



09.11.2019

THE CITY OF CORINTH:

Timeline:

146BC Archaean League of Greek Cities-States, with Corinth as its lead, was defying Roman expansion and was leveled to the ground. ALL citizens were killed or sold into slavery. It laid fallow for 100 years until Julius Caesar rebuilt it.

From 46BC on:

250,000 people. Large portion being slaves. Engaged in the non-ending movement of goods. Slaves or Free, the citizens were all transplants (rootless), cut off from their country background. A cosmopolitan mixture of race & background.

Defining Characteristics:

Romans officers were given land in Corinth as a way to populate the city.

Wealthy – A port city.

Populated.

Commercial-minded.

Sex-obsessed

Worship – Temple for Aphrodite on Acrocorinth(hill) (1,000 priestesses/sacred prostitutes) & Temple for Apollo (god's beautiful boys) & Melicertes (the sea/navigation)

“A colony without aristocracy, without tradition, without well-established citizens”. W. Barclay, *“The Letters To The Corinthians”*

S/G What would this make up set the stage for in the development of a community?

What would be the plus and minuses of its effect on building a church community in its midst?

What can this type of prosperity breed in a community?

What was Paul's state of mind as he approached this community?

He stayed 18 months. (only stayed longer in Ephesus)

He arrived, worked as a tent maker as he became known and respected. The churches of Macedonia and Philippi gave \$ to help with this church plant so Paul would not have to work at tent making.

1 Corinthians 2:3 (ESV)

³ And ^(A)I was with you ^(B)in weakness and in fear and much trembling,

A. 1 Corinthians 2:3 : Acts 18:1, 6, 12

B. 1 Corinthians 2:3 : 2 Cor. 11:30; 12:5, 9; 13:4, 9; Gal. 4:13

1 Corinthians 2:3 (NLT)

³ I came to you in weakness—timid and trembling.

Pauls' methodology was to preach in the Synagogue. Crispus (who was responsible for running the synagogue) was converted. Then, Sosthenes, who replaced Crispus at the synagogue, was also converted. Sosthenes co-authored with Paul 1 Corinthians.

We do not have access to the full story nor the full correspondence, so we study looking for clues and connections to fill in what is not said nor provided.

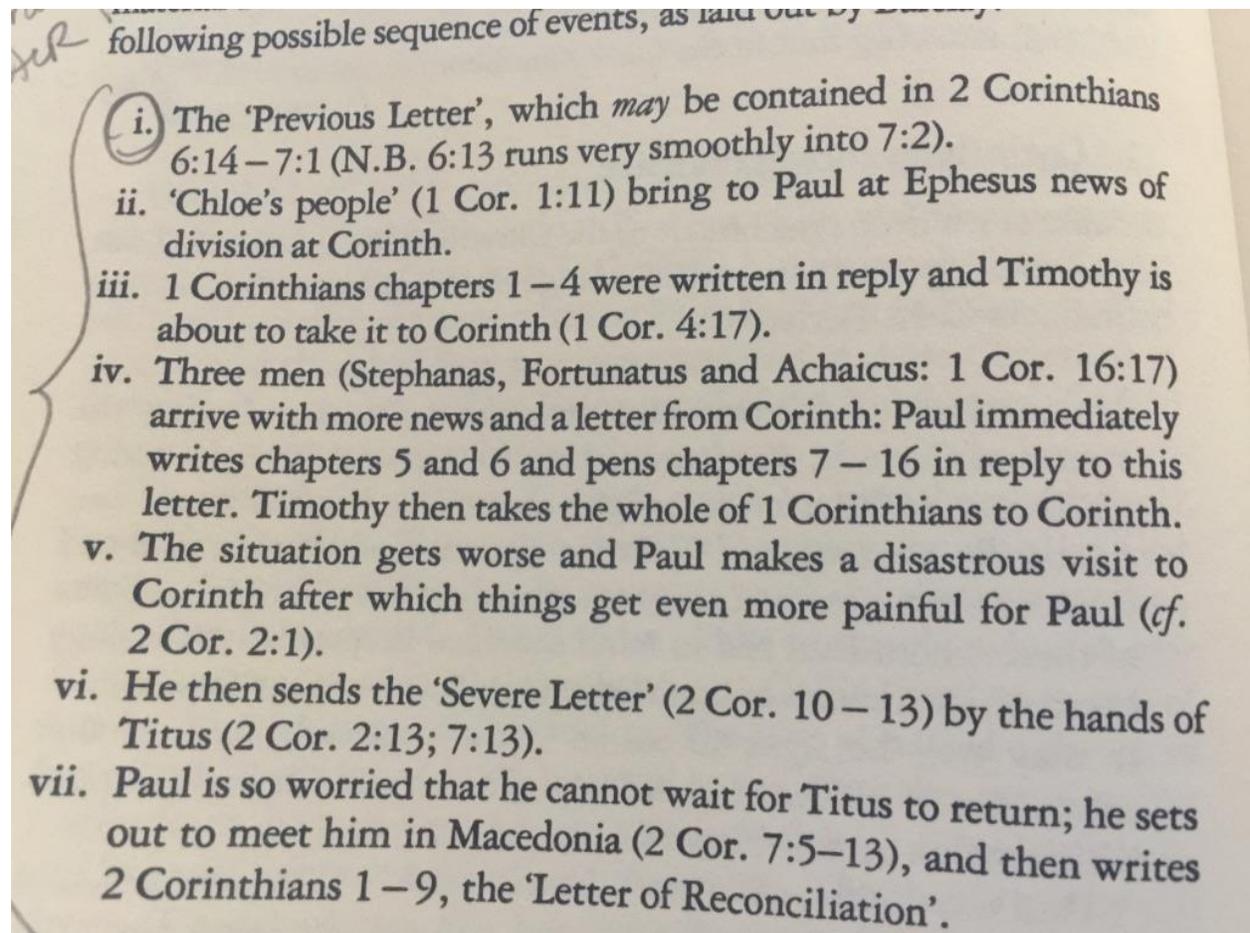
This we know:

There was a letter sent previous to 1 Corinthians reply (Could it be 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1?).

At the end of 2nd Corinthians, Paul mentions wanting to pay the Corinthians a THIRD visit...when did the 2nd visit happen? (1st = Acts 18).

Another very stern letter that Paul wishes he never sent (could it be 2 Corinthians 10-13?).

If it is, we can operate by this time frame:



("Message of 1 Corinthians", David Prior, pg. 18. The Bible Speaks Today, IVP 1985)

Paul wrote the letter from Ephesus in about A.D. 55, two or three years after leaving Corinth. Some five years earlier Paul first arrived in the city and started the church during the second of his three

missionary trips throughout the eastern Mediterranean. Paul didn't usually stay in a town longer than a few weeks, but he made an exception for Corinth, a busy port city full of international travelers who might hear his message and take it home with them. Paul stayed in Corinth for two years, then returned after writing 1 Corinthians, during his third missionary trip.

The apostle Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians in an attempt to restore the Corinthian church to its foundation—Jesus Christ. WHY DID PAUL WRITE 1 CORINTHIANS?

1 Corinthians 3:1-3 NLT

Dear brothers and sisters,^[a] when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people.^[b] I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in Christ.² I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready,³ for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren't you living like people of the world?

- 1 Corinthians brings our focus back to where it should be—on Christ. Genuine Christian love is the answer to many problems (chapter 13). A proper understanding of the resurrection of Christ, as revealed in chapter 15, and thereby a proper understanding of our own resurrection, is the cure for what divides and defeats us.
- It is possible that Jews were among the earliest inhabitants of the resettled city; they clearly had a strong presence early in its resettlement as evidenced by the discovery of a broken lintel inscribed with “[Syna]goge Hebr[aiion]” (synagogue of the Hebrew; see Murphy-O'Connor, *The Corinth that Paul Saw*, 153). While the Jewish community was obviously established, Gallio's dismissive response to their complaint against Paul (Acts 18:14–16) may indicate that the Jews, with their strict monotheism, were looked upon with some degree of disdain at the time Paul brought the gospel to the *agora*.

1 CORINTHIANS

Paul's Letter to a Fractured Church

Famous Lines

- Let's eat and drink. Tomorrow we die (15:32). Paul quotes a Greek proverb to suggest what our attitude should be if Christ was not raised from the dead.
 - O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? (15:55, King James Version). A praise of believers who realize that, like Jesus, they too will be resurrected.
 - God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear (10:13, New International Version).
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- Your body is a temple where the Holy Spirit lives (6:19). Paul’s reminder to the Corinthians to take good care of their bodies.

There’s no such thing as a perfect church when human beings are on the roll. Never has been, never will be, until the roll is called up yonder.

Consider the church founded by the most notable, influential, successful Christian minister of first-generation believers. **Paul didn’t stay in Corinth only a few days or weeks, as he did in most cities. He stayed for two years, training and nurturing the spiritual infants. Several years later, however, the Corinthians were still behaving like disobedient, rebellious kids.**

They were arguing over who in the church was most important, suing each other in court, turning a blind eye to incest among the congregation, and showing that they were thoroughly confused about key Christian beliefs such as the Resurrection.

In a blunt though loving letter, Paul replies to an array of practical questions the Corinthians raised in a letter to him. But he also confronts issues they were apparently too embarrassed to mention.

This is not a boring letter.

First Corinthians is gripping because of the deeply emotional issues Paul tackles. And it’s timely because, unfortunately, there’s a little bit of Corinth in every church—a lot of Corinth in some. □

Behind the Scenes of 1 Corinthians

Did You Know?

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- First Corinthians isn’t Paul’s first letter to the church at Corinth. It’s just the first one that survived. In 1 Corinthians Paul refers to “my other letter” (5:9).

Starring Role

Paul, leading minister to the non-Jewish world, and founder of the church at Corinth, Greece (1:1)

Plot

A couple of years after leaving the church he started in Corinth, Paul receives troubling news. Messengers arrive with a letter from the congregation asking for his help in solving a number of divisive problems. Not all the bad news is in the letter. The messengers and other sources report additional problems: power struggles among the leadership, cliques in the congregation, an I-don’t-want-to-get-involved attitude about church members engaged in illicit sex, Christians suing Christians.

Paul begins his letter by dealing with these problems first, since they reflect a deep-seated misunderstanding about what it means to be a Christian. Only then, beginning with chapter 7, does he address the questions that the Corinthians asked—questions about more practical issues of everyday living and worship services. Questions such as, “Is it best for people not to marry?” (7:1). And is it okay to eat “food offered to idols” (8:1), which priests sell wholesale to meat vendors who resell it at a profit in the meat markets?

In all of Paul’s advice, he urges the believers to act in unity and love. If they can do this, he teaches, their other problems will wither and die.

What to Look For

A power struggle in the church. The congregation is breaking into factions that prefer one of at least three leaders: Paul, Peter, or Apollos (1:12). Apollos, mentioned in Acts 18:24–28, is an Old Testament scholar and a charismatic speaker. Peter, one of the original disciples of Jesus, may have

appealed to Jewish Christians at Corinth. Paul, founder of the church and advocate for non-Jewish believers, maintained a loyal core of supporters.

“Don’t take sides,” Paul advises. “Has Christ been divided up? Was I nailed to a cross for you?” (1:10, 13).

Christians behaving badly. Besides the power struggle, there are other problems in the church—many stemming from Christians behaving as if they have a license to sin. There is a man who has married his stepmother, in defiance of both Roman and Jewish law that considers this incest (Deuteronomy 27:20). Paul is shocked that the congregation lets this man remain in the church, as though he is doing nothing wrong.

Though God judges people outside the church, Paul says, Christians have an obligation to judge and discipline their members. Paul advises the Corinthians to stay away from professing believers who are blatantly “immoral or greedy or worship idols or curse others or get drunk or cheat” (5:11). In even sterner advice Paul adds, “Chase away any of your own people who are evil” (5:13).

Another example of bad behavior is Christians suing each other in “a court of sinners” (6:1).

“Can’t you settle small problems?” Paul asks. “Why do you take everyday complaints to judges who are not respected by the church?” (6:2, 4).

Practical advice about life and worship. In chapter 7 Paul starts answering a variety of questions the church has asked him.

Here’s a sampling of the topics.

Marriage. Paul apparently expects Jesus to return soon, so he advises people not to get married, but he concedes “it is better to marry than to burn with desire” (7:9).

Eating food offered to idols. Paul says this issue is not particularly important, since all food comes from God. Paul does say, however, that Christians should be sensitive to other believers who have scruples against eating such food (8:1–13).

Dressing for worship services. People should dress appropriately, Paul says, not as trend-setters calling attention to themselves or as lures for the opposite sex (11:1–16).

The Lord’s Supper. This is a shared celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus, Paul explains. But Corinth has turned it into a segregated potluck, where rich members cluster in cliques to eat rich folks’ food, while the poor eat comparative crumbs (11:20–33).

Spiritual gifts. God gives different abilities to different people, Paul says. Each gift is important and useful in God’s work (12:1–31).

A beautiful hymn about love. One of the most famous chapters in the Bible is Paul’s lyrical message about love. The poem comes immediately after Paul has talked about other gifts from God, to emphasize that all talent is useless if it doesn’t flow from a heart of love. “What if I could speak all languages of humans and of angels?” Paul asks. “If I did not love others, I would be nothing more than a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (13:1).

The ability to love others, Paul argues, is the greatest gift of all—greater than hope, and even greater than faith (13:13). This is a powerful message especially in Corinth, a city famed for its great temple of Aphrodite, goddess of love.

Author and Date

“I am signing this letter myself: PAUL” (16:21). This conclusion, along with the introduction, “From Paul,” (1:1), clearly identifies who the writer is. Early church leaders included this letter in the New Testament because they believed it came from the pen of Paul, the most influential minister among first-generation Christians.

Paul wrote the letter from Ephesus in about A.D. 55, two or three years after leaving Corinth. Some five years earlier Paul first arrived in the city and started the church during the second of his three missionary trips throughout the eastern Mediterranean. Paul didn’t usually stay in a town longer than a

few weeks, but he made an exception for Corinth, a busy port city full of international travelers who might hear his message and take it home with them. Paul stayed in Corinth for two years, then returned after writing 1 Corinthians, during his third missionary trip.

On Location

Paul's letter is addressed to Christians in a young church he started a few years earlier, during his second missionary journey (shown on the map), at Corinth, perhaps the busiest city in ancient Greece. Located south of Athens, Corinth is near a four-mile-wide land bridge separating the Aegean Sea in the east and the Adriatic Sea in the west.

Eastern trade ships carrying products destined for Rome and other western cities would often stop in Corinth. If the ship were small enough, it could be hauled up onto a huge wagon, wheeled across the isthmus, then launched into the Adriatic. This saved merchants a 200-mile trip around the tip of Greece, sparing them from storms and pirates. Larger ships unloaded their cargo and had it hauled to other ships waiting at the Adriatic port. Nero started a canal in A.D. 66, but the project was stopped after engineers doubted it could be done and Corinthians complained that a canal would keep travelers from stopping in the city. The project was completed in 1893 and is still used. □

Big Scenes from 1 Corinthians

A few years after Paul leaves the church he founded in Corinth, continuing his preaching trips throughout the eastern Mediterranean, the congregation splits into squabbling factions. Some prefer the guidance of their founding minister. Others prefer the interpretations of Peter, who is still observing many Jewish customs and probably living in Jerusalem. Others gravitate to Apollos, a brilliant scholar and dynamic speaker living in Corinth.

Christians quarrel over who's in charge (1:10–31)

Paul begs the Corinthians to stop arguing, since only Christ is the leader of the church. "Was I nailed to a cross for you?" Paul asks. "Were you baptized in my name?" (1:13).

All three leaders are merely servants of God, Paul says. "Paul and Apollos and Peter all belong to you" (3:22). Comparing God's spiritual kingdom to a garden, Paul says "I planted the seeds, Apollos watered them, but God made them sprout and grow" (3:6).

Paul is shocked to find out that a member of the church has married his stepmother, and the church has taken no action to discipline him. By **Immorality in the church** both Roman and Jewish standards, the man has committed incest. **(5:1–13)**

“In my other letter [before 1 Corinthians] I told you not to have anything to do with immoral people,” Paul says. “But I wasn’t talking about people of this world. You would have to leave this world to get away from everyone who is immoral or greedy or who cheats or worships idols. I was talking about your own people” (5:9–11). Paul explains that God judges those outside the church, but believers have a responsibility to protect the name of Jesus by disciplining those who call themselves Christians.

Paul’s advice: “Expel the wicked man from among you” (5:13, New International Version). This harsh judgment is not to condemn the man to everlasting banishment, but to bring him to his senses so he will repent and return to Christ and the church.

