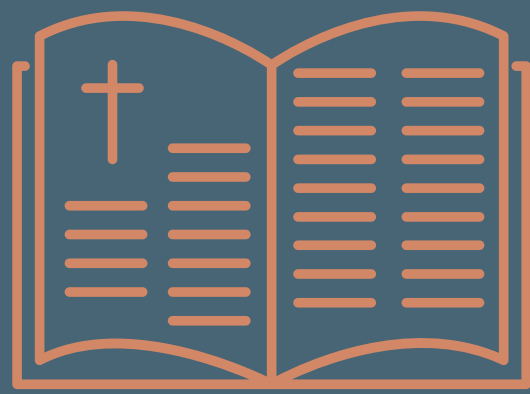


1 CORINTHIANS



FIRST CORINTHIANS

AN INTRODUCTION

Author & Background: A city of influence, indulgence, and wealth; a church riddled with divisions; sexual ethics that would make the average pervert blush. This was the situation Paul faced as he dictated his first canonical letter (first letter to be included in the New Testament) to the Corinthian church while laboring 250 miles away in Ephesus around AD 53-55. Out of all of Paul's letters, the two addressed to the Corinthians are the longest to one congregation, which, when considering the problems that Paul attempts to solve in these epistles, explains his lack of brevity.

Before traveling to Ephesus, Paul had spent eighteen months planting the church in Corinth, Greece's largest city at the time. Corinth sat upon an isthmus, a small landmass connecting Peloponnesus to mainland Greece. It was a port city where sailors from both the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas could conduct trade, and move shipments to the other side of the isthmus. This, in turn, led Corinth to become a major hub for not only business but also Greco-Roman society and culture. As the economy grew, so did the city's population, and as new ethnic groups moved to the area, they often brought their religious cults and idols with them.

Corinth's fame wasn't just due to its wealth. The city had gained notoriety through its lewd immorality, particularly its sexual promiscuity. Prostitution was extensive in Corinth and brought quite a bit of revenue into the city, whether it be from passing sailors or pagan sex cults. Orgies were not uncommon among the wealthy in the Greco-Roman world, and this city of prosperity and worldly accolades was severely deficient in the standard of biblical sexual ethics — something that the church in Corinth had great difficulty reconciling.

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Despite the city's infamy, there was a sizeable Jewish population displaced in Corinth due to the Roman emperor Claudius expelling Jews from Rome. It was within a Jewish synagogue that Paul had begun preaching the gospel and forming a church in the Greek city. As Paul preached and labored, both Jews and Greeks were coming into the faith; however, cultural backgrounds began to clash. Matthew Henry rightly summarized Paul's struggle with these groups when he said, "...the apostle had to contend with the superstition of the one, and the sinful conduct of the other." [1]

Themes: Although there are multiple themes, rebukes, and exhortations to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul directs most of his attention to preserving unity in the gospel within the church. The Corinthians were mainly Gentile believers who had recently come to faith in Christ, yet they were beginning to feel embarrassment for their belief in the simple gospel message. The philosophers and wise men of their age seemed to offer a more reasonable and socially acceptable alternative to the gospel. It was through this cunning that some members of the church were being swept away with the "wisdom of the world" (1:20). Paul pleads with the Corinthians to remember the true, uncorrupted gospel once more.

Issues of fundamental orthodoxy were not just at stake; it seems that factions had begun to divide the church. Paul addresses the young flock by appealing to the humble servitude of Christ and the apostles. He goes on to explain that divisions arise when one or both parties have ambitious, arrogant, and greedy desires that would inevitably lead to their sinful self-exaltation. Paul rebukes the church, for there is no place for this in the Body of Christ

[1] *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible*. p.1095

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Lastly, Paul deals with specific sins that the church had been openly practicing and specific questions about doctrine and practice. The Corinthians constantly faced the temptation to lust after the worldly sins of the culture around them. Unfortunately, the new Gentile believers were unsure of how to properly repent. Paul understands the difficulty of living a godly life within a perverse and blatantly sinful world, but his remedy was just as applicable to the Corinthians as it is to believers today: believe in the gospel and structure your life as He lived His.

Resources used in this Introduction:

- ESV Study Bible
- Henry, Matthew *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible*
- Elwell, Walter; Yarbrough, Robert *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey*

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Commentaries on 1 Corinthians:

- MacArthur Jr, John *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians*
- Hodge, Charles *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* Anders,
- Max & Pratt Jr, Richard L Holman *New Testament Commentary: 1 & 2 Corinthians*
- Calvin, John *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*

The Church:

- Keller, Timothy *Center Church*
- Dever, Mark *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible*

Conflict & Resolution:

- Leeman, Jonathan *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline*
- Merida, Tony *Christ-Centered Conflict Resolution: A Guide for Turbulent Times*

Sex, Marriage, & Singleness:

- Kostenberger, Andreas J. *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*
- Keller, Timothy *The Meaning of Marriage*
- Allberry, Sam *Seven Myths about Singleness*

Conscience & Convictions in Gospel Ministry:

- Naselli, Andrew David & Crowley, J.D. *Conscience: What it is, How to Train it, and Loving Those Who Differ*
- Ortlund, Gavin *Finding the Right Hills to Die On: The Case for Theological Triage*
- Luther, Martin *Concerning Christian Liberty*

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Lord's Supper:

- Schreiner, Thomas J. & Crawford, Matthew R. *The Lord's Supper: Remembering & Proclaiming Christ Until He Comes*

Spiritual Gifts:

- Grudem, Wayne A. (Editor) *Are Miraculous Gifts For Today? Four Views*
- Storms, Sam *Practicing the Power: Welcoming the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in your Life*

Resurrection:

- Wright, N.T. *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, & the Mission of the Church*
- Warnock, Adrian *Raised With Christ: How the Resurrection Changes Everything*

Godly Giving & Sacrifice:

- Alcorn, Randy *Money, Possessions, & Eternity*

