

1 Corinthians

Theme: Divisions, Disorders, and Difficulties in the Church

Author: Apostle Paul (1:1)

Recipients: The Church at Corinth (1:2)

Secretary or Amanuensis: Sosthenes ? (1:1)

Date of Writing: c. A.D. 56 – 57

Place of Writing: Ephesus (3rd missionary journey; cf. 16:8)

Time of Evangelization of Corinth: 2nd missionary journey (Acts 18:1-8)

Bearer of the Letter: Chloe's household ? (1:11)

1 Corinthians

Introduction	The Fact of Divisions (1:10-17)	Divisions in the Church	Disorders in the Church	Difficulties in the Church	Conclusion: Personal and Practical
	The Causes of Divisions (1:18 – 4:5) Misunderstanding the Message, 1:18 – 3:4 Misunderstanding the Messenger, 3:5 – 4:5 Application and Conclusion (4:6-21)				
1:1 1:9	1:10 – 4:21	5:1 – 6:20	7:1 – 16:12	16:13-24	
Contentions in the Church (Report from Chloe’s Servants)		Questions from the Church (Introduced by the phrase “Now Concerning”)			
<p>Paul, who planted the church at Corinth wrote in response to a report from Chloe’s people and to a letter from the church dealing with the specifics of divisions, disorders, and particular difficulties (e.g., marriage, gray areas, women, worship, spiritual gifts, and resurrection) in order to correct the worldly attitude and arrogance of the church and to encourage them to pursue a godly lifestyle and doctrinal purity.</p>					

Paul's Corinthian Correspondence and Visits

Event	Scripture Reference
Founds the church on second missionary journey	Acts 18:1-17
Leaves Corinth, arriving at Ephesus	Acts 18:18-19
(1) <u>Writes a letter now lost*</u> "the previous letter"	1 Cor. 5:9-13
Receives a bad report from "some from Chloe's household" and a letter from Corinth	1 Cor. 1:11; 7:1
(2) <u>Writes 1 Corinthians</u>	1 Corinthians
Sends Timothy and Erastus to Corinth	Acts 19:22; 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10
Hears of a serious crisis in Corinth caused by Jewish troublemakers in which Paul's authority is questioned	2 Cor. 10:10; 11:23; 12:6-7
Makes a hasty trip to Corinth ("painful visit")	2 Cor. 2:1; 12:14; 13:1
(3) <u>Writes "severe letter" to Corinth</u> (now lost to us)	2 Cor. 2:3-9; 7:8-12
Searches for Titus in Troas and Macedonia	2 Cor. 2:12-13
Finds Titus, who reports the worst at Corinth is over	2 Cor. 7:6-16
(4) <u>Writes 2 Corinthians</u>	2 Corinthians
Makes third visit to Corinth	Acts 19:21; 20:3; 2 Cor. 13:1

* Some believe 2 Cor. 6:14 – 7:1 is a fragment of this letter.

Introduction to 1 Corinthians

I. Author

As one of the capital or major epistles (along with Romans, 2 Corinthians, and Galatians), the Pauline authorship of this letter has never been seriously questioned. External and internal evidence is strong in support of Paul as the author.

II. Date and Place

The letter was written from Ephesus (cf. 16:5-9) in c. A.D. 56-57.

III. The City of Corinth

- A. The city was strategically located as a sentry of the 4 ½ mile Isthmus of Corinth, and it was located on major land and sea travel routes. It was located at the foot of the 1,886 feet high AcroCorinth, and was the master of two harbors (Cenchreae leading to Asia and Lechaem leading to Italy).
- B. From the beginning it was prosperous; but it became famous also for luxury and immorality. The city contained at least 26 sacred places, including one dedicated to Aphrodite that had 1,000 temple priestesses/prostitutes.
- C. The population of the city has been estimated at approximately 500,000. Corinth was the New York, Los Angeles, or New Orleans of the ancient world. Indeed *Korinthiazō* meant to commit immorality.
- D. In 27 BC it became the capital of the Roman province of Achaia, what is southern Greece today. The city was comprised of Jew and Greek, slave and free. It was proud of its Hellenic culture, international Isthmian games, philosophical schools, and esoteric mystery religions.

IV. Occasion

- A. Paul's founding visit in Corinth is discussed in Acts 18 (approximately A.D. 50-52 on his second missionary journey).

