of lots (Acts 1:15-26), St. Paul is revered as one of the Twelve in the iconography and hymnography of the Orthodox Church. Together with St. Peter, he is honored as one of the two chiefs among the apostles and the apostle to the Gentiles.
2. Paul's Relationship to Corinth – Paul was the founder of the Church in Corinth and thus held the authority of a Bishop, or episcopal oversight, over the Church there. He had extended stays there on his Second and Third missionary journeys. He may have spent more than two stints in the context of those two journeys and even mentions in 2 Corinthians 12:14 that he is ready to visit "for the third time." Paul had authority to write the faithful in Corinth, to guide, encourage, and admonish them with respect to life in the Church and preserving a healthy community there.
3. The Importance of Corinth – Corinth was a prominent Roman colony and the capital of the whole province. It was located on a 4 ½ mile isthmus connecting the Peloponnese or Achaia (a peninsula separating Southern Greece from the Mainland, or Northern Greece. In Paul's day, it was estimated to hold about 200,000 people, 5 to 8 times larger than Athens. The demographics were made up of a sizable Jewish population, many free Roman citizens, many slaves, many freed criminals, many sailors. There was a significant disparity between the rich and poor in ancient Corinth.
4. The Problem of Corinth – The City of Corinth was a pagan religious center with its famous Temple to the Greek goddess Aphrodite. Living the Christian life in the church was challenging as it was surrounded by false religion, an emphasis on hedonism, personal pleasure seeking, and all-manner of sexual immorality. The Church Paul founded there was constantly engaged in spiritual warfare against the cultural forces trying to influence the faithful.

Key Vocabulary and Phrases in this Lesson:

1. Corinth – A large Roman city in Greece. With ports east and west of the city, it was a significant economic center for trade, commerce, and travel. Its population was quite diverse.
2. Apostle – In Greek, the word literally means "one sent." Paul was called by God and elevated to apostleship, with episcopal authority, or the authority of a bishop, by the Church in Antioch where Paul was baptized.
3. The Sanctified – Those set apart to God in holy baptism.
4. The Saints – Those who, after baptism, are growing in holiness by living the Christian life and through the sacraments of the Church.
5. "All who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord" – An early description or declaration that the Church is Catholic. Paul is saying that the faithful in Corinth believe and hold to that which was believed in the Church everywhere, always, and by all.

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6. Love – The Greek word for love used in 1 Corinthians 13 is “*agape*.” In the New Testament, agape refers to a selfless, sacrificial, and unconditional love—often described as the kind of love God has for humanity and that believers are called to have for one another. This is the type of love Paul has for the Church in Corinth, the type of love they must have for him, and for one another, in order to be obedient, humble, and to grow in holiness or sanctification.

Suggested Essential Question(s) for this Lesson:

- 1. How would you describe American culture in terms of our freedom to live an Orthodox Christian Life?**
- 2. How can an Orthodox Church Community preserve and protect its people from the negative influences of the surrounding culture while at the same time staying engaged and proclaiming the gospel to the culture around us?**

To prepare for this lesson, you will need:

Audio/Visual	Printed Materials	Craft/Activity Materials
Computer, tablet, or phone to display: (Optional) “The 12 Lessons of 1 Corinthians” song and lyrics	Bibles (preferably the Orthodox Study Bible [OSB] or a New King James Version) (Optional) Introduction to 1 Corinthians worksheet, one per student (Optional) Introduction to 1 Corinthians answer key, one copy	Sticky notes or note cards, one per student. Pens and pencils.

Opening Prayer:

Open with prayer. Suggestions include **The Lord’s Prayer** or the **Prayer Before Reading Scripture**.
“Illumine our hearts, O Master Who loves mankind, with the pure light of Your divine knowledge. Open the eyes of our mind to the understanding of Your gospel teachings. Implant also in us the fear of Your blessed commandments, that trampling down all carnal desires, we may enter upon a spiritual manner of living, both thinking and doing such things as are well-pleasing unto You. For You are the illumination of our souls and bodies, O Christ our God, and unto You we ascribe glory, together with Your Father, Who is from everlasting, and Your all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.”

Opening Activity: (10 minutes)

Lead the students in the Who am I? icebreaker (for the purpose of getting students to know and reconnect with church school classmates; teachers are encouraged to participate!)

Pass a sticky note or note card and pen to each student. They should write a well-known biblical character or Saint on the side of the sticky note or card that will be facing outward.



Take the cards back and redistribute them to the group, instructing them not to look at their sticky note or card. Then tell everyone to stick the Post-it note on their forehead so that the name will face outward. If using index cards, the students may have to hold it in place with their finger. Then, they will walk around the classroom and talk to the other students. As the group mingles, they should treat one another as if they are the biblical characters on their foreheads. The student is encouraged to guess their character

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when they think they know who they are.

An example interaction would be:

"I'm so surprised the lions didn't eat you!"