Bickering among the church gets so bad that Christians start taking each other to court.

“Why should one of you take another to be tried by unbelievers?” Paul asks. “Aren’t any of you wise enough to act as a judge between one follower and another?” **Christians suing Christians (6:1–11)**

Roman courts operated without the notions we cherish today: fairness and justice being blind. Roman judges were expected to decide in favor of the wealthier, more influential party. The poor and other persons of low social standing feared being hauled into court, because—guilty or innocent—their misery would surely be multiplied if their accuser were higher class or wealthier. In prohibiting lawsuits between believers, Paul protects the socially weaker members and calls the whole church to its responsibility to apply God’s wisdom to disagreements among themselves.

In many churches, Corinth included, when believers observe the ritual of the Lord’s Supper by eating bread and drinking wine that represents the body and blood of the crucified

More of a segregated feast than a Lord’s Supper

Jesus, they also eat a full meal called a “love feast.” (11:17–34)

A problem develops.

“You don’t really celebrate the Lord’s Supper,” Paul writes. “You even start eating before everyone gets to the meeting, and some of you go hungry, while others get drunk” (11:20–21).

The love feast is apparently like a potluck, held at a large meeting place, often the home of wealthy members. Church members cluster in socio-economic cliques—rich folks eating fancy food together and poorer families and slaves eating the meager morsels they can bring.

This dishonors Christ, Paul says, and it divides people who should be united in gratitude for what Jesus did for them on the Cross.

Paul advises the people who are hungry to eat before they come to worship, so they can concentrate on the ritual meal and thank Jesus for the gift of salvation and the promise of a resurrection.

Paul writes that God has entrusted to the people at Corinth a wide variety of talents, or gifts: prophecy, healing, teaching, speaking in other languages. All of these are important because they allow Christians to help others. But Paul says the greatest gift of all—the gift that channels our talents in the right direction—is the gift of love.

God’s greatest gift: the ability to love (13:1–13)

“What if I could prophesy and understand all secrets and all knowledge?” Paul asks. “I would gain nothing, unless I loved others.”

Compassionate love—inspired by Christ’s death for humanity—produces a selfless people who are kind and patient, not boastful or easily angered, always supportive and hopeful, never keeping a record of the wrongs that others do.

Christians don’t start out this way, Paul says. “When we were children, we thought and reasoned as children do. But when we grew up, we quit our childish ways” (13:11).

Growing Christians cultivate an attitude of love above all others. Among the three most

noble traits—faith, hope, and love—Paul says
“the greatest is love.”

Some Corinthians are confused about the resurrection of Jesus and what it has to do with them. Some apparently don't believe that bodies will be resurrected. Instead, these people have adopted the Greek understanding that only the soul is immortal. Paul teaches that Jesus—soul and glorified body—were both resurrected and witnessed by hundreds.

The resurrected Jesus meets with his disciples (15:1–58)

“Unless Christ was raised to life, your faith is useless,” Paul explains. “But Christ has been raised to life! And he makes us certain that others will also be raised to life. Just as we will die because of Adam, we will be raised to life because of Christ” (15:20–21).

Paul reveals that some day, in an instant, “our dead and decaying bodies will be changed into bodies that won't die.” Our former bodies made from dust will become like that of “the one who came from heaven.”

When this happens, Paul says, the prophecies of Isaiah and Hosea will be fulfilled, and people will praise God saying, “Death has lost the battle! Where is its victory? Where is its sting?” (Isaiah 25:8; Hosea 13:14).

Reviews

Erastus was here. Erastus is identified in the New Testament as a colleague of Paul (Acts 19:22; 2 Timothy 4:20) and as the Corinth city treasurer (Romans 16:23). These references may have been about two people. Even if that's so, both were Christians, and the Erastus of Corinth was a member of the church there.

Archaeologists working in the ruins of ancient Corinth found a block of pavement stone with this inscription, written in the Roman language of Latin: “Erastus, commissioner of public works, bore the expense of this pavement.”

The inscription may be identifying the same Corinthian Christian and city treasurer that Paul wrote about.

Isthmian Games. The Isthmian Games, an athletic competition second in popularity only to the Olympics, were held in Corinth every four years—including A.D. 51, when Paul was in town. The Isthmian Games featured a wide variety of races by runners, horsemen, and charioteers.

Probably not coincidentally, Paul's first use of athletic imagery appears in his letter to the Corinthians. Comparing Christians to runners in a race, Paul says, “You know that many runners enter a race, and only one of them wins the prize. So run to win!” (9:24).

“Athletes work hard to win a crown that cannot last,” Paul adds, “but we do it for a crown that will last forever” (9:25). In fact, winners’ crowns at the Isthmian Games were woven from withered stalks of celery.

Women, keep quiet in church. Sometimes Paul comes across as the first liberationist. After all, he’s the one who said, “Faith in Christ Jesus is what makes each of you equal with each other, whether you are a Jew or a Greek, a slave or a free person, a man or a woman” (Galatians 3:28). Unfortunately, to many readers Paul looks more like a chauvinist in 1 Corinthians: “When God’s people meet in church, the women must not be allowed to speak. They must keep quiet and listen. . . . If there is something they want to know, they can ask their husbands when they get home” (14:33–34).

On the topic of women, Paul can be puzzling. On the one hand, he commends Phoebe as a church deacon (Romans 16:1) and even describes a woman named Junias by using the rare and highest church leadership title of “apostle” (Romans 16:7). Yet in other letters he insists that men should be in charge (1 Corinthians 11:2–16) and that women should be subject to ~~men~~ husbands in everything (Ephesians 5:24).

How could Paul say all these things? Some scholars suggest that Paul struggled between male-female equality in Christ and the traditional female subordination of his day. Some think that Paul affirmed that men and women are equal in worth before God but are given different roles within that equality. God made men responsible for leading, but he requires them to lead like Christ leads the church. Other scholars say that Paul restricted women’s activities only in the churches where women were abusing leadership. □

Encore

- Read Paul’s follow-up letter: 2 Corinthians. □

2 CORINTHIANS

Paul Fights a Hostile Takeover

Famous Lines

- God loves a cheerful giver (9:7).
- A thorn in the flesh (12:7). Paul’s mystifying description of an unnamed problem that tormented him.

Ministers and congregations have a long history of not getting along. The first case on record is of Paul and the church he started in Corinth. Paul plants the church like a seedling, then stays for two years and nurtures it. Eventually, he moves on to start other churches. That’s when trouble starts.

Arguments break out in Corinth about who’s in charge, how Christians should behave, and how they should worship. By long-distance courier and by a personal visit, Paul addresses these problems. Then, within the year, another crisis strikes. Others who claim to be apostles arrive in Corinth and begin wooing church leaders away from Paul’s leadership. Second Corinthians doesn’t say exactly what these fraudulent apostles teach, but Paul accuses the intruders of repackaging the gospel with “another Jesus,” “another spirit,” and “a different message” (11:4).

Paul refuses to back off. He fights for the hearts and minds of the Corinthians. It's a battle he knows he might lose. If he were concerned about his personal pride and reputation, he'd walk away and turn his energy to the many other churches that appreciate him more. But Paul cares about the Corinthian people. He's willing to endure whatever heartache and humiliation it takes to win them back to the true Jesus, the true spirit, and the genuine message. □

Behind the Scenes of 2 Corinthians

Did You Know?

- The Corinthian congregation apparently got over their bickering, eventually. In the final decades of the first Christian century, Roman church leader Clement complimented them in a letter. He wrote that they “bore no malice to one another. All sedition and all schism was abominable to you.”

- Paul wrote at least four letters to the Corinthians: (1) a letter mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9, warning believers to stay away from sexually immoral people; (2) 1 Corinthians; (3) the stern letter of reprimand mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:4; and (4) 2 Corinthians.

Starring Roles

Paul, leading minister to the non-Jewish world, and founder of the church at Corinth, Greece (1:1)
Titus, Paul's associate who carries a letter to Corinth that tries repairing the damaged relationship between Paul and the congregation (2:13)

Plot

Shortly after the Corinthian Christians receive Paul's letter known to us as 1 Corinthians, some outsiders arrive. Paul doesn't say who these people are, but clearly their take on Christianity differs from his. Paul calls the intruders “false apostles” who “only pretend to be apostles of Christ” (11:13). They apparently represented Jewish Christianity, yet 2 Corinthians says nothing about observing such Jewish matters as circumcision, food restrictions, and religious holidays.

The relationship between Paul and the Corinthians already was badly strained. The church itself had started fracturing into cliques and arguing over lifestyles and worship practices. After writing 1 Corinthians, Paul makes a visit to the church. But this only aggravates the tension.

Intruder alert.

Gifted in the art of persuasion, the newly arrived intruders lob charge upon charge at Paul. All we know of the charges is what we can infer from Paul's defense, preserved in 2 Corinthians. But the outsiders seem to attack his authority and motives. In response, Paul presents himself as an honest and sincere minister of Christ who cares deeply about the Corinthians.

What to Look For

Verbal attacks against Paul. Religious teachers arrive in town, saying they are Christians. They quickly show they are opponents of Paul, because they begin turning the church against their founding minister.

Here are what seem to be several main points of attack, along with excerpts of Paul’s defense.

1. Paul is a self-appointed apostle, not one personally commissioned by Jesus, as were the original disciples. “When I was with you, I was patient and worked all the powerful miracles and signs and wonders of a true apostle” (12:12).

2. Paul is self-promoting. “We are not preaching about ourselves. Our message is that Jesus Christ is Lord” (4:5).

3. Paul can’t be trusted, since he didn’t come to Corinth when he said he would. Paul replies by saying that his last visit was so painful that he decided a cooling off period was in order. “I have decided not to make my next visit with you so painful. . . . I didn’t want to make you feel bad. I only wanted to let you know how much I cared for you” (2:1, 4).

4. Paul is pocketing money collected for the poverty-stricken believers in Jerusalem. “Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit” (2:17, New International Version). Paul implies that the intruders are seeking donations for themselves from the Corinthians. Paul had refused to do this (12:13). Instead, he earned his keep by working as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3).

5. Paul barks boldly in his letters, but in person he’s a coward who has nothing worth saying (10:10). “When I am with you, I will do exactly what I say in my letters” (10:11).

Paul’s reluctant bragging about his sufferings. Bible experts call 11:16–12:13 the “Fool’s Speech” because Paul says “let me be a fool and brag a little” (11:16). Paul feels uncomfortable bragging about anything except the Lord. But he feels that his back is to the wall and his ministry in Corinth will be over if he doesn’t speak up.

The Fool’s Speech might look like self-defensive bragging, but it’s not. It’s a parody on ancient speeches and letters that commend a person. This is an appropriate defensive technique because the intruder-critics in Corinth have come with letters of commendation.

In a sarcastic reversal of typical commendations, Paul begins bragging about experiences that show him as a victim—a loser by the world’s standards. Paul reports suffering one tragedy after another—all because he is doing God’s will and on behalf of the Corinthians.

The readers can’t help but be reminded of how Jesus suffered for the same reason.

For many Corinthians, this speech likely generates a renewed sense of gratitude for what Paul and Jesus have endured on their behalf.

Paul’s “thorn in the flesh.” In describing what he has suffered throughout his ministry, Paul speaks of a “thorn in the flesh” that torments him and keeps him from getting conceited (12:7, New International Version).

Paul shows himself to be weak in that, though he asks God three times to remove the “thorn,” God refuses. Jesus, too, asked to be spared the suffering of the cross. Because Jesus suffered, Paul is willing to do the same—even if it makes him look weak in the eyes of the world.

Paul never says what the “thorn” is. Bible experts have many theories, including some kind of physical problem such as malaria or poor eyesight (he writes in big letters, Galatians 6:11), or his never-ending persecutions, or his rejection by the Corinthians.

Personal information about Paul. This letter reveals more autobiographical information about Paul than any of his other letters. Much of this comes in chapters 11–12, where he talks about how he suffered as a minister: beatings, jailings, shipwrecks, stoning, public humiliation. The list goes on. He also describes what sounds like a vision or an out-of-body experience in which he caught a glimpse of the afterlife (12:1–6).

An impassioned fundraising letter. Surprisingly, in this letter that includes a defense against charges that he’s preaching for profit, Paul asks for money.

But the money is not for him. In fact he makes it a point to remind the Corinthians that during the two years he lived among them he did not accept their money. The donation he is now requesting is for poverty-stricken Christians in Jerusalem. This is a special offering Paul has been collecting from churches throughout the eastern Mediterranean.

Paul applies some gentle pressure by telling the Corinthians that he has bragged about their generosity. “I know how eager you are to give. I have proudly told the Lord’s followers in Macedonia [a comparatively poor province to the north] that you people in Achaia [Greece] have been ready for a whole year. Now your desire to give has made them want to give. . . . This [donation of yours] will prove that we were not wrong to brag about you” (9:2–3).

Author and Date

The letter is “From Paul, chosen by God to be an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1:1), along with his associate, Timothy.

Paul wrote the letter a few months after writing 1 Corinthians, during his third and final missionary trip. Drawing on clues from the text, some Bible experts speculate that he wrote 1 Corinthians in the spring while staying at Ephesus, then 2 Corinthians in the winter while in Macedonia.

On Location

Like 1 Corinthians, Paul’s letter is addressed to Christians in a young church he started a few years earlier at Corinth, Greece. Located south of Athens, Corinth is near a four-mile-wide land bridge separating the Aegean Sea in the east and the Adriatic Sea in the west. (See map in 1 Corinthians, page 342.) Paul apparently assumes that other churches in the region will read circulated copies of the letter, since he also addresses “all of God’s people in Achaia,” the Roman province that is now Greece. □

Big Scenes from 2 Corinthians

Paul begins his emotional letter by saying how glad he is that God always comforts us when we suffer. This is an apt introduction since **Roman conquerors in a victory march** Paul is going to spend much of the rest of his **(2:14–17)** letter talking about the torment he has endured from the Corinthian church and from others.

Paul says that followers of Christ in this generation—and especially ministers—should expect hardship, opposition, and rejection because these are what Christ got. To illustrate two extremes in the way people react to the gospel, Paul draws on an image familiar to citizens of large cities in the Roman Empire. It’s the scene of a Roman procession: soldiers marching in a victory parade after a battle. On display are the prisoners of war who will be executed for the emperor’s pleasure or sold as slaves. Along the roadway, citizens cheer and fill the air with the sweet smell of burning incense. To the conquerors, this perfumed scent

is fragrant and welcome. To the captives, the smell means death.

Paul then paints a picture of himself and other Christian ministers marching in a victory parade led by Jesus. “For people who are being saved,” he says, “this perfume has a sweet smell and leads them to a better life. But for people who are lost, it has a bad smell and leads them to a horrible death.”

Some people welcome the gospel and its messengers. But many reject both and resist them with a vengeance.

Paul is amazed that God would entrust a message as important as the gospel to frail human beings.

Human bodies are like tents: temporary (5:1–10)

“We are like clay jars in which this treasure is stored,” Paul says. “We often suffer, but we are never crushed. Even when we don’t know what to do, we never give up. In times of trouble, God is with us, and when we are knocked down, we get up again. We face death every day because of Jesus” (4:7–11).

Paul doesn’t have an inordinate fear of death because he believes the only thing to die will be the body, which God will replace with an eternal body.

“Our bodies are like tents that we live in here on earth,” Paul writes. “But when these tents are destroyed, we know that God will give each of us a place to live. These homes will not be buildings that someone has made, but they are in heaven and will last forever.”

Torment stalks Paul like a predator everywhere he goes. Many Jewish Christians, for example, vehemently disagree with the Jerusalem council’s decision, years earlier, to allow non-Jewish believers to join the church without having to observe long-standing Jewish laws such as those about circumcision, kosher food, and religious holidays (Acts 15). So they follow Paul, who is famous as a minister to non-

A collection for the poor of Jerusalem (8:1—9:15)

Jews, and try to undo the damage they believe his preaching has done.

To help diffuse this tension, Paul tries to unify Jewish and non-Jewish factions of the church with a tangible expression of concern: he collects an offering from his predominantly non-Jewish churches for poverty-stricken Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Actually, Paul says this isn't his idea, but that it comes out of the Jerusalem council meeting (Galatians 2:10). Yet Paul gets 100 percent behind the suggestion and promotes the offering throughout his travels, as shown by references in Acts, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Romans.

