

## The Book of 1 Corinthians

“We possess more detailed information about the actual conditions with the church at Corinth than about any other church in the New Testament... Our picture... is drawn not by an enemy of the church, but the founder of that church himself.” D. Edmond Hiebert

### The Author, Title, and Date of 1 Corinthians

1. Title: 1 Corinthians: Named for the Church in Corinth to whom it was written.
2. Author: The Apostle Paul: Paul himself claims authorship within (1:1; 3:4-6; 4:15; 16:21).
3. Date: Likely written in the first half of 55 A.D. while Paul was on his third missionary journey.
4. Location: Written in Ephesus (16:8-9). Paul intended to:
  - a. Remain in Ephesus until May/June 55 A.D. (Acts 20:31; 16:8); and
  - b. Winter in Corinth 55-56 A.D. (16:6; Acts 20:2).

### The Background and Setting of 1 Corinthians

1. Location: Southern Greece
  - a. On the 4-mile wide isthmus connecting the Peloponnesus to the rest of Greece.
  - b. In the Roman province of Achaia.
  - c. Forty-five miles west of Athens.
  - d. Saronic Gulf to the east (Port city: Cenchrea) and the Gulf of Corinth to the west (Port city: Lechaem).
  - e. The “Acrocorinthus” (literally: High Corinth), the 1,800-foot monolithic rock, is at the southern edge of the city. This high point served as an easily defensible position throughout the history of the city.
2. Historical-Cultural
  - a. Alexander the Great made Corinth the seat of the new Hellenic League “in the last days of Greek freedom” prior to Rome entering into Greek affairs and subjugating its people.
  - b. Roman consul Lucius Mummius Achaicus defeated the Achaea army encamped at Corinth (Battle of Corinth) and destroyed the city in 146 B.C.
    - 1) Order of battle:
      - a) Rome entered the Peloponnesus from the north under Mummius: 23,000 infantry and 3,500 cavalry.
      - b) Achaea encamped to defend Corinth under Diaeus: 14,000 infantry and 600 cavalry.
    - 2) The Achaeans conducted a successful night raid of the Romans’ position.
    - 3) Overconfident, the Achaeans were quickly dispersed during the daylight battle the following day.
    - 4) Three days after the battle, Mummius entered the defenseless city of Corinth, and ordered it to be plundered and destroyed by fire; all the male inhabitants were put to the sword and all the women and children as well as the remaining slaves were sold.
    - 5) This battle marked the beginning of Roman dominance in the area.
  - c. Roman Emperor Julius Caesar sent veterans and freed men to Corinth in 46 B.C. to establish a Roman colony. Corinth became a thriving city once again. By the time of Paul’s journeys, Greeks, and peoples of many other nationalities returned (including a Jewish population with a synagogue (Acts 18:4).
  - d. Rebuilt in the pattern of a Roman city, with Latin as its official language, Corinth became the capital of the Province of Achaia and the residence of the proconsul.
  - e. All north/south land traffic passed through or near the Corinth for many centuries.
  - f. A major hub of international trade routes.

“Of Greek cities the least Greek, it was at this time the least Roman of Roman colonies. It was a city where Greeks, Latins, Syrians, Asiatics, Egyptians, and Jews, bought and sold, labored and revelled (sic), quarreled and hob-nobbed, in the city and its ports, as nowhere else in Greece.”  
Thomas C. Edwards, A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians (Hodder & Stoughton, 1885) as quoted by Leon Morris (p.18).
  - g. The 250-mile voyage by sea around the Peloponnesus was dangerous. Most captains transported their ships on skids or rollers across the isthmus.
  - h. A canal across the isthmus was begun by Roman Emperor Nero in 66 A.D. with 6,000 young Jews recently captured by Vespasian as excavators; however, this effort was abandoned. The canal was completed 1881-1893.
  - i. The Isthmian Games (a cause for even more people traveling to and through the city).
  - j. In his writings, Homer described the city as, “wealthy Corinth”.
  - k. Corinth was not the center of philosophy that Athens was but became known for its pottery, brass, pillars and capitals (which are still recognized in modern architecture).

