

A Brief Introduction To 1&2 Corinthians

According to Greek legend, Sisyphus was a king of Corinth. For defying the gods with his insolent wit he was sentenced to the eternal drudgery of pushing a huge stone up a hill. When he would reach the summit, the stone would roll back to the bottom and force resumption of the task. Camus, a 20th-century philosopher, found in this legend of the Corinthian king a picture of modern man's condition, the purposeless absurdity of life.

If Camus had read the two biblical letters sent to the Corinthians, he would have gotten a different picture, one with a message of purpose and hope for misdirected people. The attitude of these Corinthians, like their legendary king, smacked of proud self-centeredness. But instead of dealing with a capricious Zeus, these first-century Corinthians interacted with the gracious and loving God and His messenger, the Apostle Paul.

From a human point of view Paul probably had reason to wonder if many saints would be found in Corinth. The ancient city had a reputation for vulgar materialism. In the earliest Greek literature it was linked with wealth (Homer *Iliad* 2. 569-70) and immorality. When Plato referred to a prostitute, he used the expression "Corinthian girl" (*Republic* 404d). The playwright Philetaerus (*Athenaeus* 13. 559a) titled a burlesque play *Ho Korinthiasteus*, which may be translated "The Lecher." And Aristophanes coined the verb *korinthiazomai* to refer to fornication (*Fragment* 354). According to Strabo (*Geography* 8. 6-20) much of the wealth and vice in Corinth centered around the temple of Aphrodite and its thousand temple prostitutes. For this reason a proverb warned, "Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth."

For a hundred years after 146 B.C. no one cared to make the voyage to Corinth. The city was destroyed because of its revolt against Rome. Only a few columns in the temple of Apollo survived the razing. All its citizenry was killed or sold into slavery.

But this favorable location did not go unused for long, as Julius Caesar refounded the city as a Roman colony in 46 B.C. In 27 B.C. it became the governmental seat for Achaia, from which seat Gallio as proconsul would allow Paul's proclamation of the gospel. It was onto this new stage, which nonetheless preserved the vices of the old, that Paul stepped in A.D. 51.¹

¹Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

First Corinthians reveals the problems, pressures, and struggles of a church called out of a pagan society. Paul addresses a variety of problems in the lifestyle of the Corinthian Christians: factions, lawsuits, immorality, questionable practices, abuse of the Lord's Supper, and spiritual gifts. In addition to words of discipline, Paul shares words of counsel in answer to questions raised by the Corinthians.

Author

Pauline authorship of 1 Corinthians is almost universally accepted. In addition to the explicit statements of the epistle (1:1; 16:21), the vocabulary and teachings of the text point to Paul the apostle to the Gentiles. References to this letter in extra-biblical literature can be found as early as A.D. 95, when Clement of Rome mentions 1 Corinthians as having been written by Paul.

Date

First Corinthians was probably written during Paul's third missionary journey in A.D. 56 or 57, with 2 Corinthians being written some six to eighteen months later. Paul had founded the church at Corinth during an eighteen-month stay in the city (A.D. 51–52).

The Corinth which Paul knew had been founded as a Roman colony during the century before Christ. It was strategically located in the Roman province of Achaia on a narrow strip of land between the Aegean Sea and the Adriatic Sea, with two adjoining ports. Corinth's location made it a center for trade routes passing from east to west, and the resulting prosperity brought both luxury and immorality. "To live like a Corinthian" meant to live in gross immorality, and many pagan temples located in Corinth encouraged this licentious way of life through temple prostitution.

Themes and Literary Structure

This epistle is quite orderly in its approach as it sequentially addresses a group of problems that have come to Paul's attention. Paul also gives a series of perspectives on various questions and issues raised by the Corinthians in a letter. The three divisions of 1 Corinthians are: (1) the answer to Chloe's report of divisions (chs. 1–4); (2) answer to the report of fornication and disorder (chs. 5–6); and (3) answer to the letter of questions (chs. 7–16).

As he prepares to deal with the serious problems present in the Corinthian church early on in the epistle, Paul proclaims the relevance and sufficiency of Christ for every area of the believer's life. Christ Jesus "became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1:30).

In dealing with the sexual immorality that had arisen in the Corinthian church, Paul stresses the importance of church discipline and purity (5:9–13). Here the apostle also indicates that a primary goal of such discipline is the restoration of the wayward.

The relationship of Christian liberty and Christian love is also explored. Paul writes that "all things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful" (6:12), and chapter 13 contains the most extensive and profound teaching on the self-giving character of Christian love.

In addition, 1 Corinthians contains extensive doctrinal instruction on the place of spiritual gifts in the church (chs. 12–14), and on the nature of the resurrection body (ch. 15).

²

²*Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts : Old and New Testaments.* electronic ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1996.