The Bible doesn't say how the Jerusalem believers got poor. One theory is that the spirit of generosity that started at Pentecost spurred many believers to give away nearly everything they owned (Acts 4:32–37). Another suggestion growing out of Scripture is that a famine hit the region sometime after Paul began his first missionary trip in about A.D. 46 and before Emperor Claudius died in A.D. 54 (Acts 12:27–30). Yet another reason may be because older Jews often move to Jerusalem to spend their final days in the Holy City and be buried there. The church may have had to bear the brunt of caring for women whose husbands preceded them in death.

Whatever the reason for the poverty, the offering for Jerusalem is important to Paul. He pleads with the Corinthians to be generous.

“But don't feel sorry that you must give and don't feel that you are forced to give,” he adds. “God loves people who love to give” (9:7).

Paul later delivers the offering in person, fully aware that he may be arrested and tried for heresy by the same Jewish legislative body that tried Jesus. In fact, Paul is arrested and eventually transported to Rome for trial in the emperor's court. That's the last the Bible says of Paul. Christian writers at the end of the century report that Paul was executed.

In the closing chapters of his letter, Paul grapples with the biggest problem now

threatening the Corinthian church: “false apostles” who have arrived with letters of commendation and who are winning control of the church (11:13).

**Paul escapes Damascus in a basket
(11:16–33)**

Paul takes an incredibly creative approach to winning back his congregation. Instead of bragging about his spiritual power and influence—as the intruders have done about themselves—Paul writes a sarcastic parody on self-promotion; he brags about his weaknesses and the humiliations he has suffered.

Once, he admits, he had to sneak out of Damascus like a criminal, lowered over the city wall in a basket. This took place shortly after his conversion. Jews had posted guards at the city entrance and had planned to kill him as a religious traitor when he came out (Acts 9:20–25).

In this humiliating litany, Paul shows what great dangers and hardships he has endured out of love for God and for the Corinthians.

“Five times my own people gave me thirty-nine lashes with a whip. Three times the Romans beat me with a big stick, and once my enemies stoned me. I have been shipwrecked three times, and I even had to spend a night and a day in the sea. . . . My life has been in danger in cities, in deserts, at sea, and with people who only pretended to be the Lord’s followers” (11:24–26).

The climax of this parody comes when Paul reveals that Jesus, too, suffered terribly because of the gospel message. “He was weak when he was nailed to the cross,” Paul says, but now Jesus “lives by the power of God.”

The Corinthians should see how only Paul—not the crowd-pleasing latecomers—fits the pattern established by Jesus and is therefore their genuine apostle.

Reviews

Paul wasn’t much to look at. The Bible gives only scant hints of what Paul looked like, but those hints mesh with the earliest surviving description of him, preserved in a second-century book.

Writing in the Acts of Paul, the Christian author describes Paul as “a man of middling size, and his hair was scanty, and his legs were a little crooked, and his knees were far apart; he had large eyes, and his eyebrows met, and his nose was somewhat long.”

Paul quoted his critics as saying, “Paul’s letters are harsh and powerful. But in person, he is a weakling” (10:10). The New International Version translates “weakling” as “unimpressive,” while the New Revised Standard Version puts it this way: “his bodily presence is weak.” Whatever the description meant, it was no compliment.

Paul didn’t deny that he appeared weak to people who evaluated him by worldly values. On the contrary, he admitted it, then built on it by reminding the Corinthians that Jesus was crucified in weakness.

“Although he [Jesus] was weak when he was nailed to the cross, he now lives by the power of God. We are weak, just as Christ was. But you will see that we will live by the power of God, just as Christ does” (13:4).

In other words, the Lord has a remarkable capacity for turning weakness into power. “If Christ keeps giving me his power,” Paul adds, “I will gladly brag about how weak I am” (12:9). **More than one letter.** Second Corinthians is a cut-and-paste job drawing from two or more of Paul’s letters, some scholars say.

The letter is anything but smooth-flowing literature, seamlessly blending one topic into the next. Reading it is like taking a ride in a four-wheel-drive vehicle. One moment your chauffeur is cruising you down the expressway, chatting about how fulfilling his job is. The next moment he has ripped into a cornfield and is suddenly talking politics.

Abrupt sidetracks, radical changes from pleasant tones to harsh tones, and the variety of topics—rebukes, fundraising, sarcasm (to name just a few)—lead some Bible experts to conclude that 2 Corinthians is a composite of two or more letters. One theory is that the intense, heartbreaking letter Paul mentions in 2:4 is at least partly preserved in chapters 10–13 and has been tacked onto the letter that came after it: 2 Corinthians 1–9.

Other scholars, however, see 2 Corinthians as a single letter that addresses the many-faceted problems in Corinth. These scholars suggest that Paul’s gentle tone at the beginning, followed by the stern tone at the end, shows that Paul was trying to mend bridges before crossing over to confront the big problem: fake apostles trying to take control of the church.

Early church leaders treated 2 Corinthians as a single letter. And none of the earliest Greek manuscripts show evidence that the letter was pieced together. □

Encore

- Read Paul’s earlier letter to the church: 1 Corinthians.
- For another emotional defense of Paul’s ministry, read his letter to the church in Galatia.
- Philippians is another letter in which Paul’s gentle tone changes abruptly. In strong language he condemns people who argue that non-Jews must observe the rite of circumcision. □

1

Book of 1 Corinthians

¹ Miller, S. M., & Gross, P. (1998). [*How to get into the Bible*](#) (pp. 339–355). Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers.

Author: 1 Corinthians 1:1 identifies the author of the Book of 1 Corinthians as the apostle Paul.

Date of Writing: The Book of 1 Corinthians was written in approximately A. D. 55.

Purpose of Writing: The apostle Paul founded the church in Corinth. A few years after leaving the church, the apostle Paul heard some disturbing reports about the Corinthian church. They were full of pride and were excusing sexual immorality. Spiritual gifts were being used improperly, and there was rampant misunderstanding of key Christian doctrines. **The apostle Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians in an attempt to restore the Corinthian church to its foundation—Jesus Christ.**

Key Verses: 1 Corinthians 3:3: “You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?”

1 Corinthians 6:19–20: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”

1 Corinthians 10:31: “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

1 Corinthians 12:7: “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”

1 Corinthians 13:4–7: “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”

1 Corinthians 15:3–4: “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”

Brief Summary: The Corinthian church was plagued by divisions. The believers in Corinth were dividing into groups loyal to certain spiritual leaders (1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:1–6). Paul exhorted the Corinthian believers to be united because of devotion to Christ (1 Corinthians 3:21–23). Many in the church were essentially approving of an immoral relationship (1 Corinthians 5:1–2). Paul commanded them to expel the wicked man from the church (1 Corinthians 5:13). The Corinthian believers were taking each other to court (1 Corinthians 6:1–2). Paul taught the Corinthians that it would be better to be taken advantage of than to damage their Christian testimony (1 Corinthians 6:3–8).

Paul gave the Corinthian church instructions on marriage and celibacy (chapter 7), food sacrificed to idols (chapters 8 and 10), Christian freedom (chapter 9), the veiling of women (1 Corinthians 11:1–16), the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:17–34), spiritual gifts (chapters 12–14), and the resurrection (chapter 15). **Paul organized the book of 1 Corinthians by answering questions the Corinthian believers had asked him and by responding to improper conduct and erroneous beliefs they had accepted.**

Connections: In chapter 10 of the Book of 1 Corinthians, Paul uses the story of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness to illustrate to the Corinthian believers the folly of the misuse of freedom and the danger of overconfidence. Paul has just warned the Corinthians about their lack of self-discipline (1 Corinthians 9:24–27). He goes on to describe the Israelites who, despite seeing God’s miracles and care for them—the parting of the Red Sea, the miraculous provision of manna from heaven and water from a rock—they misused their freedom, rebelled against God, and fell into immorality and idolatry. Paul exhorts the Corinthian church to note the example of the Israelites and avoid lusts and sexual immorality (vv. 6–8) and putting Christ to the test and complaining (vv. 9–10). See Numbers 11:4, 34, 25:1–9; Exodus 16:2, 17:2, 7.

Practical Application: Many of the problems and questions the Corinthian church was dealing with are still present in the church today. Churches today still struggle with divisions, with immorality, and with the use of spiritual gifts. The Book of 1 Corinthians very well could have been written to the church today and we would do well to heed Paul's warnings and apply them to ourselves. Despite all the rebukes and corrections, ~~1 Corinthians brings our focus back to where it should be — on Christ. Genuine Christian love is the answer to many problems (chapter 13). A proper understanding of the resurrection of Christ, as revealed in chapter 15, and thereby a proper understanding of our own resurrection, is the cure for what divides and defeats us.~~

Book of 2 Corinthians

Author: 2 Corinthians 1:1 identifies the author of the Book of 2 Corinthians as the apostle Paul, possibly along with Timothy.

Date of Writing: The Book of 2 Corinthians was very likely written approximately A.D. 55–57.

Purpose of Writing: The church in Corinth began in A.D. 52 when Paul visited there on his second missionary journey. It was then that he stayed one and a half years, the first time he was allowed to stay in one place as long as he wished. A record of this visit and the establishment of the church is found in Acts 18:1–18.

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul expresses his relief and joy that the Corinthians had received his “severe” letter (now lost) in a positive manner. That letter addressed issues that were tearing the church apart, primarily the arrival of self-styled (false) apostles (2 Corinthians 11:13) who were assaulting Paul's character, sowing discord among the believers, and teaching false doctrine. They appear to have questioned his veracity (2 Corinthians 1:15–17), his speaking ability (2 Corinthians 10:10; 11:6), and his unwillingness to accept support from the church at Corinth (2 Corinthians 11:7–9; 12:13). There were also some people who had not repented of their licentious behavior (2 Corinthians 12:20–21).

Positively, Paul found the Corinthians had well received his “severe” letter. Paul was overjoyed to learn from Titus that the majority of Corinthians repented of their rebellion against Paul (2 Corinthians 2:12–13; 7:5–9). The apostle encourages them for this in an expression of his genuine love (2 Corinthians 7:3–16). Paul also sought to vindicate his apostleship, as some in the church had likely questioned his authority (2 Corinthians 13:3).

Key Verses: 2 Corinthians 3:5: “Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.”

2 Corinthians 3:18: “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

2 Corinthians 5:21: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

2 Corinthians 10:5: “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

2 Corinthians 13:4: “For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God’s power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God’s power we will live with him to serve you.”

Brief Summary: After greeting the believers in the church at Corinth and explaining why he had not visited them as originally planned (vv. 1:3–2:2), Paul explains the nature of his ministry. Triumph through Christ and sincerity in the sight of God were the hallmarks of his ministry to the churches (2:14–17). He compares the glorious ministry of the righteousness of Christ to the “ministry of condemnation” which is the Law (v. 3:9) and declares his faith in the validity of his ministry in spite of intense persecution (4:8–18). Chapter 5 outlines the basis of the Christian faith—the new nature (v. 17) and the exchange of our sin for the righteousness of Christ (v. 21).

Chapters 6 and 7 find Paul defending himself and his ministry, assuring the Corinthians yet again of his sincere love for them and exhorting them to repentance and holy living. In chapters 8 and 9, Paul exhorts the believers at Corinth to follow the examples of the brothers in Macedonia and extend generosity to the saints in need. He teaches them the principles and rewards of gracious giving.

Paul ends his letter by reiterating his authority among them (chapter 10) and concern for their faithfulness to him in the face of fierce opposition from false apostles. He calls himself a “fool” for having to reluctantly boast of his qualifications and his suffering for Christ (chapter 11). He ends his epistle by describing the vision of heaven he was allowed to experience and the “thorn in the flesh” he was given by God to ensure his humility (chapter 12). The last chapter contains his exhortation to the Corinthians to examine themselves to see whether what they profess is reality, and ends with a benediction of love and peace.

Connections: Throughout his epistles, Paul frequently refers to the Mosaic law, comparing it with the surpassing greatness of the gospel of Jesus Christ and salvation by grace. In 2 Corinthians 3:4–11, Paul contrasts the Old Testament law with the new covenant of grace, referring to the law as that which “kills” while the Spirit gives life. The law is the “ministry of death, written and engraved on stone” (v. 7; Exodus 24:12) because it brings only the knowledge of sin and its condemnation. The glory the law is that it reflects the glory of God, but the ministry of the Spirit is much more glorious than the ministry of the law, because it reflects His mercy, grace and love in providing Christ as the fulfillment of the law.

Practical Application: This letter is the most biographical and least doctrinal of Paul’s epistles. It tells us more about Paul as a person and as a minister than any of the others. That being said, there are a few things we can take from this letter and apply to our lives today. One thing is stewardship, not only of money, but of time as well. The Macedonians not only gave generously, but “they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will” (2 Corinthians 8:5). In the same way, we should dedicate not only all we have to the Lord, but all that we are. He really doesn’t need our money. He is omnipotent! He wants the heart, one that longs to serve and please and love. Stewardship and giving to God is more than just money. Yes, God does want us to tithe part of our income, and He promises to bless us when we give to Him. There is more though. God wants 100%. He wants us to give Him our all. Everything we are. We should spend our lives living to serve our Father. We should not only give to God from our paycheck, but our very lives should be a reflection of Him. We should give ourselves first to the Lord, then to the church and the work of the ministry of Jesus Christ.²

CORINTH (Κόρινθος, *Korinthos*). An influential Graeco-Roman city in the Peloponnesus region where Paul spent 18 months on his second missionary journey. The church at Corinth was the recipient of the First and Second Letter to the Corinthians. Archaeological and literary evidence about Corinth paints a

² Got Questions Ministries. (2002–2013). [*Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered*](#). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

rich picture of the city that Paul knew and provides an indispensable backdrop for understanding his writings to the Corinthians. More than many other New Testament locations, “the various sociological, economic, and religious factors that make up the environment of the city of Corinth have a profound influence on one’s understanding of Paul’s letters to the church there” (Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 1).

Overview

Corinth was the third-largest city of the Roman Empire. During Paul’s stay there during his second missionary journey, he worked as a tentmaker with Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:3), most likely in the city marketplace (Acts 18:3). He may have spent time there on his third missionary journey, as well (Acts 20:2–3).

First-century Corinth was a city rich in both history and wealth due to its geographic advantages. It was a city of cultural diversity, a hub of Roman paganism, and a hotbed for immorality. It also hosted the biannual Isthmian games, which drew throngs from across Greece. As an astute missionary, Paul likely chose Corinth for its importance as a busy center of culture and commerce and its ability to receive large crowds, which would serve as audience to the gospel before returning to their diverse homelands (see Aelius Aristides, *Orations*, 46.24). Thus, Corinth became a city of Christian witness, and the study of Corinth in its historical-cultural setting provides a vital background for New Testament interpretation.

Biblical references to Corinth occur in Acts 18:1; 19:1; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1, 23; and 2 Tim 4:20. Other ancient sources making mention of Corinth are numerous, notably Pausanias and Strabo. Archaeological excavation began shortly after the ancient city of Corinth was destroyed by an earthquake in 1858. Modern Corinth was rebuilt on a new site approximately three miles northeast of its former location, thus providing opportunity for archaeologists to study the original site. This began with the German Archaeological Institute in 1886, but the primary excavations were undertaken by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, beginning in 1896 and continuing to the present (*Corinth, Results of Excavations*; Wiseman, *Corinth and Rome*).

Corinth was renowned across the Mediterranean world for the quality of its bronze, and excavators have discovered some of its production facilities (Wiseman, *Corinth and Rome*, 512). Pliny indicated that Corinthian bronze was valued “before silver and almost even before gold” (Pliny, *Natural History* 34:1) and sought with “a wonderful mania” (Pliny, *Natural History* 34.6). Vitruvius mentioned Corinthian bronze in connection with theatrical acoustics (Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, 5:5.1, 7–8). Paul may have had this in mind in 1 Cor 13:1 (Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth*, 206).

Excavations to the southwest of the central marketplace revealed the villa of Anaploga, a richly tiled home that may have been representative of a house-church setting, such as the one hosted by Gaius in Rom 16:23 (Wiseman, *Corinth and Rome*, 528). Many temples and shrines have been excavated, including the Temple of Asclepius, in which excavators found numerous terra-cotta body parts that were presented to Asclepius in cultic healing rites (Murphy-O’Connor, *The Corinth that Saint Paul Saw*, 156; Blevins, *Introduction*, 317). Paul may have implied a contrast to these as he wrote about the living unity of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:11–31). Excavations have also shown that Corinth and its surrounding area were home to dozens of temples and shrines dedicated to such diverse deities as Apollo, Athena, Aphrodite, Demeter and Kore, Palaimon, and Sisyphus, as well as the Egyptian deities Isis and Sarapis. The Isthmian games focused their attention on a temple dedicated to Poseidon.