- B. A couple of years later, while Paul was in Ephesus, he wrote what is called the “previous letter” (1 Cor. 5). Though the contents of this letter are unknown, it definitely dealt with the problem of sexual immorality in the church. Paul’s words in 1 Cor. 5 suggest that the Corinthians misunderstood or rejected his counsel in this letter.
- C. This leads to the writing of our (the canonical) 1 Corinthians. This epistle was occasioned by several events:
 - 1. Paul has heard from “Chloe’s people” (1:11) that a party spirit has developed in Corinth.
 - 2. Paul has also received a letter from the Corinthian church. Paul begins to respond to this letter in chapter 7. He takes up the items in their letter one by one, most of them introduced by the words “now concerning . . .” (7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12). Most likely, this letter from Corinth was written, at least in part, as a response to Paul’s “previous letter” and was brought to Paul by a delegation from Corinth (16:15-17).
 - 3. This Corinthian delegation may have also brought oral reports about the situation in Corinth.

V. The Church at Corinth

- A. The church was founded on the second missionary journey, and included both Jews and Gentiles, with Gentiles (and probably slaves and the lower classes) in the majority.
- B. The church at Corinth was a divided and carnal church in a number of areas:
 - 1. A party spirit predominated, as believers split ranks to follow various personalities (1:12ff; 3:5ff). In Paul’s case, both his authority and Gospel were being challenged.
 - 2. Perhaps a group of enthusiasts elevated the supernatural gifts, especially speaking in tongues, to the top of the Christian life and thereby created an elitist group that looked down on the other believers (probably including Paul) and took control of the worship services. There were

disagreements concerning spiritual gifts, and just what it means to be “spiritual” (*pneumatikos*).

3. Some of the believers adopted a libertine lifestyle, returning to the immorality of their former ways, and looking down on the members who were convicted by conscience. Perhaps they were influenced by some type of Hellenistic duality (Platonic philosophy), which downplayed one’s physical existence. Thus, such physical acts as sexual immorality were permissible because the “flesh” was unimportant.
 4. Others reacted in the opposite direction by becoming ascetic (ch. 7), rejecting sexual relations within marriage between a man and a woman. The tension between various groups is not simply evident in the first part of the book; it is also reflected in chapters 7-12. In these chapters, Paul’s arguments, often include a “yes—but” form. In other words, he is saying to each faction, “Yes, you have something of the truth—but . . .” For example, notice the beginning of chapter 8. Paul acknowledges that food offered to idols is not dangerous (vs. 4-6). “But,” he says, “not everyone knows this” (v. 7), by which he is referring to other Christians within the church.
- C. One of the common denominators in the problems at Corinth might be called an “overrealized eschatology.” This perhaps was a hangover of their Hellenistic worldview and their former paganism. The church in Corinth was having difficulty in getting Corinth out of the church.
1. With the coming of the Lord Jesus, Paul recognized that the new age has dawned, even though it has not yet come in its complete fullness. This concept is often referred to as a tension between the “already” and the “not yet.” As a result of this tension, believers belong to both “this age” and “the age to come.”
 2. The error of many in this church was placing too much emphasis on what Christ has already accomplished. They believed they were entitled to unqualified blessings as God’s children; some probably even suggested that they

had already experienced the true “resurrection” (a spiritual one) and that no further [bodily] “resurrection” awaited them in the future (cf. chapter 15).

3. The verb “to be arrogant” (*phusioo*) occurs 6 times and the verb “to boast” (*kauchaomai*) occurs 35 times. The sin of pride ran rampant in this congregation.
4. Note Paul’s powerful statements in 4:8-13. According to Paul’s comments, these believers were boasting about their spirituality as if the final reign of God had already begun.

VI. Purpose

- A. Paul confronts and attempts to correct the division within the Corinthian church and the errant beliefs that led to these problems. Key terms in the discussions are spiritual (*pneumatikos*), wisdom (*sophia*), knowledge (*gnosis*), and love (*agape*).
- B. Paul seeks to address the questions raised by the Corinthian church in chapters 7-16.
- C. Paul instructs the Corinthians to participate in the offering for the Jerusalem church (16:1-4).

VII. Ecclesiological Contributions

- A. The church is God’s temple (3:16-17), and therefore it must be characterized by holiness.
- B. The church is the body of Christ (10:17; 11:29; 12:12-26), and therefore it must be characterized by wholeness.
 1. As a body, we affirm unity.
 2. As a body, we accept diversity.

