

New Testament Survey

The Book of 1 Corinthians

I. Attestation and Authorship¹

A. External

1. Clement of Rome speaks of this book as “the Epistle of the blessed Apostle Paul” in his *Epistle to the Corinthians* (chapter 47).
2. There may be an allusion to 3:1, 16 in the *Epistle of Barnabas* (chapter 4).
3. There are many echos of 1 Corinthians in Ignatius.
4. Polycarp quotes 6:2 and ascribes it to Paul in his *Epistle to the Philippians* (chapter 11).
5. Justyn Martyr quotes from 1 Corinthians 11:9 in his *Dialogue with Trypho* (chapter 35).
6. Robertson and Plummer state that there are more than sixty quotes from 1 Corinthians in the writings of Irenaus; more than 130 in the writings of Clement of Alexandria, and more than 400 in the writings of Tertullian.
7. 1 Corinthians stands at the head of Paul’s Epistles in the Muratorian Canon. It was also in the Old Syriac and Old Latin versions.

B. Internal

1. The writer calls himself Paul on several occasions (1:1, 16:21, 1:12-17; 3:4-6, 22)
2. The contents of the book coincide strongly with the Book of Acts.
3. The book rings of genuineness. It paints a very clear picture of life in Corinth during that time.

II. Background and Destination

A. The Church at Corinth.

1. It’s Founding - Acts 18:1-18
 - a. Paul arrived at Corinth via Athens during his second missionary journey. His major stops prior to that included Thessalonica, Philippi, and Berea.
 - b. In Corinth, Paul stayed with Priscilla and Aquilla, a Jewish couple who had been expelled from Rome during the reign of Claudius. During the week Paul worked as a tentmaker, and on the weekends he attended the synagogue where he proclaimed the Gospel.

¹ Henry C. Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Co., 1987), p p. 201-202.

- c. Soon, Silas and Timothy arrived, possibly with a gift, so that Paul could devote himself fully to the Word.
- d. At some point, the Jewish opposition grew so strong that Paul left the synagogue and retired to the house of Titus Justus, where he continued to preach.
- e. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, became a believer along with all of his house as well as many other Corinthians.
- f. After a ministry of some eighteen months, the Jews brought Paul before Gallio who had recently become proconsul (A.D. 51-52). Gallio refused to hear the matter and drove the Jews from the judgment seat.
- g. After some days more, Paul left Corinth from the port of Cenchrea and journeyed back to Ephesus. He then continued on to Antioch in Syria, Jerusalem, and Ceasarea.
- h. Most of the Corinthian church was Gentile in nature, although there were a few Jews. From Paul's discussion of the Lord's supper in 1 Corinthians 11, it appears that most of the church consisted of people from the lower economic ranks, although there does appear to be a few wealthy members.

2. It's Environment

- a. Corinth was situated on the narrow isthmus connecting the Peloponnesus and mainland Greece.
- b. It was also situated on two great trade routes. One ran through Corinth connecting the two parts of Greece, the other was a route that connected the Adriatic and Aegean seas. Corinth had two ports on either side of the narrow isthmus, Cenchrea and Lechaem, where ships would dock, unload their cargo, and then be dragged across the narrow isthmus to the other sea. This saved many weeks of travel around the Peloponnesian peninsula.
- c. Corinth was a very wealthy city, given over to every vice know to man. It had a great temple to Aphrodite which housed thousands of prostitutes. At night, these prostitutes would ply their trade in the streets of Corinth.
- d. Corinth was host to the Isthmian games, an athletic event that rivalled the Olympic games of that day. This can be seen in Paul's frequent use of sports metaphors in his writings.

II. Occasion and Date²

- A. Written approximately A.D. 53-54 from Ephesus during Paul's third missionary journey.
 - 1. During Paul's journey back to Jerusalem and his appearance in Ephesus during his third journey, Apollos, after being discipled by Priscilla and Aquila, visited the Corinthian church and ministered there for some time. He seemed to have gathered a large party around him while at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:12).
 - 2. Apollos saw this factioning of the Corinthian church, and the fact that they sought after wisdom, and as a result withdrew to Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:12). It was here that he met Paul and communicated some of his concerns.
- B. Several things happened at Ephesus that led Paul to write 1 Corinthians.
 - 1. Paul had already written a letter to the Corinthian church which we do not have (1 Corinthians 5:9). In this letter he exhorted the Corinthians regarding companying with fornicators and possibly concerning the collection.
 - 2. Paul received some bad reports from Chloe (1 Corinthians 1:11) and Apollos (1 Corinthians 16:12) regarding the situation in Corinth.
 - 3. Paul received a letter from Corinth, in which the Corinthian church asked some questions (1 Corinthians 7:1, etc.).
 - 4. As a result of all of these factors, Paul writes 1 Corinthians. First, he needs to deal with the factions and pursuit of wisdom, and second, he wanted to answer the letter of the Corinthians in which they asked him some specific questions regarding church life and practice.

