

# The Book of First Corinthians

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## **Introduction:**

1 Corinthians is an Acts epistle, unlike Romans, Paul has been to Corinth and is writing back to them, Acts 18:1-18 compared with 1 Corinthians 1:11-17, 2:1.

## **Statistics:**

16 chapters, 437 verses, and 9,489 words.

## **Author:**

The very first verse identifies the author as Paul. Acts records his visit to Corinth on his second missionary journey, which was probably in the spring of A.D. 51 (Acts 18:1-18). There he met Aquila and Priscilla and worked with them in the trade of tent making. (Acts 18:2-3). His reference to surrendering his right to have financial support (1 Corinthians 9:1-27) may explain why Paul worked in tent making while in Corinth.

## **Date of Writing:**

The date of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians can be placed with some certainty by tracing his ministry through Acts and the relevant references in the epistle itself. Paul stayed in Corinth for about one and one-half years during his second missionary journey. In the fall of A.D. 52 he traveled to Ephesus in-route to Jerusalem (Acts 18:18-23). After staying in Antioch, Paul returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey in the fall of A.D. 53 and stayed there about two and one-half years (Acts 19:1-10). It was during this stay in Ephesus he apparently wrote to the Corinthians at least twice (5:9, 11). 1 Corinthians was written after another epistle mentioned in 5:9. Therefore, 1 Corinthians was probably written near the end of his stay in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:8), or about A.D. 56, because he had already made his plans to leave Asia (1 Corinthians 16:5-7).

## **Purpose of Writing:**

The purpose of 1 Corinthians was to correct the problems in the church at Corinth and answer questions that were troublesome to the church. Chapters 1-4 appear devoted to the problems of divisions in the church as reported by Chloe. Chapters 5-6 then address the problem of immorality, probably reported also by Chloe. Finally, chapters 7-16:4 answer the specific questions of the Corinthians. Chapter 15 stands out in its doctrinal emphasis on the resurrection which has led some to believe that Paul thought this was the Corinthians' foundational problem. This could be true, since a misunderstanding about the reality of a bodily resurrection could lead to license and "liberated" behavior (Cf. 4:8), which would in turn lead to problems in practical areas. But this can be subsumed under Paul's primary concern to correct the problems in the church so that unity would be restored.

## **Key Verses:**

1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 10:12-13

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## Summary of 1 Corinthians:

Paul's introduction to 1 Corinthians (1:1-9) reminds the church of his apostolic authority and their standing before God as "saints" (1:1-2). In spite of the problems he will address, he expresses his thanksgiving for their salvation and gifts, and his confidence in their blameless condition at Christ's return (1:4-9). Though his treatment of them in the letter is very strong at times, he always appeals to them as Christians who should live up to their calling.

The first item in Paul's agenda is his answer to the report about divisions in the church (1:10-4:21). The problem, as reported by Chloe's household (1:10-17) was a lack of unity caused by sectarian attitudes among them. Paul argues that there is no basis for regarding one man over another, for the body of Christ is not segmented by its nature. His emphasis among them was preaching the gospel, and the very nature of this activity disallowed boasting in human wisdom and ability, which the Corinthians evidently did.

Thus, Paul gets to the root of the problem by addressing the reasons for their divisions (1:18-4:5). The Corinthians' misunderstood the nature of the gospel message (1:18-3:4) and the gospel messenger (3:4-4:5). They had an incorrect attitude toward the gospel message because they treated it as a form of worldly wisdom. This attitude reflected the Greek emphasis on clever and novel philosophy delivered through eloquent oratory. But Paul argues that the gospel is not worldly wisdom (1:18-2:5). As the wisdom and power of God, the gospel is able to do what philosophy cannot—it saves (1:18-25). The proof of its saving power over philosophy is the Corinthian church itself (1:26-31), for it is composed of those of lower estate, unlikely candidates for the kind of salvation which might be wrought by worldly cleverness and prestigious philosophy. This allows boasting only in the Lord, not men. The final proof that the gospel is not worldly wisdom is from Paul's manner of preaching (2:1-5). He did not preach with impressive or persuasive eloquence, but his message and manner demonstrated simplicity and his own weakness.

After proving that the gospel is not worldly wisdom, Paul shows that it is instead heavenly wisdom (2:6-3:4). The very nature of God's wisdom is that it is not of this world, but secret, and revealed and communicated through His Spirit (2:6-12). Thus it cannot be apprehended by the natural man, but only those of a spiritual mind (2:14-3:4). The Corinthians are rebuked as carnal-minded, as displayed in their factitious attitudes, and thus are unable to receive the true understanding of God's wisdom (3:1-4). Their carnality has led them to misunderstand not only the nature of the gospel, but also the ministers of the gospel. This is what led them to elevate one minister over another.

