

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE NEW TESTAMENT

First Baptist Church Dandridge – Fall 2024

Dr. Justin Terrell

justin@fbcdandridge.org

The Pauline Epistles II

1. 1 Corinthians

- a. **Overview:** The letter known as “1 Corinthians” is often categorized as an “occasional letter” (ad-hoc), meaning that it was addressed to a specific group of people concerning specific issues (unlike “circular letters,” such as Colossians). In fact, much of the content of 1 Corinthians appears to be a response to numerous questions from the congregation. However, because this letter was inspired by the Holy Spirit, the truths communicated concerning these issues are relevant and authoritative for believers throughout history.
- b. **Title:** The title “1 Corinthians” (“Paul’s First Letter to the Church at Corinth”) has weaknesses. According to 1 Corinthians 5:9 (“I wrote to you in my letter...”), Paul alludes to a previous letter (not preserved) written to the struggling church, what should technically be called “1 Corinthians,” making our canonical “1 Corinthians” really “2 Corinthians.” However, in 2 Corinthians 2:4, Paul alludes to another previous letter, one written “out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears.” Such a description doesn’t seem to fit the canonical letter of “1 Corinthians,” so most believe it was a third letter (not preserved) that should be called “3 Corinthians.” If this be the case, the canonical “2 Corinthians” would technically be “4 Corinthians.” However, because only two letters were considered inspired and canonical, the epistles we have in our English Bible are called 1 and 2 Corinthians.
- c. **Date:** Scholars have reconstructed the timeline of Paul’s second missionary journey, dating his arrival in Corinth to AD 51. He would stay there for 18 months (Acts 18:11) before returning to Jerusalem (Acts 18:22). According to Acts 19:1-20, Paul went on a third missionary journey, where he stayed in Ephesus for over two years. While he was in Ephesus, he wrote two letters to the church at Corinth. According to biblical chronology, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in AD 54-55.
- d. **Audience:** Paul was writing to the church in the ancient city of Corinth, which was located on an Isthmus (six miles wide) in southern Greece. This location made Corinth a major crossroads in the world. Not only did the city sit on a busy highway connecting northern and southern Greece, but it was near a strategic set of seaports where ships would pass traveling between

Italy and Asia. Therefore, the city not only experienced incredible economic growth through trade, but it was heavily influenced by cultures and religions from all over the world. Due to this influx of money and trade, Corinth became populated quickly with people from the east and west. This cultural explosion also brought in wickedness and moral corruption. In fact, because the city was filled with so much sexual immorality and evil, the term "Corinthianize" was coined to describe people who lived immorally.

Map of Greece, showing the location of Corinth



- e. **Problem:** Since the church emerged from such a highly concentrated pagan culture, the fleshly tendencies of the past remained close at hand. Therefore, Paul had to deal with a church that didn't always reflect Christ. In fact, the church at Corinth was a wayward church with countless problems.
- f. **Topical Outline:** Due to the issues the church faced, Paul covered these problems and questions in an orderly fashion.
- Divisions and Favoritism (1:10-4:21)
 - Sexual Immorality and Church Discipline (5:1-13)
 - Lawsuits Against Believer (6:1-12)
 - Marriage, Divorce, Singleness (6:13-7:39)
 - Eating Meat Offered to Idols (8:1-13)
 - Financial Support for Ministers (9:1-27)
 - Warnings Against Idolatry (10:1-11:1)
 - Head Coverings and Male Headship (11:2-16)
 - Corruption of the Lord's Supper (11:17-34)
 - Abuse of Spiritual Gifts and Orderly Worship (12:1-14:40)
 - Doubts About a Bodily Resurrection (15:1-58)
 - Financial Support for a Distant Church (16:1-4)
- g. **Purpose:** Paul wrote the church to correct all of these issues. One of the unique characteristics of this letter is that Paul seems to answer numerous questions from the church. For example, regarding marriage, Paul writes, "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman' But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband" (7:1-

2). Likewise, Paul writes concerning certain topics, *"Now concerning food offered to idols..."* (8:1). Therefore, 1 Corinthians was designed to correct the church in areas of confusion and sin.

2. 2 Corinthians

- a. **Overview:** The book of 2 Corinthians is known as Paul's most personal letter. MacArthur notes that it's *"the most personally revealing of all Paul's epistles... [but] perhaps the least familiar of all his inspired writings, often overlooked by individual believers and preachers alike."* (2 Corinthians. JNTC, 1). The letter is a personal appeal from Paul to validate his own ministry against the attacks of those who would discredit him. He describes how much he has suffered for the name of Jesus and how much he loves the local church.
- b. **Date:** Scholars have constructed a timeline based on Acts to determine that 2 Corinthians was most likely written from Macedonia in AD 55-56 (Kruger, 227).
- c. **Purpose:** Following Paul's first and second letters to the church, Timothy reported that the people were more wayward than ever. However, following this reproof, Timothy reported a new and dangerous threat. False teachers, claiming to be apostles sent by the Jewish church, arrived in Corinth and lured many of the members away from their loyalty to Paul and the gospel. They accused him of not receiving a divine calling, along with being uneducated, unsophisticated, and ineloquent. In response, Paul left Ephesus for Corinth and severely reproofed them in person. He referred to this as a *"painful visit"* (2 Cor. 2:1). It was not only painful for the church, but painful for Paul, as some in the church allowed the false teachers to openly insult him without coming to his defense (2 Cor. 2:5). After Paul left, he wrote them a third letter (not preserved) delivered by Titus, where he chastised them for their lack of faith and loyalty. Some have called this Paul's *"severe letter"* (2 Cor. 2:4). Following this letter, Titus reported that the church had repented, once again supporting Paul. However, while the situation improved, Paul knew that the situation was far from over as the false teachers remained among them. Therefore, Paul wrote a fourth letter (2 Corinthians) to defend his ministry as an apostle and address pressing theological and practical issues.
- d. **Content:** While Paul wanted to restore fellowship between himself and the church and reestablish credibility among them, we also find several other important themes.
 - **Trials:** Paul uses his own experience of trials, hardships, and suffering for the gospel to not only authenticate his ministry, but to help the church endure painful situations of their own. Therefore, he explains how our weakness becomes God's strength, as he experienced from his *"thorn"* in the flesh (12:7). Paul notes, *"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong"* (12:10). He also calls them to look past this hardships of this life and focus on the comforts of heaven. Paul states, *"For this light momentary affliction is preparing us for an*

eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen" (4:17-18).

- **Authenticity:** Paul demonstrated the authenticity of his faith by sharing examples of all he has experienced and endured for the sake of Christ. He writes, *"Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches"* (11:23–28).
- **Giving:** Placing attention elsewhere, Paul reminded the church of how important it is to be generous and give to the needs of other churches. In one of the most instructive sections in the New Testament on giving, Paul guides the church on how to collect and deliver a meaningful offering to the struggling church in Jerusalem. He states, *"The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work"* (9:6-8).