History

Excavators have discovered ample evidence of human settlement in Corinth dating to the sixth millennium BC (Salmon, *Wealthy Corinth*, 10). The Bacchiadae Dynasty ruled Corinth from the mid-seventh to mid-ninth century BC, during the Dorian reign of the Peloponnesus from 1000–655 BC (Murphy-O’Connor, *St Paul’s Corinth*, 33). Corinth then underwent a period of fluctuating relations with Athens and Sparta (see Salmon, *Wealthy Corinth*). In the second century BC, it was a leading city of the Achaean League, and in 146 BC it was crushed by Roman forces under the leadership of general Lucius Mummius for its opposition to Rome. The city was sacked, its structures demolished, and its population

sold into slavery. It remained virtually abandoned for just over a century (see Strabo, *Geography*, 8.6.23; 10.5.4; Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 2.1.2; Engels, *Roman Corinth*, 14–16). In 44 BC, the ancient city was resettled by Julius Caesar as a Roman state, initially populated by freedmen, military veterans, and laborers (Thiselton, *Corinthians*, 3).

~~It is possible that Jews were among the earliest inhabitants of the resettled city; they clearly had a strong presence early in its resettlement as evidenced by the discovery of a broken lintel inscribed with “[Syna]goge Hebr[aiion]” (synagogue of the Hebrew; see Murphy-O’Connor, *The Corinth that Paul Saw*, 153). While the Jewish community was obviously established, Gallio’s dismissive response to their complaint against Paul (Acts 18:14–16) may indicate that the Jews, with their strict monotheism, were looked upon with some degree of disdain at the time Paul brought the gospel to the agora.~~

While the precise chronology of Paul’s ministry is difficult to recover, it is likely that Paul’s ministry in Corinth took place sometime between AD 50 and 52. This timeframe is “one of the few certain dates in the New Testament, and the one from which most Pauline dates are ultimately derived” (Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 4n12). The reason for this degree of certainty is that Gallio’s time as proconsul (ἀνθύπατος, *anthypatos*) of Corinth can be fixed with relative precision due to Claudius’ Delphic Letters, which mention Gallio (see Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth*, 161–69). This puts the most likely date of Gallio’s proconsulate at AD 51–52 (Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 29–30). Thus the scene depicted in Acts 16:12–18 in which Paul stood before Gallio at the tribunal or bema (βῆμα, *bēma*) would have happened in the summer of AD 51, and he would probably have left that September, placing his arrival in Corinth in early to mid-AD 50 (Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 18). The First Letter to the Corinthians was written from Ephesus probably around AD 53 to 55 shortly before Pentecost (1 Cor 16:8; see Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 31–32).

Geography

Corinth’s isthmus location made it the “master of two harbors” and gateway to the Peloponnesian lands. The north—south land route came down from Macedonia and branched out from Corinth toward all other areas of Peloponnesus. Its east—west axis linked it to the Aegean Sea on the East and the Adriatic Sea on the West. This position enabled it to levy taxes on both land and sea trade routes, contributing to its wealth (Strabo, *Geography*, 8.6.20).

The wide-walled Lechaem Road led 1.5 miles directly north of the city in a walled corridor one mile wide to the port of Lechaem on the Gulf of Corinth. Lechaem’s harbor offered access to the Ionian Sea, and was among the largest in the Empire (Engels, *Roman Corinth*, 12). To the east lay Cenchreae, with its much smaller harbor, and access to the Saronic Gulf and the Aegean Sea (Murphy-O’Connor, *The Corinth that Paul Saw*, 158). It was in Cenchreae, Acts records, that Phoebe lived and ministered as a deacon or servant of the church (Rom 16:1) and that Paul shaved his head to fulfill a vow before sailing to Ephesus (Acts 18:18–19).

The Corinthian Isthmus was not quite five miles across at its narrowest point, and a paved road called the *diolkos* was constructed by Periander in the sixth century BC (Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth*, 61), enabling the portage of goods and small boats from one shore to the other, thus avoiding the much longer and often dangerous sea voyage (compare Strabo, *Geography*, 8.6.20). **The *diolkos* was as much as 20 feet wide in places and had parallel grooves spaced 5 feet apart for the wheeled *holkos*, a wooden platform for moving goods (see Wiseman, *Corinth and Rome*, 441). The *diolkos* was in use until the ninth century AD. A canal across the isthmus was not completed until 1893.**

As Paul entered Corinth from the northeast, he could not have failed to notice the rugged outline of Acrocorinth dominating the city’s southern backdrop. The path up its 1886 feet flank rose past many shrines and smaller temples, and on its summit was the temple of Aphrodite. At the foot of the mountain to the north lay Corinth. The original city walls, destroyed in 146 BC, were never repaired. Their rubble served as a quarry for the settlers of 44 BC.

The city had water supplies sufficient for numerous baths and fountains (Pausanias, *Description of Greece, Description*, 2.3.5; see also Wiseman, *Corinth and Rome*, 510–12). One of the primary water sources was the spring fed Fountain of Peirene, which flowed at a rate of over 600 cubic feet per hour, providing by itself water sufficient for the entire city (Engels, *Roman Corinth*, 10). Additionally, the coastal plain just north of the city was “among the most productive regions of Roman Greece,” despite low precipitation (Salmon, *Wealthy Corinth*, 7). Excavations there uncovered a wine press and a tank for olive oil, indicating that the lack of rainfall did not prevent agricultural prosperity (Engels, *Roman Corinth*, 11). **The city proper was unusually spacious, offering ample room for trade, housing, entertainment, temples, and public baths. It also encompassed a theater that could seat 14,000,** to which Paul may have alluded in 1 Cor 4:9 when he wrote about being a spectacle to the world (Murphy-O’Connor, *The Corinth that Paul Saw*, 155).

Culture

Corinth’s population has been variously estimated anywhere from 150,000 to over 300,000, “plus 460,000 slaves” (McRay, *Corinth*, 228). The city was recolonized primarily “by those belonging to the freedmen class” who proceeded to make their initial living by robbing ancient graves and selling their finds (see Strabo, *Geography*, 8.6.23c). The resettlement provided a fresh beginning in a land rich with potential. Murphy-O’Connor **likened the great population influx to San Francisco in the gold rush era** (Murphy-O’Connor, *The Corinth that Paul Saw*, 147). By the time Paul arrived, Corinth had a reputation for its banking industry and was known as a wealthy region (Plutarch, *De Vitando*, 831a). Its inhabitants represented every tier of society—Alciphron mentions the “nauseating behavior of the rich and the misery of the poor” (Alciphron, *Letters*, 3:60). Paul addressed this disparity in 1 Cor 11:17–34. He then reminds the church of the importance of generosity, and compares their apparent procrastination to the eager liberality of the relatively impoverished Macedonian Churches (1 Cor 16:1–2; 2 Cor 6:10; 8:1–2, 9; 9:9).

The resettled city was culturally Roman and was “established to foster the majesty of Roman culture, religion, and values” (Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 3). As such, it was a cultic center for the worship of Roman deities. Paul addressed the resulting social and ethical ramifications of eating meat in a city which had little meat available other than what came from animals slaughtered in cultic sacrifice (1 Cor 8:1–13).

Corinth had also developed a reputation for sexual license—a reputation that was fueled primarily by Athenian propaganda (Murphy-O’Connor, *The Corinth that Paul Saw*, 152, 56). Strabo’s oft-cited report that Corinth was home to 1,000 cult prostitutes is unrealistic, and has been thoroughly disproven (Strabo, *Geography*, 8.6.20c; Murphy-O’Connor, *The Corinth that Paul Saw*, 152; compare Conzelmann, *Korinth und die Madchen*). Nevertheless, sexual immorality was at least as much of a problem in Corinth as it was in any other part of the Mediterranean as indicated by ancient sources and Paul’s numerous references to sexual immorality, prostitution, and incest (1 Cor 5:1, 9, 11; 6:9, 13, 15–16, 18; 7:2; 10:8; 2 Cor 12:21).

Corinth was host to the biannual Isthmian Games. One of the city’s important civic positions, the superintendent of the games, was named primarily for that limited aspect of the role’s broader responsibilities (Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 11). In Paul’s day, the crown of victory was made of plant material, a detail that corresponds with the “perishable crown” Paul mentions in 1 Cor 9:25.

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Week 1 – 1 Corinthians

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CORINTHIANS (Κορίνθιος, *Korinthios*). The residents of Corinth, a city in Greece and a descriptor also used for the audience of Paul's letters to the Corinthians (Acts 18:8; 2 Cor 6:11).

CORINTHIANS, FIRST LETTER TO THE One of the letters that Paul wrote to the church at Corinth. Addresses many ethical problems, including: division and unity, the role of Christian workers, church discipline, incest, civil litigation, sexual immorality, divorce and remarriage, weak and strong Christians, and spiritual gifts. First Corinthians integrates doctrinal concerns—like the cross of Christ, the resurrection, and the nature of the Church—with practical issues.

Outline of 1 Corinthians

The book can be outlined in the following manner:

- 1:1–9—Paul's greeting
 - 1:1–3—Salutation
 - 1:4–9—Thanksgiving
- 1:10–4:21—Corinthian division and the cross of Christ
 - 1:10–17—Party factions and the cross
 - 1:18–25—Condemning false wisdom
 - 1:26–31—Reminder of true calling
 - 2:1–5—True preaching of the cross
 - 2:6–16—Paul's wisdom in a mystery
 - 2:6–10—What human senses cannot grasp
 - 2:12–16—The mind and Spirit of Christ
 - 3:1–4—Paul's rebuke for people of the flesh
 - 3:5–17—The role of the Christian servant in God's work
 - 3:6–9—Laborer in God's field
 - 3:10–15—Builder in God's building
 - 3:16–17—Servant in God's temple
 - 3:18–23—Summary: No more boasting in human leaders
 - 4:1–6—True attitudes for the Christian servant
 - 4:7–15—The Corinthians' pride versus Paul's conduct in the cross
 - 4:16–21—Imitate Paul, their father in the faith
- 5:1–6:20—Discipline your bodies properly
 - 5:1–6:20—Purify yourselves from immorality
 - 5:1–13—Discipline the man with the incestuous relationship
 - 6:1–11—Do not take your brothers to court
 - 6:12–20—Flee immorality
 - 7:1–40—Marriage and celibacy
 - 7:1–5—Spouses wholly devoted to each other
 - 7:6–16—Do not divorce
 - 7:17–38—Remain in your calling
 - 7:39–40—Remarriage guidelines
- 8:1–14:40—Idolatry and true worship
 - 8:1–11:1—Weak and Strong brothers
 - 8:1–13—Take care of the weak
 - 9:1–27—Paul as the exemplary strong brother
 - 9:1–14—Workers are worthy of their wages
 - 9:15–27—Paul willingly renounces these rights
 - 10:1–11:1—Warning to the strong
 - 10:1–13—From Israel's history
 - 10:14–11:1—Flee idolatry
 - 11:1–16—Head coverings in worship

- 11:17–34—Unity in taking the Lord’s Supper
- 12:1–14:34—Spiritual gifts
- 12:1–7—Unity and diversity
- 12:11–21—Diversity amongst the gifts like the body
- 12:22–25—Importance of least visible gifts
- 12:27–31—Everyone does not have every gift
- 13:1–13—Use of gifts in love
- 14:1–28—Gift of Tongues
- 14:29–40—Gift of Prophecy
- 15:1–58—The resurrection and consummation
 - 15:1–11—Things of first importance
 - 15:12–19—Consequences of denying the resurrection
 - 15:20–28—Significance of the resurrection
 - 15:29–34—Exhortations in light of the resurrection
 - 15:35–49—Answers to objections
 - 15:50–57—The resurrection secures victory
 - 15:58—Be steadfast
- 16:1–24—Letter conclusion
 - 16:1–4—Collection for church in Jerusalem
 - 16:5–9—Travel plans
 - 16:10–20—Coworkers’ news
 - 16:21–24—Farewell

Graeco-Roman Corinth

The city of Corinth is located in modern day Greece on the northeast corner of the Peloponnesian Peninsula. It is about 90 kilometers (48 miles) west of Athens. Its location on the narrow isthmus between the Peloponnesian Peninsula and mainland Greece made it a great place for commerce. Corinth controlled the land route between Italy and Asia and also between two ports: Lechaemum just to the north and Cenchræa to the east.

Near Corinth was a road called the *diolkos*. This road was made in the sixth century BC with large paving stones and was 6 kilometers long (3.7 miles), running from the Saronic Gulf in the east to the Gulf of Corinth in the west. Due to the dangers of sailing around the Peloponnesian Peninsula, ships would unload at Corinth, then haul the cargo in carts along this road to the other side. Many ships used the *diolkos*, and the nearby city of Corinth became a thriving metropolis from charging tariffs on cargo. In Paul’s day, there may have been as many as 800,000 inhabitants in Corinth. Ships today use the Corinth canal, which was dug in the 19th century to take the place of the ancient road.

The Corinth that Paul knew was not only wealthy but thoroughly influenced by Graeco-Roman culture. While the history of the city can be dated to the eighth century BC and prospered as a Greek-city state, Rome destroyed it in 146 BC. Julius Caesar then established Corinth as a Roman colony in 44 BC. He also settled his veteran Roman soldiers and their families in the city. Entrepreneurs, traders, freedmen, and slaves swelled the population. Though located in Greece, Corinth was also thoroughly Roman.

Corinth also contained a significant Jewish community. Archaeologists have found a lintel inscribed with the words “Synagogue of the Hebrews” (Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth*, 79). The city of Corinth has also been listed as one of the cities of the Jewish Diaspora (Philo, *On the Embassy to Gaius*, 281–82) (Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 23).

In ancient Corinth, worldly values like honor, prestige, and self-promotion were desired. Traveling bands of speakers called Sophists made their way through Corinth, persuading followers with their rhetoric. The city contained many wealthy benefactors who used their money to advance their reputation. These influences can be seen in 1 Corinthians (Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth*; Litfin, *St. Paul’s Theology of Proclamation*; Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*).

Ancient Corinthians worshiped a wide range of deities. There was a large temple dedicated to Apollo, the sun god. Corinthians would seek healing from Asclepius, the god of healing and medicine. There were also temples to Roman imperial personalities, such as a temple to Octavia, the sister of the Roman emperor Augustus. People also worshiped Dionysius, Neptune, Pan, Artemis, Zeus, Athena, Poseidon, and Aphrodite.

The Graeco-Roman society in Corinth valued status and power. Wealth was a key to social standing, and many Corinthians worshiped it like a god. The citizens competed for honor, and each promoted his own accomplishments and possessions in order to win praise from others (*Savage, Power through Weakness*, 19–53).

Paul’s History with the Corinthians until the Writing of 1 Corinthians

Paul first visited Corinth in AD 49 during his second missionary journey. He lived with Aquila and Priscilla and worked with them as tentmakers (Acts 18:1–18). The first part of Paul’s ministry in Corinth was to those who were Jewish—but also to Gentiles who feared God. He was opposed by the Jews in the synagogue and then expelled. However, Titius Justus and Crispus—the synagogue ruler—believed the message (Acts 18:8). The first church meeting may also have met in Titius Justus’ house; he was also known as Gaius (1 Cor 1:14).

The second phase of Paul’s ministry in Corinth was directed to the Gentiles. The Lord spoke to him in a vision and encouraged him to continue preaching in Corinth. He stayed about 18 months in the city. As a result of his efforts, Paul was the founder of the church in Corinth (1 Cor 4:14–15). Within that church were notable people mentioned within the Bible elsewhere, such as Chloe, Erastus, Tertius, and Stephanas. In AD 51, after the church was founded, Paul left for Ephesus.

After Paul left Corinth, he began writing letters to the church that he founded there. The first letter that he wrote is lost, but we see evidence of it from 1 Cor 5:9–13. That letter chided the Corinthians for their sexually immoral behavior and forbade them from associating with immoral believers who refused to repent.

After he wrote this letter, Paul received a report from Chloe’s household at Corinth and learned that there was quarreling and factions in the church (1 Cor 1:11). At about the same time, it seems that Paul also received a letter from the Corinthians asking for him to give answers concerning marriage and divorce, weak and strong brothers, spiritual gifts, and collections. As a result of this report and these questions, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in AD 55 while in Ephesus.

The Message of 1 Corinthians

(This section is adapted from Brown and Twist, *Lexham Bible Guide: 1 Corinthians*, 2013.)

First Corinthians represents Paul’s response to the report from Chloe’s household and the letter from the Corinthian church (1:11; 7:1). Yet Paul does not write to the Corinthians as an unknown authority figure, but rather as the apostle who founded the church and whose apostolic leadership had been challenged by rival leaders. Paul’s main goal in the letter is to teach the Corinthians to think according to true wisdom—which comes only from the Spirit of God—so that they can live holy lives until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ (1:4–8).