"Am I Daniel?"

When a person guesses their Bible character or Saint, they can remove the card from their forehead and then help others figure out who they are. This fun icebreaker activity is perfect for any size group. A small group will have an opportunity to interact closely with one another, while a larger group could pair off into smaller groups.

After the icebreaker game, go around the room and ask students to answer another "Who am I?" question by stating their name, grade in school, and one thing about themselves (this could be a hobby, the most fun thing they did over the summer, etc.). This is the first session of the Church School year, so take some time with all this, especially if you have new students who may not know everyone.

Lesson Instruction: (15-20 minutes)

Note: Prior to class, carefully read 1 Corinthians 1:1-2 and 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 so that you are very familiar with the text and can contextualize.

A. Initial part of the lesson

Distribute Bibles, and share that the lessons for this year will focus on St. Paul's letters (epistles) to the Corinthians. One of the central themes of 1 Corinthians is love, which Paul describes as the greatest gift from God. In chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians (often called the "Love Chapter"), Paul explains what love is and why it is essential in the Christian life. He emphasizes that love is patient, kind, and not self-centered.

Ask a student to read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

Paul's teaching on love has inspired Christians throughout history and remains a guiding principle for the Church today.

First Corinthians is an important book for understanding how Christians should live together as a community. We get a sense of the importance of our relationship to the bishop, the priest, and to one another. Paul's words remind us that love and faith should shape every part of our lives; everything from our relationships to how we worship. His teachings encourage unity, moral integrity, and above all, love. Throughout 1 Corinthians, the Church learns how to follow Christ faithfully, even in a challenging world.

In this lesson, we are focusing on the Apostle Paul's relationship to the Church in Corinth. One of the main reasons Paul wrote two letters (1 and 2 Corinthians, and these two likely comprise content from additional letters he wrote) is because he had been in the city with the Faithful an extended period of time (Acts 18:1-11), staying at least eighteen months before he left and wrote any letters. He may have spent more than two stints in the context of those two journeys and even mentions in 2 Corinthians 12:14 that he is ready to visit "for the third time." During these long stays, Paul was there for weddings, baptisms, children being born; he had even been expelled from the Synagogue.

Eventually, the Jewish community expelled all the Christians out of the synagogue, so they started meeting in homes. And after this, more troubles arose! Paul loved and knew this community well. He wrote the letters to deal with situations that came up in the church after he left.

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When we look at Paul's life there, he had established a close bond with others whom the Church would ultimately honor as saints. In Corinth he meets Sts. Priscilla and Aquilla, apostles of the 70; as well as St. Silas and St. Timothy; Paul has a support network in Corinth.

The people loved and respected Paul. He was an Apostle and the founder of their Church. In Greek, the word "apostle" literally means "one sent." Paul was called by God and elevated as an apostle with episcopal authority, the same authority as our bishops today. Paul had authority to write the faithful in Corinth, to guide, encourage, and admonish them with respect to life in the church and preserving a healthy community there.

Although Paul was not one of the original twelve, and Judas the betrayer was replaced by St. Matthias through the casting of lots (Acts 1:15-26), St. Paul is revered as one of the Twelve in the iconography and hymnography of the Orthodox Church. Together with St. Peter, he is honored as one of the two chiefs among the apostles and the apostle to the Gentiles.

Ancient tradition describes Paul as small in size, baldheaded, bow-legged, well-built, with eyebrows meeting, rather long-nosed, and full of grace because sometimes he seemed like a man and sometimes he had the countenance of an angel. His detractors looked with contempt upon his appearance and his speech (2 Cor 10:10), but no one could deny the power of his words.

Corinth was important in the ancient world; it was a large Roman city in Greece. With ports east and west of the city, it was a significant economic center for trade, commerce, and travel. Its population was quite diverse, as well. Corinth was a prominent colony and the capital of the whole province. It was located on a 4 ½ mile isthmus connecting the Peloponnese or Achaia (a peninsula defining Southern Greece from the Mainland, or Northern Greece). In Paul's day, it was estimated to hold about 200,000 people, five to eight times larger than Athens. The demographics were made up of a sizable Jewish population, many free Roman citizens, many slaves, many freed criminals, and many sailors. There was a significant disparity between the rich and poor in ancient Corinth.

Corinth also was problematic for the newly founded Christian Church there. The City of Corinth was a pagan religious center with its famous Temple honoring the Greek goddess Aphrodite, patron goddess of the city. Living the Christian life in the church was challenging as it was surrounded by false religion, an emphasis on hedonistic pleasure seeking, and all-manner of sexual immorality.

The church Paul founded there was constantly engaged in spiritual warfare against the cultural forces trying to influence the faithful. The city was so corrupt that a phrase was used, "like a Corinthian," which meant someone who was extremely immoral. When Paul left to establish Churches elsewhere, the faithful had to war with the culture around them. More than perhaps any other New Testament church, the Corinthian Christians struggled to maintain their new faith. Sinful culture was creeping in and influencing church members.