VIII. Structure

- A. Introduction—1:1-9
- B. Response to Reports—1:10 – 6:20
 1. A church divided—chs 1 – 4
 2. Immorality and litigation—chs 5 – 6

- C. Response to the Corinthian letter—7:1 – 16:12
 - 1. Marriage—ch 7
 - 2. Food offered to idols—chs 8 – 11:1
 - 3. Women and men in worship—ch 11:2-16
 - 4. Abuse of the Lord's Supper—ch 11:17-34
 - 5. Spiritual gifts—chs 12 – 14
 - 6. Resurrection—ch 15
 - 7. The Jerusalem offering—ch 16:1-11
 - 8. The Apollos situation—ch 16:12
- D. Conclusion 16:13-24

“What Kind of Man Are You?”

1 Corinthians 2:10 – 3:4

- I. The Natural Man Does What Comes Natural 2:14
 - 1. He is a lost man who lives like a lost man
 - 2. He is captive to his soul
 - He has no appreciation of spiritual things
 - He has no comprehension of spiritual things

- II. The Spiritual Man Does What Comes Supernatural 2:10-13, 15
 - 1. He is a saved man who lives like a saved man
 - 2. He is captive to the Spirit
 - a. He is informed by the Spirit 2:10-11
 - b. He is instructed by the Spirit 2:12-13
 - c. He is given insight by the Spirit 2:15
 - d. He is made incomprehensible by the Spirit 2:15

- III. The Carnal Man Does What Comes Unnatural 3:1-4
 - 1. He is a saved man who lives like a lost man
 - 2. He is captive to his flesh
 - a. There is the weak carnal man 3:1-2
 - b. There is the willful carnal man 3:2-4
 - 1) He is deformed 3:2
 - 2) He is divisive 3:3-4

My Body Belongs to God

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

- I. God has principles for my body (vs. 12-13)
 1. My actions must *edify self* (vs. 12)
 2. My actions must *not enslave the soul* (vs. 12)
 3. My actions must *exalt the Savior* (vs. 13)
- II. God has plans for my body (vs. 13-14)
 1. In the *present* God will *use me* (vs. 13)
 2. In the *future* God will *raise me* (vs. 14)
- III. God has protection for my body (vs. 15-18)
 1. I must *remember my sacred union* (vs. 15-17)
 2. I must *run from sexual perversion* (vs. 18)
- IV. God has possession of my body (vs. 19)
 1. I am *important to* God
 2. I am *indwelt by* God
- V. God has paid for my body (vs. 20)
 1. God is the owner of my body
 2. I am to honor God with my body

God's Guidelines
For the GRAY Areas of Life
(Paul's Corinthian Principles)
1 Corinthians 6:12 – 11:1

- I. Will this action edify self? (6:12)
Will it build me up? Profit me? Help me personally?
- II. Will this action enslave my soul? (6:12)
Can it bring me into emotional/psychological (even chemical) bondage?
- III. Will this action exalt the Savior? (6:13; 10:31)
Can I glorify my Lord in this activity?
- IV. Will this action encourage other saints? (8:13)
Is this a potential stumbling block to someone else?
- V. Will this action evangelize sinners? (10:32-33)
Will this help or harm my witness for Christ?
- VI. Will this action emulate my Savior? (11:1)
Is this something I could see Jesus doing?

“Love: God’s Great Gift”

I Corinthians 13

I. Love is essential 12:31–13:3

1. Without love it does not matter what you say 13:1
2. Without love it does not matter what you know 13:2
3. Without love it does not matter what you do 13:3
 - a. Sacrificing your possessions gains you nothing without love
 - b. Sacrificing your person gains you nothing without love

II. Love is expressive 13:4-8

(Sixteen descriptive terms used to portray Christ-like love)

1. It has a proper inward perspective (self) 13:4
 - a. Love’s beauty – suffers long and is kind
 - b. Love’s humility – does not envy...parade itself, is not puffed up
2. It has a proper outward perspective (others) 13:5
 - a. Love’s courtesy – is not rude
 - b. Love’s sensitivity – does not seek its own, is not provoked
 - c. Love’s purity – thinks no evil
3. It has a proper upward perspective (God’s will) 13:6
 - a. Love’s integrity – does not rejoice in iniquity
 - b. Love’s transparency – rejoices in the truth
4. It has a proper forward perspective (the future) 13:7-8
 - a. Love’s generosity – bears and believes and hopes all things
 - b. Love’s durability – endures all things; it never fails

III. Love is enduring 13:8-13

1. Love will outlive spiritual gifts 13:8-10
2. Love will outlast spiritual growth 13:11-12
 - a. We will grow beyond the need of some things 13:11
 - b. We will know beyond the need of other things 13:12
3. Love will outshine the spiritual graces 13:13