Paul communicates this overarching message throughout two main sections of the letter. In the first part of the letter he addresses problems mentioned by Chloe’s household (1:10–6:20). In particular, Paul writes about divisions within the Corinthian church and reminds them of their status as the holy temple of God’s Spirit (3:16–17). He also condemns the church’s deplorable tolerance of sexual immorality (5:1–11) and lawsuits between believers that further fragmented the community (6:1–11). In the second part of the letter, Paul responds to questions raised by the Corinthian believers (7:1–15:58). These questions touch on various issues concerning singleness, marriage, sexual relationships (7:1–40); food sacrificed to idols and challenges to Paul’s apostleship (8:1–11:1); the importance of orderliness and intelligibility in worship including the proper use of spiritual gifts (11:2–14:40); and questions about the resurrection of the dead (15:1–58).

Unity of 1 Corinthians

Most scholars view the letter of 1 Corinthians as a unified work. Some, however, view the letter as partitioned for various reasons. One of these is the length of 1 Corinthians; at 16 chapters, it is

significantly longer than most of Paul's other letters. It is also lengthier than many other letters written at that time.

Helpful in this matter is the possession of the entire letter in the Papyrus Chester Beatty (P46). This papyrus is dated to AD 200—approximately 150 years after Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. This is significantly earlier than any full manuscripts that we have on the canonical Gospels. Also significant is that in this manuscript, only 1 Cor 9:3; 14:15; and 15:16 are missing.

While the majority of scholars currently favor 1 Corinthians being viewed as a unity, earlier in the 1900s several scholars proposed a variety of partition theories. These individuals offered various opinions on the points of division within 1 Corinthians. The main problematic issues include:

- supposed tensions between 1:10–20 and 11:18–19;
- supposed tensions within 1 Cor 8–10;
- supposed differing sources of information (Schrage, *Brief*).

J. Weiss viewed 1 Corinthians as a composite of two letters but later changed his mind, arguing that the letter was composed of three separate letters (Weiss, *Earliest Christianity*). Weiss' revised theory sees one letter as being 10:1–23; 6:12–20; 10:23–30; and 11:2–4. A second letter would be 7–8; 9:1–23; 12–16. A third letter would include 1:1–6:11. W. Schmithals proposes nine letters that then formed 1 Corinthians. These divisions differed significantly from Weiss' proposal. G. Sellin viewed the letter as composed of three letters; Khiok-kng Yeo, four separate documents; and R. Jewett, six separate letters (Yeo, *Rhetorical*).

Of the partition theories, M. C. de Boer provides the most plausible alternative. He postulates that Paul stopped writing and then resumed twice following the visit of Chloe's people. By de Boer's thinking, Paul addressed the envy and jealousy at Corinth in 1 Cor 1–4. Then Stephanas arrived with the Corinthians' letter, which led to Paul's responses in chapters 7, 8, and 12 with the greetings in chapter 16. Chapters 5–6 were then initiated from conversations that were held by the Stephanas delegation (de Boer, "Composition").

Several aspects of these theories are striking. Weiss and Schmithals have changed their minds on the identity of the various portions that make up 1 Corinthians, indicating uncertainty on their parts. Also, these scholars cannot come to agreement as to the various portions that make up the letter. When compared with recent studies that examine thematic coherence within 1 Corinthians, it is more likely that the letter is a unified whole. There are many scholars who advocate for the integrity of 1 Corinthians, including G. Fee, J. C. Hurd, H. Merklein, J. Murphy-O'Connor, F. Lang, R. F. Collins, W. Schrage, and M. Mitchell.

Mitchell's study is significant on this matter. In her work *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, Mitchell depicts 1 Corinthians as a single letter that is united by the theme of promoting unity within a divided Corinthian church. Against the background of Greek deliberative rhetoric, she examines 1 Corinthians in relation to Graeco-Roman deliberative rhetoric, using 1:10 as the thesis statement in the epistle. In her view, 1:11–17 contains the facts of disunity at Corinth. The majority of the remaining text provides arguments for unity. In 1 Corinthians 1:18–4:20, she finds Paul censuring Corinthian factionalism. The next section, 5:1–11:1, encourages the unity of the Corinthian community against outside defilement. The following section, 11:2–14:40, details manifestations of Corinthian disunity when coming together. The last section points to the resurrection as a common rallying point for unity (15:1–58). Her overall analysis concludes decidedly on the epistle's overall unity.

Several recent commentaries on 1 Corinthians identify various thematic ideas that would unite the entire letter:

- Thiselton's early work identified the problem in Corinth as an over-realized eschatology and a hyper spirituality (Thiselton, "Eschatology"). He later revised this, suggesting instead that the Corinthians

misunderstood grace and the proclamation of the cross and resurrection within a secular Graeco-Roman society (Thiselton, *Corinthians*).

- Dale Martin and A. R. Brown also see the letter as Paul's gospel confronting the secularity of Graeco-Roman society. For them, 1 Corinthians is a reproclamation of the different values of the cross and resurrection. The virtues of love and respect for the less esteemed are important counters in a society focused on status and wealth (Martin, *Body*; Brown, *Cross*).
- Ciampa and Rosner understand Paul as addressing immorality and idolatry. Rather than seeing the letter partitioned, they see it organized around encouragements to purity and exhortations against two vices—immorality and idolatry.

These recent studies and commentaries all favor seeing 1 Corinthians as one letter rather than separate ones that were sewn together. Current scholarship clearly favors viewing 1 Corinthians as a unity.

Major Interpretive Issues within the Letter

Paul mentions many topics in his letter—human wisdom, food sacrificed to idols, head coverings, and others—but gives little explanation. His readers would have understood these matters, but 2,000 years later, they are not as clear. There are many conflicting interpretations of this letter. It is widely accepted that Paul was the author and that he wrote the letter from Ephesus between AD 55–56. There is also widespread agreement that it was accepted into the canon quite early. The two contested points concern the nature of Paul's opposition at Corinth and the unity of the letter.

Paul's Opposition at Corinth at the Time of Writing 1 Corinthians

Due to the varied history of the Corinthian letters, it is necessary to be clear about the opponents within each letter (see extended history of Paul and the Corinthians in "Second Letter to the Corinthians"). Within 1 Corinthians, the opposition is internal (compare 1 Cor 4:18; 15:12). There is no mention of specific opponents—unlike 2 Corinthians, in which Paul addresses certain men who had slipped into the community (2 Cor 3:1; 11:13–15).

Some believe that the problem is false teaching within the Corinthian church (Goulder, *Paul*; Baur, *Paul*). They see the mention of party factions in 1 Cor 1:12 and 3:22 as showing that different teachings from Peter and Paul are the cause of the conflict. However, this assertion does not make sense of the rest of the letter, as Peter is not mentioned.

Others have proposed different false teachings within the Corinthian community; Schmithals and Winter have proposed Gnosticism as the source. However, this is unlikely because Gnosticism originated in the second century (Schmithals, *Gnosticism*; Winter, *Pneumatiker*, Wilckens, *Weisheit*). Some have assumed that the false teaching originated from charismatics or from a misunderstanding of the resurrection (Baumann, *Mitte und Norm*; Käsemann, *Jesus*). Although it is likely that the Corinthians misunderstood many of these issues, none of them seems to be the prime element that Paul refutes throughout 1 Corinthians.

J.C. Hurd and J. Drane have claimed that Paul is correcting his own previous teaching (Hurd, *Origin*; Drane, *Paul*). However, this is unlikely—Paul does not draw attention in 1 Corinthians to any previous errors of his that needed fixing. Others have assumed that those with Jewish viewpoints are the ones causing difficulties (Davis, *Wisdom and Spirit*; Pearson, *Terminology*; Horsley, "Wisdom of Words"). However, Paul does not mention Jewish opposition (2 Cor 11:13–15). Furthermore, Paul would not address concerns about idolatry if his opposition had only been encouraging a more "Jewish" outlook (compare 1 Cor 10).

Others have found the source of Paul's opposition to be a misunderstanding of eschatology within the Corinthian church. In 1978, Anthony Thiselton proposed that the Corinthians had an over-realized eschatology (Thiselton, "Realized Eschatology"). In other words, they were living as if the end of time had already come. This triumphalism of the Christians in Corinth distorted their view of ethics and

worship. They were believing that the kingdom of God had come and thus were acting rich, powerful, and wise (1 Cor 4:8–10) (Barrett, *First Corinthians*).

Another suggestion is that the source of the opposition was a personal conflict between Paul and the Corinthians. Gordon Fee sees the opposition between Paul and the Corinthians as evident from 1 Cor 4 and 9, in which Paul defends his apostolic ministry. His demands that the Corinthians submit to his apostolic authority supports this viewpoint further (14:37–38; Fee, *First Corinthians*, 5ff). However, the Corinthians did seek Paul’s opinion on several matters, and he feels that he can ask the Corinthians to contribute to the collection for saints in Jerusalem (16:1–4). Thus, while certain passages exhibit conflict with Paul, this is not the main opponent in his writing of 1 Corinthians.

A better proposal for the source of the opposition comes from those who have read the letter in relation to the Graeco-Roman background of 1 Corinthians, including Bruce Winter, Duane Litfin, and Stephen Pogoloff. They have drawn connections with the Sophistic movement that was active in cities like Corinth. The Sophists were traveling speakers who would use rhetoric to draw people away to follow their wisdom. They were divisive—they made disciples, boasted of their own abilities, and demanded respect. If they had any influence on the church at Corinth, this probably would have led to division amongst the Christian community (Winter, *Paul and Philo*; Litfin, *St. Paul’s Theology*; Pogoloff, *Logos*). In this case, it would make sense for Paul to preach the cross rather than human wisdom (compare 1 Cor 1:17–2:5).

Further connections to first-century Graeco-Roman culture infiltrating the Corinthian church have been noticed. Clarke sees that secular leadership practice has been evident within the Corinthian community from his reading of 1 Cor 1–6 (Clarke, *Secular*). Chow sees Graeco-Roman patronage significantly influencing the life of the church. Basing his view that there were at least a few influential people within the Corinthian church on 1:26, he finds the problems at Corinth were due to a network of patrons within the church. These used their status or riches to exercise influence over a group who depended on them for some favors (Chow, *Patronage*, 87–93). In *Enmity in Corinth*, Peter Marshall finds Graeco-Roman social conventions throughout Paul’s address to the Corinthians. Ben Witherington has also examined 1 Corinthians to find many other Graeco-Roman ideas infiltrating the community at Corinth (Witherington, *Conflict*).

Another likely solution is that worldly Graeco-Roman values were the source of opposition. This solution has led Thiselton to modify his view on over-realized eschatology and admit secular influence within the Corinthian church (Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 40). This viewpoint is reflected in major commentaries on the letter—even those that are not directly concerned with examining the Graeco-Roman background (compare Ciampa, *First Corinthians*).

Theological Unity of the Letter

A second important issue for understanding 1 Corinthians is the letter’s unity. Those who propose a unified letter describe a variety of unifying themes.

Rhetorical studies on 1 Corinthians effectively argue that the letter was originally a single whole. These studies affirm that Paul’s appeal for unity in 1:10 not only influences the immediate chapters, but can be seen to extend throughout the entire letter. For example, Paul shows concern for unity in chapter 1, but also in his statements on church discipline in chapter 5; on civil litigation in chapter 6; on weak and strong brothers in chapters 8–10; on the Lord’s Supper in chapter 10; and on the proper use of spiritual gifts in chapters 12–14. This viewpoint agrees with the understanding of the earliest interpreters of the letter—the writer of *First Clement* and Ignatius of Antioch. Several scholars see 1 Corinthians as an example of deliberative rhetoric—an ancient Greek means of arguing that addressed both the heart and the intellect and compelled an audience to come to a decision. These scholars have seen the influence of this rhetoric in 1 Corinthians and view the entire letter as an appeal for unity (Mitchell, *Rhetoric*; Wuellner, “Greek”; Kennedy, *Interpretation*).

Others see the theological themes of 1 Corinthians as proof of its original unity. Instead of being a series of unconnected ethical instructions, 1 Corinthians is a letter in which the role of the cross and

resurrection are everywhere at the center. Paul appeals to the death of Jesus in order to promote a community ethic consistent with the values shown by His death (Pickett, *Cross*). The cross plays a clear role in Paul's instruction for unity in chapter 1, Christian stewardship in chapter 4, community exclusion in chapter 5, civil litigation in chapter 6, weak and strong brothers in chapters 8–10, and the Lord's Supper in chapter 11 (Williams, "Living"). First Corinthians is about the reproclamation of a different value set based on grace, the cross, and the resurrection (Brown, *Cross*; compare Martin, *Body*). W. Schrage sees Paul's proclamation of the cross as "ground and criterion of church and apostle" (Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 1:165).

Another newer approach to proving the letter's original unity is that of Ciampa and Rosner. Rather than seeing the letter partitioned or organized around the theme of unity or the reproclamation of the cross and resurrection, they see the composition of the letter organized around purity and vices: immorality and idolatry. These are the two main Gentile vices, and they consume the majority of the letter. Paul argues against immorality in chapters 5–6. In chapter 7, he promotes sexual purity through the proper use of the body in both marriage and celibacy. In chapters 8–10—in the context of weak and strong brothers and food offered to idols—Paul encourages the Corinthians to flee idolatry (compare 6:18; 10:14). He then discusses how proper traditions of worship and use of spiritual gifts in love foster right worship of God (1 Cor 11; 12–14; Ciampa, *Corinthians*).

Ciampa and Rosner also discuss the role of the Old Testament in 1 Corinthians. There are 18 citations from or allusions to Old Testament material found within the letter. Many of these come from the books of Deuteronomy and Isaiah. Other less explicit references to Scripture have also been noted within the book, and thus, a greater amount of Jewish influence may be seen than previously acknowledged (compare Hays, *Echoes and Corinthians*; Rosner, *Paul*; Kuck, *Judgment*, Tomson, *Paul*; Williams, *Wisdom*). Further attempts to show the letter's unity will likely involve an examination of the influence of the letter's Graeco-Roman setting, the Jewish Scripture Paul quotes, and the role of the cross of Christ.

Theology of 1 Corinthians

First Corinthians is filled with many ethical injunctions. While Paul could have simply declared "do this" or "do not do this," appealed to community dynamics to resolve issues, or forcefully used his own authority, he instead employed theological arguments to convince his audience. Theological ideas are found multiple places throughout the letter; three of the most important are:

1. the cross;
2. the Christian recapitulation of Old Testament theology;
3. the lordship of Christ.

The Cross

The role of the cross of Christ is the most significant theological idea within 1 Corinthians, just as the cross is pivotal to understanding much of the ethics of the New Testament (Hays, *Moral Vision*). Paul appealed to the death of Jesus in order to promote a community ethos and ethic consistent with the ideals and values it symbolized (R. Pickett, *Cross*; Williams, "Living"). As Paul begins to address party strife and division at Corinth, he ties these ideas directly to the cross in 1 Cor 1:17. Surprisingly, the gospel message of the cross is the first theological item he uses to encourage unity—he could have simply urged the Corinthians to be united without referring to Jesus' death at all.

The cross is found throughout Paul's arguments for unity. In 1 Cor 1:26–31, Paul shows how all of the Corinthians—regardless of their wisdom, power, and wealth—are saved by the message of the cross and can boast only in it. Thus, the cross draws the divided Corinthians' attention to the one calling that they share in Christ (1:24, 26). The message of the cross cuts across divisions based on worldly claims of wisdom, power, and wealth and treats everyone the same in saving them.

In 1 Cor 2:1–5, when Paul speaks about his manner of preaching, the cross functions as a unifying factor. It helps to unify the Corinthians by causing them to focus on the one message that Paul, their

founding father, preached (compare 2:1–5; 4:14–15). He claims only to know Christ crucified and preach the cross. In these ways, Paul uses the cross to create unity amid a divided situation.

While the cross is not explicit in 1 Cor 4 (as it is in 1 Cor 1), it exerts influence there as well (see Fee, *Corinthians*; Fitzgerald, *Vessel*; Marxsen, *Foundations*; Schrage, “Leid”). As Paul describes his apostleship, he declares himself to be weak, in disrepute, reviled, and persecuted. He declares that he has “the sentence of death” and perceives himself to be a “spectacle to the world” and the “scum of the earth” (4:10–13). All these are aspects of the cross, and the effect of these descriptions is to connect Paul’s leadership directly with the cross—the message that he preached (1:17; 2:1–5). While other leaders in Corinth were fascinated with human wisdom, riches, power, and honor, Paul’s leadership style has a theological basis in his theology of the cross.