Most of this letter is St. Paul's correction and reproof toward the wayward Corinthians. It is an important reminder to us of the challenges we face today when the culture around us seems to be drifting ever farther away from truth.

B. Second part

Ask:

1. How would you describe American culture in terms of our freedom to live an Orthodox Christian Life? (Guide students towards this conclusion:

- In the United States we do have freedom of religion. The state does not designate or favor a state religion, it does not prohibit the free exercise of religion, nor does it require the practice of religion. The Constitution

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specifically states that, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.")

In Corinth, the worship of the Greek and Roman Gods was very tied to the state, protected by the state, thus making Christianity a threat not only to the established religious system, but to the government.

As Orthodox Christians, we recognize that the kingdom of God *"is not of this world"* (as Jesus said in John 18:36); nevertheless, we do pray for our governmental leaders. As St. Paul says, "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:1-4)

Most Orthodox Christians, throughout the centuries, have had to practice their faith under threat from the civil and religious (non-Orthodox or non-Christian) authorities.

Ask:

1. How can an Orthodox Church Community preserve and protect its people from the negative influences of the surrounding culture, while at the same time staying engaged and proclaiming the gospel to the culture around us? (Guide students towards this conclusion:

- The principal virtue that protects us from societal pressure is love; the love of God, love of the church, and love for one another that exists in the Church. It is love that calls us to God. It is love that motivates us to humility, obedience, and repentance. It is love for God that prompts us to turn from the evils of the world to the purity of the kingdom. It is love that motivates us to look after our brothers and sisters in the church. And it is love for others, even our enemies, that incentivizes us to share our faith with an unbelieving world.)

A free society is a blessing to the faithful while at the same time allowing the secular culture to promote and propagate non-Orthodox, non-Christian, and immoral values. What the Church teaches is often viewed as narrow, closed-minded, even hateful by unbelievers. The morality taught by St. Paul in the church of Corinth was viewed as a threat to the pleasure-seeking culture that existed in the city. It was difficult for the faithful to war against these influences and keep the church free from the pressures of an immoral society.

Have a student read 1 Corinthians 1:1-2.

As Paul begins his letter, we should be reminded that he is an apostle to us as well! We are the sanctified, having been baptized into Christ. We are saints, striving for holiness in the life of the Church. We are members of the one, holy, catholic church; we are part of the *"All who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord!"*

And the whole church, from the time of Corinth to today, is held together by love.

Closing Activity: (5 minutes)

Using the Orthodox Study Bible, view Map 7 which shows St. Paul's second missionary journey when he visited Corinth. Locate Corinth on the map. Ask the students to find additional city names that they recognize. Can they identify if/how the cities relate to Paul's life and ministry?

Optional: Introduce the 12 Lessons of 1 Corinthians song for Lesson 1.

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To extend this lesson for additional time...

Additional activity ideas:

1. *Review today's introduction to 1 Corinthians.* Distribute pens and the Introduction to First Corinthians worksheets. Students can work individually or in small groups. Give students five minutes to complete the worksheet, then review using the answer key.

Background Resources for Teachers:

- Teachers may find General Teaching Strategies and Classroom Considerations included in the back of this packet to be a beneficial resource while preparing for this lesson.
- Teachers are encouraged to read the introductory material at the beginning of the First Book of Corinthians in the *Orthodox Study Bible*, p.1550-1551.
- Fr. Stephen De Young discusses 1 Corinthians, Chapter 1, and an introduction to the Corinthian letters in the Whole Counsel of God podcast:

https://www.ancientfaith.com/podcasts/wholecounsel/1_corinthians_chapter_1/



Introduction to 1 Corinthians: the Church is a Community of Christian Love

1. Which Apostle founded the Church in Corinth? _____
2. What was the population of the City of Corinth in biblical times?

3. Established by the _____, Corinth was a major port city with seaports on both the east and west sides of the city; it was a center of shipping, trade, travel, and commerce.
4. In the Greek language, the word “apostle” means _____
_____.
5. As an apostle, Paul had the authority of a _____; even when away, he remained responsible to oversee, encourage, and correct the Faithful as needed.
6. The patron goddess of the City of Corinth was the Greek goddess
_____.
7. The worship of this Greek goddess in the temple honoring her promoted and encouraged _____ behavior and a focus on hedonism and personal _____ seeking.
8. The most important virtue that binds Paul and the Faithful of Corinth together is _____; it is this virtue that is the basis of his care for them and their willingness to hear him, exercise humility, demonstrate obedience, and practice repentance.

Introduction to 1 Corinthians: the Church is a Community of Christian Love

Answer Key

1. St. Paul
2. 200,000
3. Romans (or Roman Empire)
4. one sent
5. bishop
6. Aphrodite
7. immoral, pleasure
8. love

