

1 Corinthians

Purpose: “To instruct and restore the church in its areas of weakness, to correct false teaching, and to give instruction concerning the offering for Jerusalem” (edited from NIV Study Bible).

Outline: 1:1-4:21 – Introduction on divisions in the church
5:1-15:58 – Instruction on various moral and faith issues
16:1-24 – Conclusion on practical and personal matters

Author: Paul

Date: 55 AD while in Ephesus during his third missionary journey (cf. Acts 18)

Highlights:

1 Corinthians is actually the second letter from Paul to the church in Corinth. 1 Corinthians 5:9 refers to a previous letter. 2 Corinthians is actually the fourth letter from Paul to the church in Corinth. 2 Corinthians 2:3-11; 7:15-16 refers to “the sorrowful letter” addressing the sin of someone in the congregation. He hears the result of this letter from Titus in Acts 20:1.

The Corinthian Church had been established on Paul’s Second Missionary Journey. Since then, several concerning conditions had developed in the Corinthian Church. The city of Corinth was a significant Greek city, with lots of commerce...and immorality. There was a cultural center, and a place for all sorts of religion. A high premium was placed on wisdom. A low premium was placed on sexual morality (sound like any country you know?).

Divisions in the church was a major concern. People were following individual teachers instead of following Christ. Influential teachers – demonstrating their eloquence, wisdom, and intellect – were pulling people away from the message of the cross. Paul encourages individuals not to follow the wisdom of the world, but the foolishness of God.

Paul then goes on to write a series of important teachings – beginning with moral issues, and ending with theological issues.

Laxity in the discipline has resulted in immorality within the church, and even lawsuits among believers (compare this to the beginning of the church, when believers shared everything with one another).

Paul’s teaching on sexual immorality leads to some teaching on marriage. Compare Paul’s teaching with the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 19:10-12 and Matthew 22:29-32.

The issues become more theological in nature (although all moral issues have underlying theological issues) in chapters 8 and 9. Here, Paul discusses the issue of food sacrifice to idols and the rights of Apostles.

Chapter 10 includes important teaching about life and faith from the example of Israel’s (Old Testament) history. We face the same temptations that the Israelites did, even if they manifest themselves differently. The theological principles taught in chapter 8, 9 and the first part of 10 are applied in the latter half of chapter 10.

Chapter 11 begins the teaching on the subject of worship, the Lord’s Supper, Spiritual Gifts, and the Church. This is all taught in the context of love (chapter 13).

Spiritual gifts are taught in chapter 12 and the specific gifts of prophecy and tongues are addressed in chapter 14. The key verse (14:12) reminds us, “Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.”

Chapter 15 shares extensive teaching about the resurrection of Christ, of the dead, and the resurrected body. Portions of chapter 15 are frequently read at funeral services to bear witness to the resurrection of Christ and the believer who has recently passed away.

Chapter 16 includes Paul’s personal remarks, including some words about a collection that he is taking for God’s people. The collection will be taken to Jerusalem for the ministry going on there.

2 Corinthians

Purpose: To express relief at the success of the “sorrowful letter,” to challenge them to keep their promise to help with the collection to the Jerusalem Church, and to address a challenge regarding his authority.

Outline: 1:1-7:16 – Paul’s explanation of his ministry
8:1-9:15 – Paul’s encouragement of the collection for the Jerusalem ministry
10:1-13:14 – Paul’s vindication of his apostolic authority

Author: Paul

Date: 56 AD while in Macedonia during his third missionary journey

Highlights:

The Galatians were living as though the “already” (Christ’s death and resurrection) were “not yet” (so they were still living under the law and not grace).

The Thessalonians were living as though the “not yet” (Christ’s second coming) made the “now” irrelevant (so they sat idle waiting for Christ to return, concerned that those who died would not be resurrected to eternal life).

The Corinthians were in a state of “over-realized eschatology” even beyond the Thessalonians. They were living as though the “not yet” (Christ’s second coming) were “already” (and, having passed, they could now do whatever they wanted to).

Paul needs to clarify that Christ has not returned and that they need to focus on the present teachings of Christ and not the present teachings of the world.

Chapter 1 begins Paul’s explanation of his ministry. He explains the source of his ministry, and his change of plans. In Chapter 2 & 3 Paul explains his painful encounter with a certain member of the congregation, and what is expected from ministers of the new covenant.

Chapter 4-6 further explores the ministry under the new covenant, including Paul’s hardships and joys in his ministry.

Chapter 8 & 9 discuss the collection for the poverty-stricken people in Jerusalem.

Chapter 10 begins Paul’s defense of his ministry. This is continued into chapter 11 (2 Cor. 11:1-15 was the text for the first sermon I ever preached in a church).

Chapter 12 addresses Paul’s vision and thorn, and his concern for the Corinthians. Following his last words regarding his apostolic authority in the beginning of chapter 13, Paul signs off with the Trinitarian benediction, which has been a part of Christian worship tradition ever since (13:14).