Paul will also apply the cross to the problem of exclusion in 1 Cor 5. In this chapter, Paul rebukes the Corinthians because they have done nothing about a man in their midst who was caught in incest. In the midst of this argument, Paul writes, “Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (5:7 NIV). As in previous situations, the cross works as theological support in a section that could have been argued solely sociologically.

Cross-related ideas are also found within Paul’s next ethical injunction in 1 Cor 6. In the midst of arguing against civil litigation between Christian brothers, Paul states in 6:7, “The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?” (NIV) These questions recall Paul’s example of disregarding himself in 4:11–13—a passage that concerned Christian leadership in light of the cross (Rosner, *Paul*). In this case of civil litigation, Christ’s death functions as the basis for self-sacrifice. Rather than choosing the ways of Graeco-Roman secular society and flaunting their status or social privilege, the Corinthians should look to Christ crucified as a model for sacrificing their rights for one another.

In 1 Corinthians 10:32–11:1, Paul writes, “Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (NIV). These are the final verses from Paul’s discussion about weak and strong brothers. Throughout much of 1 Corinthians, Paul has been advocating for the protection of the weak brothers. As he concludes this three-chapter section, he refers again to the cross. This passage contains the matter of self-sacrifice—a theme linked with the cross earlier. He also repeats the imitation idea that was found in chapter 4, a section with influence from the cross. As imitation is now clearly linked with Christ, who went to the cross, it thus recalls the theological foundation of the cross within 1 Corinthians.

A direct reference to the cross appears in 11:17–34, where Paul passes along a tradition that he received from the Lord regarding the Lord’s Supper—the body and blood of Christ. The cross can also be seen here in that Paul recognizes that the tradition he is delivering to the Corinthians is from the night that the Lord was betrayed before His crucifixion (11:23). Furthermore, according to Paul, the remembrance of this tradition results in the Corinthians proclaiming Christ’s death on the cross until He comes again (11:26). This section then encourages self-sacrifice by waiting for others before eating together.

Sacrificial love that is found within 1 Cor 13 also carries with it cross-related ideas. This chapter, which is found between discussions on spiritual gifts, provides a model for how these gifts are to be practiced (Ciampa, *First Corinthians*). Rather than using a gift like tongues or prophecy for one’s own benefit, Paul encourages the Corinthians to forego their rights (see especially 13:4–7). His words echo ideas about the cross that have been found prominently within other passages in 1 Corinthians.

One final appearance of the cross indicates its theological importance. At the end of 1 Corinthians, following many chapters of correction, Paul mentions the things of first importance. In 1 Corinthians 15:3–5 he writes, “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.” Of first importance is the cross of Christ. Thus, it makes sense that this is of influence within the rest of 1 Corinthians.

Old Testament Ideas

First Corinthians draws a significant amount of its theology from the Old Testament Scriptures. There are 18 quotations from or allusions to the Old Testament within 1 Corinthians that have been identified in major studies on Paul's use of Scripture (Koch, *Schrift*; Stanley, *Paul*). These come from books including Genesis, Job, Psalms, Jeremiah, and Hosea (Williams, *Sources*). Of particular interest are the large number of references from Deuteronomy and Isaiah.

Deuteronomy. Within the Pentateuch, the book of Deuteronomy explains the response to God's calling His people out of bondage in Egypt. The book calls God's people to worship Him at a particular place and in a particular way (Deut 12; 14:23–24; 16:1–11). God's people are to be careful especially to avoid idolatry (6:14–15; 12:1–6) and immorality (22:13–30; 23:2, 17–18; 31:16). As a result, Moses appoints judges (1), urges the people to heed his instruction (particularly the Ten Commandments; 6:1–13), to celebrate the Passover (Deut 16), and to inaugurate the covenant (Deut 29).

Deuteronomy as a whole has a sense of warning to it—God's people are in danger of failing. In Deuteronomy 2, God's people are compared with the pagan nations. Deuteronomy 31:16–18 already anticipates the Israelites' failure to keep the covenant. Throughout the book, there are repeated appeals to remember, pay attention, and heed Moses' words (5:1; 6:1–14; 7:12–15). Other sections also anticipate Israel's inability to keep God's laws (12:28–32; 13:18; 31:16–18; 32:19–26). There is, however, a sense of promise within Deuteronomy on the condition that God's people respond obediently (11:13–15, 22–25; 15:5–6; 28:1–14).

The book of 1 Corinthians continues many of the ethical principles that Deuteronomy encouraged. For example, Paul promotes the appointing of judges (1 Cor 6:1–6) and gives exhortations for the keeping of the Passover meal (5:7; 10:16–21; 11:23–26). Particularly striking is the emphasis on fleeing immorality and idolatry (6:18; 10:14). These are the only two vices discussed in 1 Corinthians that are “to be fled.” Other sections within 1 Corinthians urge the Corinthians to clean out impure elements amongst them—such as immorality (1 Cor 5). Sexual purity is the concern of several other sections of 1 Corinthians (6:16–19; 7:1–40).

Idolatry is the focus of 1 Cor 8–10. Paul begins his discussion in 8:7–13 with warnings about food sacrificed to idols. The subtleties of idolatry are the concern of 10:12–33. Instead of repeating the failures of God's people from the time of the Pentateuch, the Corinthians are to “do all to the glory of God” (10:31). In 1 Corinthians 11–14, to prevent the Corinthians from falling into idolatrous practices, Paul promotes the proper worship of God (Ciampa, *First Corinthians*).

Isaiah. As with the book of Deuteronomy, the book of Isaiah contributes significant influence to 1 Corinthians. The opening two chapters in 1 Corinthians contain several references to Isaiah, providing an explanation of the two types of salvation-wisdom that Paul opposes and endorses (Williams, *Wisdom*).

The first type of salvation-wisdom—one that Paul opposes (1 Cor 1)—is human wisdom that derives from the nations of this world and their rulers (1 Cor 1:23; 2:6). Paul quotes Isaiah 29:14 in 1 Corinthians 1:19 to argue that human wisdom is the opposite of the plan of God and will be brought to nothing. The larger passage of Isaiah 29 depicts those who follow human wisdom as following the path to destruction. By referring to human wisdom with reference to Isaiah, Paul explains why he opposes mixing the message of the cross with human wisdom: Following human wisdom leads to destruction, for it rejects the cross of Christ.

The second type of salvation-wisdom in 1 Corinthians is true wisdom, which triumphs and which comes from God (1 Cor 2). In 1 Corinthians 2:9, Paul refers to Isa 64:3 in conjunction with Isa 65:17. In both Isaiah's original context and Paul's use of the quotation, God's plan will be a dramatic one that surprises those with a worldly mindset. The context of Isa 64:3 concerns the hidden nature of God's revelation among people. This overlaps with Paul's thoughts in 1 Cor 2:7–8, where he describes a secret and hidden wisdom that none of the rulers of this age understood. That wisdom is hidden from some, but it is revealed to those whom the Lord calls to Him. The context of Isa 65:17 suggests a similar idea, as the

redeemed are able to see and appreciate God’s revelation with the new creation of the heavens and the earth.

Isaiah’s influence continues into Paul’s discussion about the mind in 1 Cor 2, where he refers to Isa 40:13. Here Paul speaks of the mind that is able to understand the ways of the Lord within history. Those without the Spirit cannot comprehend it, but those to whom the Spirit is given are able to understand (1 Cor 2:12–16). When read in the context of Isa 40:13, the understanding mind is found in a series of questions that indicate that God alone is able to reveal His mind and His ways (Isa 40:12, 14). Seen in context of Isaiah, the “mind” refers to the salvation plan of God, which is also an overlap with the wise plan of God in 1 Cor 2.

Isaiah’s theological influence regarding wisdom can also be seen in 1 Cor 14, where Paul quotes Isa 28:11–12 in his discussion concerning tongues. In this section, Paul challenges the Corinthians about using indiscernible tongues during worship. Rather than simply saying not to use them, he refers to Isa 28, in which the inability to understand language referred to being captured by God’s opponents.

When Paul concludes his discussion in 1 Corinthians 15 regarding the resurrection, he also refers directly to Isaiah. Paul quotes from Isa 22:13 in 1 Cor 15:32 when he writes, “If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’ ” The main ideas from the context of Isaiah fit with a world without a resurrection. Isaiah 22 concerns a siege that is due to occur upon the people of Jerusalem. Rather than repenting, they decide to “party like there is no tomorrow” since there is no hope (Hays, *Corinthians*). This context of Isa 22 fits the hopeless existence without a resurrection that Paul is describing in 1 Cor 15. Hopelessness leads to indulgence.

One final explicit reference to Isaiah is found within the section that speaks of the believer’s resurrection body in 1 Cor 15. Paul quotes from Isa 25:8 when he states, “When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory’ ” (1 Cor 15:54 NIV). In this section there is a sense of victory, thanksgiving, and celebration. Overtones from the Isaianic banquet from Isa 25:8–9 can also be detected.

Lordship of Christ

The lordship of Christ is the final significant theological theme. Paul encourages his readers to acknowledge this lordship from the beginning of his letter: “To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours” (1:2). He then stresses Christ’s lordship repeatedly throughout 1 Corinthians. The word “Lord” occurs 56 times in the letter, and the phrase “Lord Jesus Christ” occurs eight times. Jesus is referred to as “Lord Jesus” four times. Within the first 10 verses of 1 Cor, Jesus is explicitly referred to as “Lord” five times. The epistle concludes with a blessing in the name of the “Lord Jesus” (16:23).

Throughout the letter, Paul asks the Corinthians to change their behavior so that it might be in line with Christ’s lordship:

- The church must be unified so that it reflects the mind of Christ (1:10; 2:16).
- The church be cleansed from the man caught in incest so that it might reflect the sacrifice of Christ (5:7).
- It is improper to have relations with a prostitute as that violates the body of Christ (6:18–20).
- The Corinthians should not eating food sacrificed to idols, since it can harm the conscience of some for whom Christ died (8:11).
- When the Corinthians are worshiping corporately, head coverings or the lack of wearing head coverings reflects the headship of Christ (11:3).
- The Lord’s Supper is to be observed by discerning the body of Christ (11:29).
- Spiritual gifts are to be practiced by using them in relation to the Christian body, of which Christ is the head (12:27).

Paul even stresses that all of history is about the subjection of all things under Christ's feet (15:24–28).

Reception of 1 Corinthians

First Corinthians is one of the best received documents from the New Testament within early church history. In the writings that can be dated to the late first century and early second century, there are many places in which references from 1 Corinthians can be found. Quotations are found within *First Clement*, the *Letters of Ignatius*, and the *Letter of Polycarp to the Philippians*. It is also likely that 1 Corinthians can be recognized within the *Shepherd of Hermas*. Portions of 1 Corinthians may possibly be found within the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the *Didache*, and *Second Clement* (Oxford Historical Society, *Reception*). Later church fathers such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine all referred to 1 Corinthians. The church fathers John Chrysostom and Origen wrote a series of homilies on 1 Corinthians (Kovacs, *Corinthians*). Additionally, Cyril of Alexandria and Theodoret wrote commentaries on this epistle. In his *Handbook on Faith, Hope, and Love*, Augustine uses 1 Corinthians as the foundational text for his treatise.

The reception within *First Clement* is especially significant, as it is one of the earliest books written following the New Testament (AD 95–97) and was highly respected within the early church. Some even placed it on par with other New Testament writings. Not only does *First Clement* quote portions of 1 Corinthians, but it reveals that the letter is to be considered as authoritative. Clement writes in *1 Clement* 47:1, “Take up the epistle of the blessed Apostle Paul. What did he write to you at the time when the Gospel first began to be preached? Truly, under the inspiration of the Spirit, he wrote to you concerning himself, and Cephas, and Apollos, because even then parties had been formed among you” (Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene*).

This quotation indicates that Paul's exhortation for unity found in 1 Cor 1–3, and other portions of 1 Corinthians, was still seen to be authoritative some 40 years after the time that Paul wrote. This is particularly striking since Paul's relationship with the Corinthians was evidently one that fluctuated, as is clear from sections within 2 Corinthians (compare 2 Cor 2:1–5; 7:2–4; 10:1–5, 10; 13:1–10).

Besides being cited within early Christian literature, 1 Corinthians was received into the earliest lists of the New Testament canon. In fact, it is found in all significant canon listings within the early church. Even when the heretic Marcion composed his shortened list of canonical books in AD 140, he included 1 Corinthians. The following early canon lists include 1 Corinthians:

- the Muratorian Canon (AD 180);
- the listing of canonical books in the Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae (AD 206);
- Eusebius' canonical listing (AD 325–40);
- the Canon of Cyril of Jerusalem (AD 350);
- the Cheltenham Canon (AD 360);
- Athanasius' canon listing in his *Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter* (AD 367).

One of the most significant receptions of a portion of 1 Corinthians can be found in the early Christian creeds. The Nicene Creed borrows wording from 1 Cor 15:4 when it reads, “On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures.” The words “suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried” may have come from 15:3. It is also possible that 8:4–6 influenced, “I believe in one God, the Father Almighty.” The phrase “resurrection of the body” may have been influenced by 15:49–58. The Apostles' Creed can claim influence from the same texts.

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DRAKE WILLIAMS

CORINTHIANS, SECOND LETTER TO THE Paul's most personal letter to a congregation. It is emotional and filled with feelings of uncertainty, frustration, sympathy, and relief. This emotional spectrum was due to Paul's close relationship with the Corinthians. He had planted the church in Corinth, stayed with them for a year and a half (Acts 18:11), visited them a second time, and had written several letters to them prior to 2 Corinthians.

Though it is named 2 Corinthians, this is at least the fourth letter that Paul had written to them. Second Corinthians reflects the tumultuous relationship that Paul had with the church in Corinth. While it is not one of the Pastoral Letters (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus), it has been called the “pastoral letter *par excellence*” (Harris, “2 Corinthians,” 309).

Many appreciate 2 Corinthians due to its memorable word pictures. Some have been encouraged from Paul’s depiction of “the God of all comfort who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God” (1:3b–4 NIV). Others have been inspired by the picture of the triumphal procession in 2:14 in which Paul and others are led in Christ. Still others have quoted Paul’s words in 3:6, “for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life,” while others have gained strength from Paul’s struggle with of his “thorn in the flesh” in chapter 12.

Outline of 2 Corinthians

The book can be outlined in the following manner:

- 1:1–7:16—Paul’s explanation of his apostolic ministry
 - 1:1–11—Introduction
 - 1:1–2—Greeting
 - 1:3–7—Praise to God for divine comfort in great suffering
 - 1:8–11—Deliverance from affliction
 - 1:12–2:11—Explaining the postponement of his visit
 - 1:12–14—Boasting in simplicity and godly sincerity
 - 1:15–22—Replying to charge of changing his mind
 - 1:23–2:4—Cancelled painful visit
 - 2:5–11—Forgiveness for the offender
 - 2:12–3:6—Led in Christ’s Triumphal Procession
 - 2:12–13—Paul’s care and suffering for the Corinthians led to change of plans
 - 2:14–3:6—Paul’s conduct in the ministry is explained
 - 3:7–18—Superior ministry of glory
 - 4:1–18—Confidence despite rejection
 - 4:1–6—Transforming hearts
 - 4:7–12—Suffering displaying God’s glory
 - 4:13–18—Boldness from faith in the unseen
 - 5:1–5—A heavenly dwelling
 - 5:6–10—Hope in the future
 - 5:11–21—The aim to persuade all men
 - 6:1–7:4—Persuading the Corinthians to open their hearts
 - 7:5–16—Joy at the majority of the Corinthians’ repentance
- 8:1–9:15—Paul calls for the collection to be completed
 - 8:1–15—The need for generosity
 - 8:1–6—The Macedonian example
 - 8:7–12—Liberal giving
 - 8:13–15—Aim for equality
 - 8:16–24—The service of Titus and his companions
 - 9:1–15—His confidence that the Corinthians will give generously
- 10:1–13:13—Paul defends his apostolic ministry against the unrepentant minority
 - 10:1–11—Entreating the unrepentant minority
 - 10:12–18—Legitimate boasting
 - 11:1–12:21—Foolish boasting
 - 11:1–9—Fear that the Corinthians are being led into idolatry
 - 11:10–33—Boasting over other supposed apostles
 - 12:1–6—Reluctant boasting in great revelations
 - 12:7–10—The thorn in the flesh
 - 12:11–21—Paul has become a fool in boasting, but the unrepentant have foolishly not responded
 - 13:1–13—A third warning
 - 13:1–6—A final strong warning
 - 13:7–10—Paul’s prayer for the Corinthians
 - 13:11–13—Conclusion and benediction; calls for joy, unity, and peace

Historical Background and Purpose of the Corinthian Epistles

There is a significant historical background that informs the reading of 2 Corinthians. The history between Paul and the Corinthians is largely deduced from information within 1 & 2 Corinthians. Most of

this history is constructed from what is contained in the letters of 1 and 2 Corinthians. Consequently the reconstruction of the letter's background is an uncertain enterprise about which there is not complete agreement.