Paul then explains the true nature of the gospel ministry to correct their attitudes toward the gospel messengers (3:4-4:5). First, he explains that ministers of the gospel are fellow-workers with God (3:5-17). God is behind any fruit: the most Paul can say he did in Corinth was to plant (3:6-7). In the work of building the church, each man's labors will be tested and rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ (3:8-17), thus gospel messengers do not answer ultimately to men.

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Paul then argues that God has given each of his ministers to the whole church for its mutual benefit (3:18-23). There is therefore no basis for dividing them according to the dictates of the worldly wisdom and eloquence. Finally, he explains that each minister is accountable to God as a steward, and in light of this, man's opinion of him is of little consequence (4:1-5).

**NOTE: 1 Corinthians 3:12 outlines two kinds of ministry: That of Gold, Silver, precious stones verses that of wood, hay, and stubble. Quality verses quantity, don't compromise quality for their quantity.**

Having surfaced and corrected the misconceptions about the gospel and its ministers, Paul now makes an application to their problem of divisions (4:6-21). To do this, he first contrasts the Corinthians' prideful attitude to the apostles' lowly position as "fools for Christ's sake" (4:6-13).

The Corinthians may have thought themselves already reigning with Christ and thus free from earthly authorities (4:8). Then Paul makes an affectionate appeal for them to follow his example (4:14-17). He finally warns against those who are puffed up with pride and threatens to come to power and discipline, though he would prefer to come in love (4:18-21).

His reference to those "puffed up" (4:18) is general, but no doubt he has in mind the immoral man he is about to describe (5:1). In surfacing the root of the problem of divisions in the church, Paul has shown it is due to incorrect attitudes about the gospel and its ministers, and further this attitude is caused by pride in worldly wisdom and standards.

He then turns to the matter of immorality reported in the church (5:1-6:20). The first matter concerns sexual immorality between a man and his stepmother (5:1-13). Paul is amazed that this sin is even tolerated; much less that it is a source of pride in the church (5:1-2). He gives directions for immediate discipline of the man (5:3-8). The Corinthians evidently misunderstood his earlier letter which warned them about associating with sexually immoral people in the church, so he clarifies his previous instruction (5:9-13).

### **The dead outline for chapters 6-8:**

- Dead to SIN Chapter 6
- Dead to LAW Chapter 7
- Dead to FLESH Chapter 8

The second matter he addresses is that of lawsuits between believers (6:1-11). Some in the Corinthian church were bringing their grievances against one another before unbelievers instead of the church (6:1). Paul argues that the church should settle such grievances because believers will judge in the future, there are able arbitrators (Least esteemed in the church (6:4), and the church will be perceived as deficient if they don't (6:2-8).

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It is better to accept the wrong than to bring such disrepute to the church. Besides, this conduct before unbelievers is inconsistent with their status as kingdom citizens (6:9-11).

The third matter of immorality Paul addresses is the matter of the body's sanctity (6:12-20). Evidently, a libertarian philosophy was prevalent in the church in the church which led to loose living. But Paul states that liberty is to be limited on the basis of the activity's helpfulness and its enslaving capacity (6:12). In relation to sexual activity, the body is not to be joined to harlots because it is united to God (6:13-17). Therefore, he exhorts them to flee sexual immorality as a sin which harms the body that God now owns (6:18-20).

The indication in 7:1 is that Paul has finished addressing the problem's reported by Chloe's household and is now taking up the questions sent through the official delegation. These are "the things wherein ye wrote unto me," and his answers to these things comprises the contents of 7:1-16:4).

The first question he answers concerns marriage and divorce (7:1-40). The Corinthians obviously thought it was commendable to avoid sexual relations and marriage altogether. The reason for this thinking is unknown, but might be attributed to a belief that they were already reigning with Christ in His kingdom (4:8), and therefore marriage and sex was of no consequence.

Paul thus gives his approval to sexual relations between husband and wife and to the act of marriage, unless one is enabled to remain celibate (7:1-9). To those who are already married, he advises they remain so, unless an unbelieving spouse insists on leaving (7:10-16). He supports this with the contention that all should remain in the state in which they were called as Christians (7:17-24).

Paul's final instructions are for the unmarried (7:25-40). Considering the shortness of the time left in this age, he suggests that there is good reason for the people to not alter their marital status (7:25-31). A significant consideration is the freedom one enjoys in the unmarried state (7:32-35).

Furthermore, he states the conditions under which fathers may give or withhold their daughters in marriage (7:36-38). He concludes with advice to widows (7:39-40).

The second question concerns food offered to idols (8:1-11:1). Paul begins by stating the superiority of love over knowledge (8:1-3). The Corinthians were knowledgeable about idols, and this puffed them up with pride, but they lacked love. Not everyone shared an accurate knowledge about idols, and this caused them to violate their consciences by eating meat that had been offered to idol worship (8:4-8). Therefore, it is better to voluntarily restrict one's freedom to eat, lest a weaker brother eat against his conscience (8:9-13).

