

Outline of 1 Corinthians

This outline of 1 Corinthians is intended to assist you as you diligently study God's letter to you — His holy Word.

1 Corinthians is the first of two letters to the Corinthians written by Paul that is preserved for us. It is the fourth letter of Paul's that we have preserved, following Galatians (49-50 A.D.), and 1 & 2 Thessalonians (51 A.D.). At the time of writing Paul is in Ephesus on his third missionary journey, somewhere around A.D. 54 or 55 (1 Corinthians 16:8).

Corinth had been occupied as a city since before 2000 B.C. It was strategically located on an isthmus that joined the southern part of the Greek peninsula with the mainland to the north. At Corinth, the isthmus was only about six miles wide. From 350-250 B.C., Corinth was the largest and most prosperous city of mainland Greece. The city was destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C. For 100 years, the city was left desolate. In 44 B.C., Julius Caesar rebuilt the city and settled it with Roman colonists. Corinth became the capital of Achaia and the seat of the Roman government. It surpassed Athens as a center of science and culture and as the hub of the area.

The city was known and identified as a city of evil, immorality, and frivolousness. The Greek word "Corinthianize" came to be used to mean "to practice immorality." The main worship of the city centered around Aphrodite, and the temple dedicated to her held 1,000 female priests who engaged in prostitution.

It was into this Roman/Greek city that Paul came in 51 A.D. (Acts 18:1-18) and stayed for 18 months (Acts 18:11). During this time he exhibited the Spirit of God and power to them (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). Many were saved, but Paul purposely only baptized a few (1 Corinthians 1:14-17). Nevertheless, he was the founder of the church.

Sometime after this, Apollos, a powerful speaker and instrument of God, who came from Alexandria, Egypt, and was sent to Corinth by the believers at Ephesus, appeared and provided great support to the church. There were also some in the church that apparently had been converted under Peter's ministry.

After leaving Corinth, Paul wrote an epistle back to Corinth, of which we know very little, except there was a warning not to associate with sexually immoral people (1 Corinthians 5:9). While in Ephesus, he wrote a second letter, which we know as 1 Corinthians, to correct problems that he heard from the house of Chloe (1 Corinthians 1:11).

Thereafter, on a journey that is not recorded in Acts, Paul left Ephesus and traveled to Corinth. This was known as the painful visit (2 Corinthians 2:1; 12:14; 13:1-2). Obviously, this was not a pleasant visit for Paul.

Paul then returned to Ephesus and wrote a painful letter (2 Corinthians 2:4; 7:8) probably in the early part of 56 A.D. This letter was apparently carried by Titus to Corinth (2 Corinthians 12:13). Paul then went to Troas to find Titus and hear the news but Titus did not come (2 Corinthians 2:12-13). Paul crossed over to Europe and found Titus, who relayed the good news of the Corinthian acceptance of and repentance over Paul's third letter (2 Corinthians 7:5-16).

Paul then wrote a fourth letter (A.D. 56), which we know as 2 Corinthians, to express his thankfulness and to prepare the Corinthians for his third visit. He arrived in Corinth and apparently spent the winter there (Acts 20:3; 1 Corinthians 16:6).

153 times in this epistle of 16 chapters Paul mentions Jesus Christ. He is mentioned in every chapter except chapter 13, the love chapter. Paul's Christianity revolves around Jesus Christ. He writes to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus (1:2) and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus (6:11). Paul sees his victory as coming through Him (15:57). Christ provides grace (1:4) and enrichment in everything (1:5). Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God

(1:24); He is the righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1:30). He is the foundation of our lives (1:11).

The epistle deals with a series of problems, from divisions to immorality, to legal fights, to marriage, to tender care, to idolatry, to the Lord's Supper, to gifting, to the resurrection, to giving. Interestingly, some 40 years later, some of the same problems existed in this church. In one of the earliest preserved writings of the Christian church, the church at Rome in 95-96 A.D. wrote to the Corinthians reminding them of Paul's words in this book and telling them to repent from rebellion against the presbyters (Letter of the Romans to the Corinthians, p. 47).

The city of Corinth and its church continued well into the Middle Ages when in 1458 the Saracens captured it. In 1858, a tremendous earthquake destroyed the city. It has since been rebuilt about three miles from the former site.

Date: 56 A.D.

Structure:

After an introduction, Paul deals immediately with problems in the church in chapters 1-6. Thereafter, beginning in chapter seven, he introduces other matters of instruction with the words "Now concerning . . ." or similar words (7:1; 8:1; 11:2; 12:1; 16:1). This phrase is used also at 7:25 and 16:12, though these introduce concepts closely related to previous ones and therefore I do not separate them.

I. Introduction 1:1-9

- A. Salutation 1:1-3
- B. Thankfulness to God for them 1:4-9

II. The Problems 1:10-6:20

- A. Divisions 1:10-4:21
 - 1. There are divisions 1:10-17
 - 2. But not because of the gospel 1:18-31
 - 3. Nor because of my presentation 2
 - 4. But because of your carnality 3:1-4
 - 5. Straighten up, your works will be tried 3:5-17
 - 6. Don't glory in men 3:18-23
 - 7. Don't puff yourself up 4
- B. Gross immorality 5
 - 1. When immorality affects the church, it is serious 5:1-8
 - 2. You must deal with it 5:9-13
- C. Legal suits 6:1-11
 - 1. Disputes between believers should be settled in the church 6:1-6
 - 2. Be righteous and accept wrong 6:7-11
- D. Sexual impurity 6:12-20

III. Other Matters of Instruction 7:1-16:12

A. Marriage 7

1. General principles 7:1-9
2. Don't leave your spouse 7:10-16
3. Live as God has called you 7:17-24
4. If you are unmarried, listen 7:25-40

B. Christian Liberty 8:1-11:1

1. Don't use your knowledge to destroy your brother 8
2. Follow the example of service shown by Paul 9
3. Don't think that you are above falling 10:1-13
4. Flee idolatry 10:14-22
5. Do all to the glory of God 10:23-11:1

C. Church practice 11:2-34

1. Men and women should behave differently 11:2-16
2. Do not permit the church to be a place of shame 11:17-22
3. Celebrate the Lord's Supper worthily 11:23-34

D. Spiritual Gifts 12-14

1. The Spirit gives them out 12:1-11
2. But they are not divisive 12:12-30
3. Love is the greatest way 12:31-13
4. But do not forget gifts, especially prophesy 14

E. Resurrection 15

1. The gospel in a nutshell 15:1-11
2. There is a future resurrection 15:12-34
 - a. Christ has risen 15:12-19
 - b. In Him we raise 15:20-28
 - c. I am foolish if there is no resurrection 15:29-34
3. Our bodies will be different 15:35-49
4. It will happen in a moment in time 15:50-58

F. Giving 16:1-4

G. Future visits 16:5-12

1. I plan to come and stay awhile 16:5-9
2. Timothy may come first 16:10-11
3. Apollos will come when it is convenient 16:12

IV. Conclusion 16:5-24

A. Final instructions 16:13-18

B. Final greetings 16:19-21

C. Final warning 16:22

D. Final blessing and love 16:23-24

Key Idea: Live as a body

Key Passage: 12:12, 27

Key Lesson: Don't let differences cause schisms