Graeco-Roman Corinth

The city of Corinth is located in modern-day Greece on the northeast corner of the Peloponnesian Peninsula. The religious, political, and philosophical background of the city are essential for understanding the correspondence between Paul and the Corinthian church. For more on ancient Corinth, see the section on "Graeco-Roman Corinth" in the article on First Corinthians.

Paul's History with the Corinthians prior to 2 Corinthians

Paul first visited Corinth in AD 49 during his second missionary journey. Upon his arrival, he attached himself quickly to Aquila and Priscilla. His activities as a tentmaker and preacher are recorded in Acts 18:1–18. The first part of Paul's ministry in Corinth was both to those who were Jewish, and also to Gentiles who feared God. He was opposed by the Jews in the synagogue and expelled. Still, there was fruit from this activity. Titius Justus and Crispus, the synagogue ruler, believed the message (Acts 18:8). The first church meeting may also have met in Titius Justus' house, also known as Gaius (1 Cor 1:14).

The second phase of Paul's ministry in Corinth was directed to the Gentiles. Despite his fear, the Lord spoke to him in a vision, encouraging him to continue on preaching in Corinth (Acts 18:9–10). He stayed about 18 months in the city. As a result of his efforts, Paul was the founder of the church in Corinth (1 Cor 4:14–15). Within that church were notable people mentioned within the Bible elsewhere, such as: Chloe, Erastus, Tertius, and Stephanas. After the church was founded in AD 51, Paul left for Ephesus.

After Paul left Corinth, he began writing letters to the church that he founded. The first letter that he wrote is lost, but we see evidence of it in 1 Cor 5:9–13. That letter chided the Corinthians for their sexually immoral behavior and forbade them from associating with immoral people.

After he wrote this letter, Paul received a report from Chloe's household at Corinth. They reported that there was quarreling and factions in the church (1 Cor 1:11). At about the same time, Paul also received a letter from the Corinthians asking for him to give answers concerning marriage and divorce, weak and strong brothers, spiritual gifts, and collections. As a result of this report and these questions, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in AD 55 from Ephesus.

Paul's Painful Visit

Paul returned to his work in Ephesus with the expectation that he would travel to Corinth with the collection (1 Cor 16:5–8) and sent Timothy to visit the Corinthians in the meantime (1 Cor 16:10–11; compare Acts 19:22). When Timothy arrived in Corinth, he found that the problems were much greater than anticipated. These likely came from Paul's opponents outside of Corinth. As a result, Paul decided to visit Corinth immediately. He would then go on to Macedonia and return for a second visit on his way to Jerusalem (2 Cor 1:15–16). He was expecting that his arrival at Corinth would provide a "second experience of grace" and his sincere conduct would be proved.

Instead of exonerating Paul, this visit turned into what scholars call the "painful visit" (2 Cor 2:1). A group of leaders had infiltrated the church and caused many problems. These people are known as "super apostles." They were of Jewish origin, liked to boast, and carried with them letters of recommendation (3:1; 11:13–15). They were not apostles in the way that Paul was, proclaiming the death and resurrection of Christ, but were more likely agents of others who commissioned them. These super apostles likely were influenced by the surrounding Hellenistic culture. Due to their influence, Paul's gospel message and authority were called into question. One of the leaders severely criticized Paul himself (2:5–8; 7:8–13; 11:4). It was evident that the gospel ministry in Corinth was in jeopardy.

The "Severe Letter"

Paul left Corinth for Ephesus while the Corinthians revolted against his apostolic authority (1:23–2:5; 7:12). He chose not to retaliate, but instead extended mercy to the Corinthians (1:23–24). This left him

open to criticism (1:16–17). Paul decided to send Titus back to Corinth with his next letter. This letter is known as the “severe letter” since it was written “out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears” (2:4 NIV). It has also been called the “letter of tears,” the “tearful letter,” the “sorrowful letter,” or the “painful letter.”

The aim of the severe letter was to embolden the Corinthians to discipline the ones who did wrong, and thus vindicate Paul, the one who suffered the wrong (2:6, 9; 7:12). Another purpose of the letter was to spare the Corinthians and himself from another painful visit (1:23–2:4). The letter also displayed his care for the Corinthians and was designed to test the Corinthians’ obedience to his apostolic ministry (2:4; 2:9). It also was a reminder that Paul was their spiritual father (7:12). After the Corinthians received it, most were repentant (2:5–11; 7:5–16).

There have been six identifications of the severe letter. Three unlikely possibilities include: a letter written before 1 Corinthians and the letter mentioned in 1 Cor 5:9–13; the “previous letter” mentioned in 1 Cor 5:9, 11; 2 Corinthians (Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, 55–56). Other possibilities that demand more attention are: the severe letter is 1 Corinthians, a letter incorporating 2 Cor 10–13, or a lost intermediate letter following the sending of 2 Cor 1–9.

Those who support 1 Corinthians as the “severe letter” do so for three reasons. With all of the great problems within 1 Corinthians, namely, division, immorality, litigation, profaning of the Lord’s Supper, and challenges to Paul’s ministry, it is possible that it caused him much distress. Additionally, the pain expressed in 2 Cor 2:5–11 could be seen from Paul’s discipline of the man caught in incest (1 Cor 5:1–8). Further, the identity of the “one who did wrong” in 2 Cor 7:12 could be connected with the man caught in incest in 1 Cor 5:1 (Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*; Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*; Hughes, *Second Corinthians*; Hyldahl, *Einheit des Zweiten Korintherbriefes*).

However, passages such as 2 Cor 2:6 and 7:12 suggest that the “severe letter” dealt specifically with the punishment of the wrong-doer instead of questions surrounding the entire Corinthian church, which is the concern of 1 Corinthians. Further, 1 Corinthians does not seem to be written in place of another painful visit (compare 1 Cor 4:18–19; 11:34; 16:2–7) as 2 Cor 1:23; 2:1–3 demands. Additionally, in 2 Cor 2:10 Paul offers his personal forgiveness to the individual whom the Corinthians are to forgive, but it is highly doubtful that he would have seen this as a personal injury. Moreover, the passages in 2 Corinthians show no rebuking of sexual immorality but rather a direct confrontation with Paul’s authority (2 Cor 7:12).

Rather than seeing 1 Corinthians as the severe letter, others divide 2 Corinthians into two parts—chapters 1–9 and chapters 10–13. In this scenario, 2 Cor 10–13 is called the severe letter, and was written before 2 Cor 1–9 (Hausrath, *Der Vier-Capitelbrief*; Plummer, *Second Corinthians*, Dodd, *New Testament Studies*, Welborn, *Politics and Rhetoric*). Some believe that 1–9 intentionally allude to portions of 10–13. However, it is just as likely that 10–13 passage are alluding to 1–9. Furthermore, it is unlikely that 2 Cor 10–13 is the severe letter since there is nothing within these chapters about the punishment of the troublemaker—a key aspect of the severe letter (compare 2 Cor 2:5–9). Finally, the contents of 10–13 do not seem to fit the description of the severe letter, which stemmed from many tears. On the whole, 2 Cor 10–13 is a vigorous self-defense, filled with irony and warnings. Thus, this popular suggestion is unlikely (Harris, *Second Corinthians*).

It is best to see the severe letter as a lost letter; there are other letters from Paul that we do not have (compare 1 Cor 5:9, 11; Col 4:16). If this is the case, the severe letter was written after 1 Corinthians and Paul’s painful visit but before the writing of 2 Corinthians (Semler, *Paraphrasis*; Harris, *Second Corinthians*; Barnett, *Second Corinthians*; Barrett, *Second Corinthians*; Martin, *2 Corinthians*; Murphy-O’Connor, *Second Corinthians*; deSilva, “Measuring Penultimate and Ultimate Reality”; Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*; Thrall, *Second Corinthians*).

The “Deadly Peril” and Reunion with Titus

After he sent this letter, several things happened to Paul. He experienced a “deadly peril” such that “he despaired of life.” He felt a “sentence of death” upon him (2 Cor 1:8–10). While some might see this as

his encounter with wild beasts or opposition in Ephesus, imprisonment in Asia, or the Demetrius riot of Acts 19:23–41, it was most likely a severe physical illness. Harris sees this from the association of the distress in 2 Cor 1:8 with the thorn of 2 Cor 12:7, as well as factors which would identify the three prayers for removal with distresses in Cilicia (AD 43), Perga (Acts 13:13–14 in AD 47), and in Troas (2 Cor 1:8; 2:12; 7:5 in AD 56; Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 164–82; compare Alexander, “St. Paul’s Infirmity”). Whether it was a physical illness or something else, this affliction did cause him to abandon self-sufficiency and trust in God’s power. It also forced him to consider the significance of death for the Christian believer.

Following this severe illness, Paul continued with his gospel ministry. He traveled to Troas, where there was a door open to him, but he found no peace as Titus was not present there (Acts 20:1–11; 2 Cor 2:12–13). So, he left Troas and headed for Macedonia. While in Macedonia, he helped to organize the collection for the Christians in Jerusalem as well his gospel ministry (Acts 20:1–2; 2 Cor 8:1–4; 9:2). While his ministry was successful in Macedonia, it took him longer than expected to connect with Titus. Thus, it took him longer to hear how his severe letter had been received in Corinth (2 Cor 7:5).

Titus finally arrived with good news for Paul, which led Paul to rejoice (2 Cor 7:6–9). Paul had worried about the effects of his severe letter, fearing that he had been too harsh. Hearing Titus’ report comforted Paul greatly—the Corinthians had deep sorrow for their behavior, and were longing to see Paul. Paul was overjoyed, perhaps greater than ever with their response. If his severe letter had wounded them, it was only for a while (2 Cor 7:8).

At this point, in AD 56, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians. Chapters 1–9 exhibit grace and relief while chapters 10–13 display a noticeably harsher tone. There are also several places within the letter in which the transition is less clear. This has led to the main difficulty in studies of 2 Corinthians—the issue of integrity.

The Message of 2 Corinthians

(This section is adapted from Brown, Twist, and Widder, *Lexham Bible Guide: 2 Corinthians*, 2013.)

Paul writes the letter known as 2 Corinthians to prepare the Corinthian church for his upcoming visit (12:14; 13:1). With this goal in mind, Paul devotes most of the letter to addressing doubts concerning his integrity and ministry that resulted from unresolved issues and recent events in Corinth. In 2 Corinthians, Paul confronts these doubts and implores the church to reconcile with him as their founding apostle in what is probably Paul’s most personal and autobiographical letter. In response to these issues and challenges to the legitimacy of his apostleship on the basis of his alleged “weakness,” Paul delivers a theological message that centers on the suffering Christ and the power of the resurrection.

The two main sections of 2 Corinthians reflect Paul’s attempt to defend his ministry and address problems caused by rival leaders in Corinth. In the first nine chapters of the letter, Paul primarily explains the nature of his ministry after briefly accounting for changes to his previous plans to visit (1:15–2:13). He then explores the nature of his apostolic ministry (4:1–7:4). For Paul, the transformed perspective of the new covenant (3:1–18) allows him to regard his “weaknesses” as strengths that actually enhance his ministry and bring glory to God. Paul then returns to the question of his itinerary (7:5–16) before he makes his major appeal for the Jerusalem collection (8:1–9:15). In the second part of the letter, Paul takes up new challenges from the so-called “super apostles” in Corinth (10–13). He defends his own credentials while also criticizing the methods of his rivals throughout this section. The letter concludes with a final note about Paul’s trip to Corinth (12:14–13:10).

Unity of 2 Corinthians

The majority opinion is that 2 Corinthians is a divided letter of at least two or more fragments. For example, J. Weiss divides the material of 2 Corinthians into four different letters (Weiss, *Christianity*, 1.323–57). The most influential partition theory for 2 Corinthians is found in G. Bornkamm’s writing. He sees five letters in 2 Corinthians. The first letter is a letter of defense and includes 2:14–6:13; 7:2–4. The second is a letter of tears and is 10:1–13:10. He sees a letter of reconciliation composed of 1:1–2:13 and

7:5–16. The fourth letter is one of commendation made of 8:1–24. The fifth part is 9:1–15 (Bornkamm, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, 162–94). W. Schmithals has found portions of 2 Corinthians in seven of 13 pieces (Schmithals, *Briefe*, 19–85).

While there are several partition theories, the four passages that present the most difficulty are 2:14–7:4; 6:14–7:1; 8:1–9:15; 10:1–13:13. Many find the transition between these sections and other portions of 2 Corinthians difficult. Sufficiently different subject matter and tone has led scholars to argue that these passages are separate from the rest of 2 Corinthians; yet there are also good reasons to see 2 Corinthians as a unity.

2 Corinthians 2:14–7:4

J. Weiss has felt that 2:14–7:4 is an insertion and should be viewed separately (Weiss, *Urchristentum*, 265, 272). He believes this to be likely because Paul mentions his trip to Macedonia in 2:13, but the reader must wait until 7:5 to hear about the results. Weiss believes that the lengthy thanksgiving section of 2:14–7:4 seems unrelated to Paul's travels. Furthermore, Weiss sees conflict inserted in 2:17; 3:1; 4:2–3; and 5:12, which seems out of step with Paul's attitude in 1:1–2:13 and 7:5–8:24 (see also Halmel, *Korintherbrief*, 79–86).

Many words and ideas link 2:12–7:4 within the original composition of 2 Corinthians. Verbal links found in 7:4 also appear later in 7. In 2 Corinthians 7:4, Paul uses words such as “encouragement” and “tribulation” which can be found within 7:5–16. He also boasts in the Corinthians and will return to this idea of boasting in 7:14. In 2 Corinthians 7:4, Paul rejoices and then returns to the theme of joy in 7:7, 9, 13, and 16. Finally, he mentions affliction in 7:4 as well as in 7:5. With all of these connections, 2:14–7:4 is much less likely to be an insertion (Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, 20–25).

An important consideration in evaluating the integrity of this portion of the letter is Paul's intention. He is not obligated to give a continuous account from 2:12–7:16. His digressions could be a result of his emotional dealings with the Corinthians. It is possible that as he was writing 2:12–13, he was emotionally moved, recalling his meeting with Titus in Macedonia. This may then have led to praise and thanksgiving, and thus account for his change of thought. A Pauline digression is a better explanation for the change in thought in 2:14–7:4 than concluding that these verses are an insertion (Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 14).

2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1

Moffatt, Fitzmeyer, Gnilka, and Dahl have proposed that 6:14–7:1 is an insertion within 2 Corinthians (Moffatt, *Introduction to New Testament Literature*, 109–25; Fitzmeyer, “Qumran and the Interpolated Paragraph in 2 Cor 6,14–7,1” 271–80; Gnilka, “2 Cor 6:14–7:1,” 48–68; Dahl, “A Fragment and Its Context: 2 Corinthians 6:1–7:1,” 62–69). Particularly for Gnilka and Dahl, this idea emerged from similarities that they have found with literature from the Dead Sea Scrolls. As a result, they see 6:14–7:1 as Christianized theology that emerges from the non-Pauline Qumran community.

The argument for this view is that 6:14–7:1 lacks specific connections with the Corinthian problems. From their perspective, it calls for timeless principles of a holy life rather than addressing the specific situation at Corinth. They also believe that 6:14–7:1 interrupts the flow of 6:13–7:2. If 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 was removed, Paul's writing could flow seamlessly from 6:13 to 7:2 with the exhortation for the Corinthians to open wide their hearts.

There are a series of words that are characteristically non-Pauline. Greek words translated into “unequally yoked” in 6:14, “agreement” and “Belial” in 6:15, and “agreement” in 6:16 (ESV) occur nowhere else in the Greek New Testament. Furthermore, two phrases in 7:1 translated from the ESV as “let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit” and “bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God” are unique in Paul. Finally, the Old Testament passages that are quoted at the end of 6 are unique and not referred to anywhere else in Paul's letters.

While there are non-Pauline elements within 6:14–7:1, there are also reasons to see this portion as being written by Paul, and part of the original composition of 2 Corinthians. The passage does contain similar themes which are found in other parts of 2 Corinthians. For example, the distinction between

believers and unbelievers in 6:14–7:1 can also be found in 2:15–16 and 2 Cor 4:3–6. The “fear of God” found in 7:1 can be found in 5:11. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 and 6:2, there are Old Testament ideas that are taken from promises for divine restoration like those in 6:14–7:1.