To illustrate this, Paul uses his own restriction of liberty as an example (9:1-27). As an apostle, Paul had many rights, including the right to receive support from those to whom he ministered. His arguments for this right are laid out in (9:4-14). He was basic physical

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needs just like anyone else (9:4-6). Also, those in secular practice have their needs supplied from their work (9:7), just as the law teaches (9:8-10).

Furthermore, Paul deserves at least a physical return for his spiritual ministry in Corinth (9:11-12). Finally, the Lord has commanded that those who serve Him in ministry should be able to make a living from that ministry (9:13-14). Yet Paul gave up this right in Corinth (9:12), which may explain why he worked making tents there (Acts 18:3).

The reason he gave up his right to receive support, Paul explains, he is not taking advantage of this situation. If you are called to preach; preach, paid or not (9:15-18). A corresponding reason was that he might win as many men as possible by not giving any possible cause for offense or accusation (9:19-23).

Paul has not said it outright, but his liberty is controlled by his love for people and God. This is the point he made at the beginning of his discussion (8:1-3), which the Corinthians so needed to hear. His concern for others and the gospel of Christ compels him to use self-control in exercising his liberty (9:24-27), thus the Corinthians should, also.

His next argument for the proper use of liberty takes the form of a warning from Israel's abuse of liberty (10:1-13). His reminder of Israel's history shows that though they had a privileged position before God, they abused that position and were punished severely (10:1-5).

This is an example for the Corinthians so that they might avoid those same sins and their consequences (10:6-10). Instead, they must not be overconfident in testing, but trust in God for deliverance from the temptation (10:12-13). The conclusion is that the Corinthians should not take their privileged position of liberty in Christ in Christ and abuse it to the extent of tempting God or causing another to sin.

It is best, therefore, to flee from idolatry (10:14-22). Paul argues that the cup of the Lord's Supper is an actual communion with the Lord, just as the Jewish priests eat the sacrifice as part of their service to God (10:15-18). Thus, when a believer participates in an idol-feast, he is communing with devils (10:19-22).

Paul summarizes the principles for conduct in areas of conscience, particularly the eating of meat offered to idols (10:23-11:1). The general principle is that one should limit his liberty if it is an issue with his own conscience or with the one who offers it (10:25-30).

In conclusion, Paul says all things should be done to the glory of God and for the benefit of others, just as is seen in his own example (10:31-11:1). The Corinthians must stop proudly flaunting their liberty, and start loving others.

The next questions Paul addresses concern disorders in the assembly during public worship (11:2-14:40). Three issues are mentioned. The first question is over the covering of women in worship (11:2-16). Paul explains the subordination of relationships (11:2-3) in creation and applies this to worship (11:4-6). A woman is to be covered when praying or

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prophesying as a sign that she is under authority. She is not to let her hair loose as a demonstration of liberty or rebellion (11:5-6).

This principle is evident from the created order (11:7-12) and natural instinct (11:13-16). Increasingly, Paul never mentions any covering until he affirms that long hair is given to the woman “for a covering” (11:15). Evidently the controversy in Corinth was caused by Gentile women who misunderstood Christian liberty and did not wear the customary Jewish veil, and further, even let down their hair like accused prostitutes.

The second issue in the assembly’s worship concerned conduct at the Lord’s Supper (11:17-34). At the supper, factions were evident as people ate with inconsideration of others or became drunk (11:17-22). This causes Paul to remind them of the spiritual purpose of the Supper (11:23-26), warn them about the consequences of sharing in it in an unworthy manner (11:27-32), and exhort them to proper conduct (11:33-34). Once more the sinful pride of the Corinthians was exhibited and rebuked in favor of a concern for others.

The third and final issue in the public worship meetings was the use and misuse of spiritual gifts (12:1-14:40). As will be seen, the Corinthians elevated the minor gift of tongues to major importance, and then exercised it without consideration of others. Paul’s first words explain the manifestation of the Spirit’s gifts (12:1-31).

Their manifestation must be under the control of the Spirit (12:1-3) who gives different gifts as He wills (12:4-11). Believers are one in the body of Christ and must therefore use their gifts in harmony, all being important to the whole (12:12-31). More importantly, they must use them in love or they are worthless to others.

Chapter 13: Also known as the charity chapter

Chapter 13 outline:

- Verses 1-3 – the importance of charity
- Verses 4-7 – the definition of charity
- Verses 8-13 – the greatness of charity

(13:1-13). The characteristics of love and the permanence of love over the gifts are explained here. Again, Paul recognizes the need for love in the haughty Corinthian congregation.