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l. Corinth's population when Paul arrived was between 600,000 to 700,000 (Godet)  
m. With tolerance for "new" ideas and the infusion of abhorrent cultures, Corinth was quite cosmopolitan in Paul's day but was morally corrupt and its name was synonymous with debauchery and depravity.

To "*corinthianize*" was to become immoral or, in the Greek of the time, "go to the devil". A.M. Hunter, *Introducing the New Testament* (SCM Press, 1945) as quoted by Leon Morris (p.18).

### 3. The Church at Corinth

a. Paul founded the church in Corinth during his Second Missionary Journey in 49-52 A.D. He preached as he travelled from Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens and Corinth (Acts 16:11-18:1).

b. Paul's preaching changed lives. Through Paul the Spirit led the leader of the local synagogue, Crispus, to believe in Christ as his savior (Acts 18:8)

c. Paul ministered in Corinth for one and a half years (Acts 18:11).

d. Paul left Corinth and returned to Palestine (Acts 18:12-22).

e. Apollos became Corinth's net pastor (Acts 18:24-19:1).

f. The fledgling congregation had problems.

"Sometime between Paul's leaving Corinth and his writing of what we call First Corinthians, Paul had written the church another letter (1 Cor 5:9), commonly referred to as the lost epistle. It too was corrective in nature." MacArthur

g. Paul was in Ephesus during his Third Missionary Journey; it was here that he received a letter from the Corinthians asking for instruction (7:1a). Paul also received "news of a less and less favorable character and disclosed distressing conditions which had developed in the... church" Erdman

1) The Members of the Corinthian church did not love one another as they should and were plagued by quarreling and unspiritual factions (1:10-17);

2) Wishing to remain worldly, members did not "decorinthinize" and become tolerant of gross immoralities; even permitted arrogantly immoral sinners to remain members (5:9-13);

3) Members were suing one another in "heathen courts" (6:1-11);

4) The church had become disorderly in their observance of the Lord's Supper (11)

5) The church required instruction regarding spiritual gifts (12);

6) Members even denied the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead (15:12).

h. Not able to leave his work in Ephesus (16:8), Paul sent Timothy, who was possibly in possession of 1 Corinthians.

### The Purpose of 1 Corinthians

1. Paul describes "the order that should prevail in Christian assemblies" (Ironsides)

2. To demand the church be set apart from the world and be purified.

3. To require those who are loved by God to love one another.

### Format

This letter is written in much the same format as Paul's other letters: Introduction and thanksgiving, body of the letter, and conclusion. (Godet)

### The Themes of 1 Corinthians

1. Correction

2. Separation

3. Love

### Some Key Verses

"Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment." (1:10)

"For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void." (1:17)

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“And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.” (2:1-5)

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” (6:9-11)

“FOR THE EARTH IS THE LORD’S, AND ALL IT CONTAINS (from Ps 24:1)... Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” (10:26, 31)

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” (13:4-6)

### The Basic Structure of 1 Corinthians (MacArthur)

1. Calling and benefits of sainthood (1:1-9)
2. Errors and problems in the church (1:10-16:4) regarding:
  - a. Unity (1:10-3:23)
  - b. Servanthood (4:1-21)
  - c. Mortality (5:1-6:20)
  - d. Marriage (7:1-40)
  - e. Liberty (8:1-11:1)
  - f. Men and women in the church (11:2-16)
  - g. The Lord’s Supper (11:17-34)
  - h. Spiritual gifts (12:1-14:17)
  - i. The resurrection (15:1-29)
  - j. Stewardship (16:1-4)
3. Personal plans and greetings (16:5-24)

References: John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians*  
MacArthur NASB Study Bible  
Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Revised Edition): 1 Corinthians*  
Charles R. Erdman, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*  
H.A. Ironside, *Addresses on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*  
D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the Pauline Epistles*  
Frederic L. Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians*