Chronology of Contacts

The nature and number of Paul's contacts and correspondence with the Corinthians after his first visit in A.D. 51 is subject to considerable debate. Let's start with what we do know:

1. The length of Paul's stay on this first tour of ministry was one and one-half years, after which he sailed in A.D. 52 to Ephesus enroute to Jerusalem. Priscilla and Aquila accompanied Paul to Ephesus where they remained to meet and instruct the gifted Alexandrian Apollos whom they subsequently sent on to Corinth for ministry there (Acts 18:18-28).

2. While Apollos was ministering in Corinth (Acts 19:1), Paul returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey, about A.D. 53, for a period of about two and one-half years (Acts 19). It was probably during the early part of Paul's ministry in Ephesus that he wrote the letter mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9, a letter seemingly misunderstood by the Corinthians (5:10-11).

3. Paul learned of the divisions in the church at Corinth from the household of Chloe (1:11). Then Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (16:17) seem to have brought Paul specific questions on issues dividing the church. First Corinthians was written, probably about A.D. 56, to address these matters.
 4. This is where it becomes more difficult. Its possible 1st Corinthians did not resolve the problems in the church. Possibly Timothy was the bearer of this news (4:17; 16:10, 2 Cor 1:1). Paul then decided to revisit the church (2 Cor 2:1), a sorrowful visit. (2 Cor. 12:14, 13:1, which speaks of a third visit, the last leg of Paul's third missionary journey)

 5. Then possibly after a short visit Paul sent a letter borne by Titus, which it grieved him deeply to write (2 Cor. 2:4) apparently because of its disciplinary nature (2 Cor. 7:8-9).

Or

- 4 & 5. Paul did not visit and the letter he refers to sent by Titus was 1st Corinthians. This would correspond to the events recorded for us in Acts 18-20.

6. After the silversmiths' riot Paul left Ephesus bound for Troas to meet Titus. Because Paul could not find him there, he anxiously pushed on to Macedonia, apparently with grave concern about Titus' safety (2 Cor. 2:12-13; 7:5). There he met Titus who brought good news about the general well-being of the Corinthian church but bad news about a group opposed to Paul.

7. From Macedonia Paul wrote 2 Corinthians and followed it up with a visit about A.D. 57 (Acts 20:1-4).

Outline

Chapter 1:1 - 9 Apostle Paul's *greeting and thanksgiving* to the church in Corinth.

Paul's teaching on ten reported problems or questions:

Chapter 1:10 - 4:21 Paul writes about the problems of *divisions within the church*.

Chapter 5:1 - 13 Paul teaches Corinthians they must judge *brother committing sin of sexual immorality* with his father's wife and condemns them for their attitude in the matter.

Chapter 6:1 - 11 Paul condemns them for *sueing the brethren* in courts of law.

Chapter 6:12 - 20 Paul deals with their attitudes about *sexual immorality* and teaches them the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 7:1 - 40 Paul deals with *question of celibacy*.

Chapter 8:1 - 11:1 Paul teaches on *matters of expediency* or what to do with our freedom in Christ.

Chapter 11:1 - 16 Paul teaches on *head coverings* .

Chapter 11:17 - 34 Paul teaches on the *Lord's supper*.

Chapter 12:1 - 14:40 Paul teaches Corinthians on the purpose and proper use of *spiritual gifts*.

Chapter 15:1 - 58 Teaching on the *resurrection*.

Chapter 16:1 - 4 Instructions on the *collection for the saints* in Jerusalem.

Chapter 16:5 - 24 Paul's plans, words of encouragement and *farewell*.

Syllabus

Day & Time: Sundays from 9:30am to 10:30am
Beginning: July 4th
Ending: December 26th

<u>Date</u>	<u>Week</u>	<u>Chapters</u>
Jul 4	1	1st Corinthians Introduction
Jul 11	2	1:1 – 31
Jul 18	3	2:1 – 2:16
Jul 25	4	3:1 – 23
Aug 1	5	4:1 – 21
Aug 8	6	5:1 – 13
Aug 15	7	6:1 – 20.
Aug 22	8	7:1 – 40
Aug 29	9	8:1 – 13
Sep 5	10	9:1 – 27
Sep 12	11	10:1 – 33
Sep 19	12	11:1 – 34
Sep 26	13	~ Gospel Meeting with Clyde Wilson ~
Oct 3	14	12:1 – 31
Oct 10	15	13:1 – 13
Oct 17	16	14:1 – 40
Oct 24	17	15:1 – 49
Oct 31	18	15:50 – 16:24
Nov 7	19	2nd Corinthians Introduction & 1:1 – 2:2
Nov 14	20	2:3 – 3:18
Nov 21	21	4:1 – 5:21
Nov 28	22	6:1 – 7:16
Dec 5	23	8:1 – 9:15
Dec 12	24	10:1 – 18
Dec 19	25	11:1 – 33
Dec 26	26	12:1 – 13:14