Chapter 14 outline:

- Verses 1-22 – edify the church
- Verses 23-26 – Convince the outsiders or unbelievers
- Verses 27-40 – done orderly, “Let all things be done decently and in order.”

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Five “UN’s” in Chapter 14:

- Unknown tongue – Verses 2, 4, 13-14, 19, 27
- Unknown Sound – Verse 8
- Unfruitful understanding – Verse 14
- Unlearned – Verse 16
- Unbelievers – Verse 23

Finally, Paul instructs them in the proper use of the gifts (14:1-40). Prophecy should <sup>be</sup> valued far above tongues in the body, because prophecy edifies the church, whereas tongues edify the speaker (14:1-5).

Tongues profit no one because they are not understood by themselves. In fact, they were originally given as a sign for unbelief (14:6-25 c.f. Genesis 11:1-9). Therefore, tongues and prophecy must be carefully regulated in public worship according to the principle of mutual edification (14:26-36). Remember tongues were for a sign to the Jews! Today, our churches have interpreters, to interpret the services for those who speak a different language.

Women are also not to participate in the judgement of prophecy (14:33b-36). To sum up, Paul states the Corinthians can demonstrate their spirituality by obeying his commands (not by showing off their gifts) and by conducting services “decently and in order” (14:37-40).

Another question that reached the apostle was prompted by some in Corinth who denied a resurrection form the dead (a doctrine of the Sadducees Acts 23:6-9; Luke 20:27) (15:1-58; especially verse 12).

Paul shows that the resurrection is crucial to three areas (15:12-140).

First, it is essential to salvation, lest the Corinthians believed in vain (15:12-19).

Second, it is essential to God’s program for our future resurrection and His triumphant reign (15:20-28).

Third, it is critical as a motivation for righteous living, else believers suffer in vain (15:29-34).

Whatever the misconceptions the Corinthians had are addressed in Paul’s explanation of the Christian’s resurrection (15:35-38). He answers two questions in particular: “How are the dead raised up, and with what kind of body do they come?” (15:35).

He first answers about the kind of body by showing that Christians must be raised with the same kind of body that Christ had in resurrection (15:36-49). Then he answers about how the body is raised by declaring its momentary transformation at the coming of the Lord. This transformation is to immortality and the final victory over death (15:50-57). The

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Christian's certainty of resurrection is the basis of an exhortation to be steadfast in the work of the Lord (15:58).

Perhaps the denial of resurrection by some caused some of the disorders in the church at Corinth. If they thought the resurrection had already occurred in some spiritual way, they might assume they were now ruling with Christ and free from earthly moral restraints.

Paul's final answer concerns the preparation of the collection for his visit (16:1-4). He instructs them in how they should give, and in how the gift will be carried to Jerusalem.

Paul's conclusion to the letter (16:5-24) concerns his, Timothy's, and Apollos' intentions to visit Corinth (16:5-12). IN addition, he gives some personal exhortations, most significantly, that they do everything in love (16:13-19). This is named repeatedly in the letter as a quality lacking in the church. Paul then closes with some final greetings and an assurance of his love (16:19-24).

Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians contains some strong words and corrective measures. Yet if the church there would humble themselves and learn to love, their problems would dissolve. Their response to Paul's advice became the occasion for 2 Corinthians.



## THE FIRST BOOK OF CORINTHIANS

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

1. First Corinthians is a \_\_\_\_\_ epistle.  
A. Revelation    B. History    C. Acts    D. Missionary
2. What was the purpose of Paul writing First Corinthians?  
A. Correct problems in the Synagogue at Corinth and answer questions troubling the church  
B. Correct problems in the Church at Corinth and answer questions troubling the church.  
C. Correct problems in the Inner Circle at Corinth and answer questions troubling the church.  
D. Correct the Pastors at Corinth and not answer questions.
3. What problem was reported by Chloe's household about the church?  
A. There were attitudes    B. There was boasting    C. There were divisions in the church
4. Paul was amazed of \_\_\_\_\_ behavior in the church in (5:1-6:20)?  
A. Moral    B. Riotous    C. Argumentative    D. Immoral
5. In Chapter six Paul addressed \_\_\_\_\_ between believers?  
A. Lawlessness    B. Arguments    C. Grievances    D. Lawsuits
6. Fill in the blanks to the dead outline:  
Dead to \_\_\_\_\_ Chapter 6  
Dead to \_\_\_\_\_ Chapter 7  
Dead to \_\_\_\_\_ Chapter 8
7. Fill in the blanks:  
Paul instructs them in the proper use of \_\_\_\_\_. Prophecy should be valued far above \_\_\_\_\_ in the body, because \_\_\_\_\_ edifies the church, whereas \_\_\_\_\_ edify the speaker.