IV. Purpose and Plan³

- A. To deal with the divisions in the Corinthians church.
- B. To command the disciplining of the man living with his step-mother.
- C. To reprove the Corinthians from suing each other.
- D. To answer questions regarding marriage and divorce, eating of food offered to idols, the behaviour of women in the church, the use of spiritual gifts, and the resurrection of the dead.
- E. To encourage the Corinthian believers to participate in the collection for the Jerusalem saints.
- F. To commend certain fellow-workers to the Corinthian church.

V. A Basic Outline⁴

- A. Introduction - 1:1-9

² Thiessen, pp. 203-205.

³ Thiessen, p. 205.

⁴ Thiessen, pp. 205-206.

- B. The Rebuke of the Party Spirit - 1:10-4:21
 - C. The Problems of Sexual Morality
 - 1. Discipline of the Incestuous Man - 5:1-13
 - 2. (Parenthetical: Evils of Litigation before Heathen Tribunals, 6:1-11).
 - 3. Fornication in the Light of the Sacredness of the Body - 6:12-20
 - 4. Marriage and Divorce - 7
 - D. The Subject of Food Offered to Idols
 - 1. Some General Principles - 8
 - 2. The Law of Forbearance - 9
 - 3. The Admonition from the History of Israel - 10:1-13.
 - 4. The Prohibition of Idolatry and Idolatrous Practices - 10:14-22
 - 5. The Use and Abuse of Christian Liberty - 10:23-11:1
 - E. The Disorders Connected with Public Worship
 - 1. The Veiling of Women in Public Worship - 11:2-16
 - 2. The Disorders Connected with the Lord's Supper - 11:17-34
 - 3. The Regulations Concerning Spiritual Gifts - 12-14
 - F. The Doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead - 15
 - G. The Immediate Practical Concerns of Paul - 16:1-18
 - H. Conclusion - 16:19-24
- VI. Chapters To Remember
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| 1 Corinthians 1 | The Foolishness of the Cross |
| 1 Corinthians 3 | The Believer's Rewards |
| 1 Corinthians 7 | Marriage and Divorce |
| 1 Corinthians 8-9 | Christian Liberty |
| 1 Corinthians 11 | The Lord's Supper |
| 1 Corinthians 12 | Spiritual Gifts |
| 1 Corinthians 13 | The Love Chapter |
| 1 Corinthians 14 | Tongues |
| 1 Corinthians 15 | The Resurrection |

VII. Points and Peculiarities

1. 1 Corinthians is the only book outside of Acts that deals with the issue of tongues.
2. 1 Corinthians is the only book that gives us a comprehensive understanding of the Resurrection.

VIII. A Closer Look

A. 1 Corinthians 1-3

1. Introduction - 1 Corinthians 1:1-9
2. Concerning Factions in the Church - 1 Corinthians 1:10-17.
3. Concerning the Wisdom of God - 1 Corinthians 1:18-16
4. Concerning the Carnality of Division - 1 Corinthians 3:1-4
5. Concerning Rewards and Spiritual Service - 1 Corinthians 3:5-23

B. 1 Corinthians 4

1. The Authority of the Apostles - 1 Corinthians 4:6-21

C. 1 Corinthians 5

1. Discipline of the Incestuous Man - 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

D. 1 Corinthians 6

1. Suing other Believers - 1 Corinthians 6:1-8
2. Christian Sexual Purity - 1 Corinthians 6:9-20

E. 1 Corinthians 7

1. Marriage and Divorce - 1 Corinthians 7:1-40

- F. 1 Corinthians 8-9
 - 1. Christian Freedom and Forbearance - 1 Corinthians 8:1-13
 - 2. Apostolic Rights and Responsibilities - 1 Corinthians 9:14-18
 - 3. All Things to All Men - 1 Corinthians 9:19-27
- G. 1 Corinthians 10
 - 1. The Example of Israel - 1 Corinthians 10:1-13
 - 2. Flee from Idolatry - 1 Corinthians 10:14-22
- H. 1 Corinthians 11
 - 1. The Separation of the Sexes - 1 Corinthians 11:1-16
 - 2. Conduct at the Lord's Table - 1 Corinthians 11:17-34
- I. 1 Corinthians 12-14
 - 1. Spiritual Gifts - 1 Corinthians 12:1-31
 - 2. The Primacy of Love - 1 Corinthians 13:1-13
 - 3. Tongues - 1 Corinthians 14:1-40
- J. 1 Corinthians 15
 - 1. The Resurrection - 1 Corinthians 15:1-58
- K. 1 Corinthians 16
 - 1. Contributions for the Saints - 1 Corinthians 16:1-4
 - 2. Conclusion - 1 Corinthians 16:19-24