Besides the overlap in ideas, 6:14–7:1 seems to refer to the specific situation at Corinth. The passage is a powerful call to separate from Gentile temple worship, which is a concern from the Corinthian correspondence. It also could fit well within Paul’s exhortation to separate from pagan influences from the rival super apostles (Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, 26–29).

Finally, 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 does possess a common Pauline stylistic feature. Paul often declares who Christians are, with the use of an indicative verb, and then follows with a command. This is found repeatedly throughout 6:14b–16a where Christians are declared to be righteousness, light, believers, and a living temple. As a result, they are commanded to separate from unrighteousness, darkness, unbelievers, and idols.

While 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 may be an abrupt transition from chapter 6, it should be seen in unity with the rest of 2 Corinthians. Besides its correspondence with the rest of the book, Paul, as any writer, should be allowed to write periodically with unique words and phrases. A few unique words should not lead to the conclusions that the writing is non-Pauline.

Recent studies are supportive of the passage’s Pauline origin. They also support that the passage belongs within the larger argument of 2 Corinthians (compare Fee, “2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 and Food Offered to Idols,” 140–61; Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, 25–36; Beale, “The Old Testament Background of Reconciliation,” 550–81).

2 Corinthians 8:1–9:15

There are a variety of opinions regarding the relationship of chapters 8–9 to 2 Corinthians. Windisch, Bornkamm, and Wendland split chapter 8 from chapter 9 and propose that Paul wrote 8 before 9. They find that chapter 8 was sent to the Corinthian congregation, while chapter 9 was written to Christians of Achaia (9:2; Windisch, *Der zweite Korintherbrief*, 242–43, 268–71, 286–89; Bornkamm, *Paul*, 245–46; Wendland, *Die Briefe an die Korinther*, 8–9, 222–23). Weiss, Schmithals, Dinkler, Betz, and others propose that chapters 8–9 originally were separate letters from 2 Corinthians (Weiss, *Christianity*, 1.356–57; Schmithals, *Briefe*, 77–85; Dinkler, *Korintherbriefe*, 18; Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 3–35).

There are, however, good reasons to see chapters 8–9 together. Paul continues his boast in 8:24 with further boasting in 9:2–3. Furthermore, the ministry of giving to the saints that Paul speaks of in 9:1 resumes his discussion of the relief of the saints from 8:4. His use of brothers in 9:3, 5 resumes his brother-talk used in 8:16–23 (Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 27–28).

There are then good reasons to see chapters 8–9 together, and following naturally upon chapters 1–7. While there is certainly a transition between 1–7 and 8, Paul is feeling confident with the defense of his apostolic ministry in chapters 1–7 (7:4, 16). Now is the appropriate time to encourage the collection for Christians in Jerusalem that was first started in 1 Cor 16 (Barnett, *Second Corinthians*, 24; Harris, *Second Corinthians* 29; Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, 38). Given Paul’s defensiveness with the Corinthians, it is reasonable to believe that he would repeat his encouragement to give from 2 Cor 8 within 2 Cor 9 (Barnett, *Second Corinthians*, 24).

2 Corinthians 10–13

One of the most popular partition views in 2 Corinthians scholarship is to separate chapters 1–9 from chapters 10–13. This is known as the Semler hypothesis (Semler, *Paraphrasis*), and many modern commentators support this view (e.g., Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Furnish, *2 Corinthians*, Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, deSilva, “Measuring Penultimate against Ultimate Reality,” Murphy-O’Connor, *Second Corinthians*, Kruse, “The Relationship between the Opposition to Paul”).

Semler bases his argument on a few notable differences, including a change in tone between 1–9 and 10–13. Titus’ visit to Corinth appears to be a future event in 8:17–18, 22, but it appears to be a past event

in 12:18. An imminent third Pauline visit is clear in chapter 13 but is not mentioned in chapters 1–9. Paul refers to “we” in 1–9, but in 10–13 he uses “I” or “me.”

These objections, however, need not overthrow the traditional view of the letter’s unity. It is possible that Paul received another report between the writing of 1–9 and 10–13 (Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 38–39), and this could have led to the change in tone. Another possibility is that Paul addressed the repentant majority throughout 1–9 and then returned to address the unrepentant minority in 10–13 (Hafemann, *Second Corinthians*, 19–36).

While Titus’ visit to Corinth appears to be a future event in 8:17–18, 22 but a past event in 12:18, it is possible that Paul is not referring to only one visit. There could be distinct, separate visits since in chapter 8 two brothers are with Titus in his visit, but in chapter 12 only one brother is with him. Titus would have initiated the collection, delivered the “severe letter,” or both in chapter 8. His second visit could equally have involved delicate financial and personal matters in chapter 12 (Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 40).

The change in emotion between these sections could fit the general tenor of 2 Corinthians in which Paul is quite emotional. Indeed, the seventh chapter of 2 Corinthians is one of the most emotional in all of Paul’s writing. The sudden shift between chapters 9 and 10 within an already emotional letter might not be out of the question. The greater number of first person plurals within 10–13 can be explained by the personal nature of the conflict that Paul is having.

Paul’s impending visit may not suddenly appear in 2 Cor 13, as those who see chapters 1–9 and 10–13 separately say. Hints of another Pauline visit can be seen in 2:1, 3 and 9:4, though he may not speak of it so directly in each of these places. In chapter 2, the Corinthians should be reconciled about the man who had wronged Paul. In chapter 9, the Corinthians should complete the collection and thus avert shame before he arrives.

Other matters make it likely that the traditional view—2 Corinthians as a single letter—is viable and preferable. There is a unified theme that runs throughout the entirety—a defense of Paul’s apostleship (Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 44–47). Some of the vocabulary appearing in both 1–9 and 10–13 occurs less frequently in other Pauline letters. For example, the word “commend” is found throughout the letter (3:1; 4:2; 5:12; 6:4; 10:12, 18; 12:11); it is found only five times outside of 2 Corinthians. The phrase “in Christ we speak before God” occurs only in 2:17 and 12:19, suggesting a unity between chapters 1–9 and chapters 10–13 (Barnett, *Second Corinthians*, 19–21).

Findings from studies on ancient rhetoric have been used recently to support a unified letter. Second Corinthians 10–13 recapitulates the arguments from chapters 1–9, which parallels other ancient letters (such as those from Demosthenes, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, or Quintilian). In ancient apologetic letters, there was a section known as the *exordium* that raised issues and sought the audience’s sympathy. Paul could have had this in mind from 1:1–11. Such letters would conclude with a *peroration*, which restated the issues raised in the *exordium*. Paul could be considering chapters 10–13 as the *peroration* (Barnett, *Second Corinthians*, 18–23; Young and Ford, *Meaning and Truth*, 28, 37–38, 43–44).

Several modern commentators promote 2 Corinthians as a unified letter (e.g., Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 31–33; Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 328–39; Scott, *2 Corinthians*, 4–7, 200; Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 33–44; Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 42–51; Barnett, *Second Corinthians*, 17–23). The discussion concerning the unity of 2 Corinthians, however, is far from decided.

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DRAKE WILLIAMS

CORINTHIANS, THIRD LETTER TO THE Corinthians, Third Letter to The. A pseudepigraphal work that circulated in the early Christian period and was attributed to the Apostle Paul; it is included as part of the noncanonical *Acts of Paul*. In the early church period, *3 Corinthians* was considered canonical in some Syriac and Armenian churches, but does not seem to have been widely considered authoritative elsewhere. Today no church considers it canonical.

Structure of *Third Corinthians*

The letter of *3 Corinthians* consists of four parts:

1. an introduction describing the context in which the Corinthians wrote to Paul
2. the Corinthians' letter to Paul
3. an additional introduction describing the context in which Paul responded to the Corinthians
4. the alleged letter

Although these four sections are often referred to cumulatively as "Third Corinthians," the fourth section of this unit—Paul's alleged letter—can be understood as *3 Corinthians* proper. It is possible that the two

letters—the supposed letter from the Corinthians to Paul and Paul’s alleged letter—were written first and the accompanying introductions were then added at a later time. The entirety of the document we now know as *3 Corinthians*, which includes all four sections, was then likely placed within the *Acts of Paul*.

Attestation in Early Witnesses and Reception

The oldest and most significant witness to *Third Corinthians* is Bodmer X Papyrus, a third- or fourth-century Greek papyrus that contains the ostensible Corinthian letter to Paul and the third letter to the Corinthians. The absence of *3 Corinthians*’ two introductions in Bodmer X Papyrus may suggest that they were produced later than the two letters. Aside from Bodmer X Papyrus, few witnesses to *3 Corinthians* in the Greek tradition exist, which may suggest that the letter was rarely regarded as authoritative in the Greek-speaking world. Translations of *3 Corinthians* into Armenian, Coptic, Syriac, and Latin have also been preserved.

Third Corinthians was translated into Syriac in the third century and was treated as canonical by early Syriac Christians; the fourth-century Syriac church fathers Aphraat and Ephrem cited it as authoritative and Ephrem’s commentary on the letters of Paul includes *3 Corinthians*. However, the fifth-century Syriac Peshitta translation of the New Testament excluded *3 Corinthians*. Since the Peshitta became the standard version of the New Testament in Syriac churches, *3 Corinthians* lost canonical status in Syriac churches (Metzger, *Canon*, 176, 219). The Armenian Bible was influenced by early Syriac tradition and so also included *3 Corinthians*. The work was used in the Armenian church at least until the thirteenth century, and probably later, since it appears in a printed Armenian Bible from the 17th century (Metzger, *Canon*, 176, 223; Nersessian, *Bible*, 20, 29; Charlesworth, *Fluid Borders*, xx). However, it is no longer considered canonical by Armenian churches (Charlesworth, *Fluid Borders*, xx).

On one occasion, Tertullian described the Acts of Paul—a collection of writings that included *3 Corinthians*—as a forgery. He noted that the writer of the *Acts of Paul* was a presbyter from Asia who was removed from his position after he confessed to writing the letter (Tertullian, *On Baptism* 17.5).

Lack of Epistolary and Historical Features

The actual alleged letter of *Third Corinthians* proper, being the fourth part of the document now available to us, includes no historical references to either the situation of the author or the recipients. Thus, there is nothing within the letter itself to suggest that it was originally an occasional letter that sought to address specific matters in a local congregation. Instead, the letter is universally applicable, suggesting that the author intended the letter to be received by a large audience rather than one specific community.

Major Themes

Resurrection

Third Corinthians emphasizes Christ’s resurrection and defeat of Satan. The letter’s author seemingly considered Jesus’ resurrection to be bodily just as the future resurrection would be for believers (compare 3 Cor 6). The author urges those who are skeptical regarding the resurrection to consider the Lord’s restoration of Jonah (3 Cor 29–30) and Elisha’s resurrection of a body (3 Cor 32).

The resurrection was also a central theme in 1 Cor 15, where Paul presents the resurrection as central to the gospel (1 Cor 15:1–8) and the ultimate hope for believers (1 Cor 15:12–22). Paul also describes the resurrection as the decisive event that defeated the “last enemy,” death (1 Cor 15:26 NASB). He taught that only those who are in Christ will ultimately “put on the imperishable” (1 Cor 15:54 NASB) at the return of Christ. *Third Corinthians* places much more emphasis on Christ’s defeat of Satan, who the author describes as the evil one (3 Cor 2).

Jesus’ Miraculous Birth

Third Corinthians also emphasizes Jesus’ miraculous birth. On two occasions the author describes the Holy Spirit being sent to Mary (3 Cor 5; 14). According to the author, the purpose of Jesus’ incarnation was to defeat death (3 Cor 6) and the evil one (3 Cor 15). In Paul’s canonical letters, he only references

Christ's birth in Gal 4:4, which describes Christ as "born of a woman" (NASB), and Rom 1:2, which describes Jesus as one "who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh" (NASB).

Related Articles

For further information on the *Acts of Paul*, which *3 Corinthians* sometimes circulated as part of, see this article: Acts of Paul. For information on the process of canonization, see this article: Canon, New Testament.

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INTRO TO CORINTHIANS

Introduction to 1 Corinthians

First Corinthians is all about living like followers of Christ. A couple of years after Paul established a group of believers in Corinth, he received word that they were losing their way. In 1 Corinthians, Paul gives them practical advice on how to live as Christians in the midst of a culture that pressures them to compromise.

Background

Paul founded the church in Corinth around AD 51 (Acts 18:1–11). As he moved on with his missionary activity, he spent three years in Ephesus (Acts 20:31). While he was there (1 Cor 16:8), he heard that things were not going well in Corinth—believers were quarrelling (1:11; 5:1). Paul wrote at least one letter to try to straighten things out (5:9), but it did not solve the problem—so he wrote what we call 1 Corinthians and sent it with his associate Timothy (4:17). The letter probably was written toward the end of Paul’s stay in Ephesus, around AD 54–55.

Corinth was in Greece, but during Paul’s time the city was part of the Roman Empire. It was a major commercial center, had a bustling port, and as the third largest city in the Roman Empire, was a cosmopolitan city; it also was known for its sexual permissiveness. Many of the problems Paul addresses come from the Corinthian Christians’ tendency to reflect the values of their city rather than those of the body of Christ (6:15).

Structure

Like a typical Graeco-Roman letter, 1 Corinthians has an opening (1:1–9), a body (1:10–15:58), and a closing (16:1–24). Paul begins the letter by greeting the Corinthians as saints—people made holy by Jesus—and giving thanks for them. In the first part of the letter’s body (1:10–6:20), Paul responds to things that he has heard in Ephesus about the Corinthians. They didn’t report these things themselves. They have acted divisively, assessing their leaders based on their own definition of what it means to be wise and spiritual. Paul responds that their views don’t fit with the gospel he preached to them (1:10–4:21). Then he addresses other issues he has heard about: incest, lawsuits, and sexual immorality (5:1–6:20).

The second part of the letter’s body (7:1–15:58) discusses issues raised in the Corinthians’ letter to Paul. He responds to them about marriage (7:1–40), food sacrificed to idols (8:1–11:1), conduct in worship (11:2–34), the practice of spiritual gifts (12:1–14:40), and resurrection (15:1–58). Paul concludes the letter by going over some personal items, including his travel plans and the offering he was collecting for the impoverished church in Jerusalem (16:1–24).

Outline

- Introduction (1:1–9)
- Paul responds to reports of the Corinthians' conduct (1:10–6:20)
- Paul responds to the Corinthians' letter (7:1–15:58)
- Concluding matters (16:1–24)

Themes

In 1 Corinthians, Paul emphasizes how to live as a Christian community, which differs from the values of secular culture. The Corinthians had heard the story of Jesus and embraced it with enthusiasm, but over time it had been twisted. Their culture's stories were distorting their views about following Jesus.

Paul strongly criticizes the believers' misguided attempts to live according to Christian values, pointing them instead to life in the Spirit of God, based on the work of the Lord Jesus Christ (6:11). The Corinthians think they know what wisdom is, but their wisdom looks no different from their culture's. They think they know what being spiritual means, but their spirituality leads them to be divisive, immoral, and selfish. By contrast, truly living in the Spirit leads to unity, to putting others first, and to living a holy life. Paul tells the believers to see themselves as a community, as individuals, as God's temple—as members of Christ's body (3:16; 6:15).

Like the Corinthians, we live in a world filled with ideas and practices that are at odds with the gospel. Every day, we hear stories about what it means to be wise and spiritual based on our secular culture, and these often cause us to misunderstand our place in the world or distort the gospel for our own purposes (compare chs. 8; 10). Paul challenges our desires to be sophisticated and powerful and shows them to be empty counterfeits. We are challenged to walk away from immorality and live as God's people, empowered by the Holy Spirit (chs. 5; 12–14). We are to embrace the power of the resurrection and work for the Lord (1:2, 9; 7:17; 15).⁴

THE FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS

Introduction

“A fragment of ecclesiastical history like no other.”

—Weizäcker

I. Unique Place in the Canon

First Corinthians is the “problem book” in the sense that Paul handles the problems (“Now concerning . . .”) that faced the congregation in the wicked city of Corinth. As such it is most needed by today's problem-racked churches. The divisions, hero-worship of leaders, immorality, legal battles, marital problems, doubtful practices, and regulation of spiritual gifts, are all handled here.

It would be wrong, however, to think it was all problems! This is the Epistle that contains 1 Corinthians 13, the most beautiful essay on love, not just in the Bible, but in *all* literature. The remarkable teaching on

⁴ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., . . . Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

the resurrection—both Christ’s and ours (chap. 15), the regulation of the Lord’s Supper (chap. 11), the command to take part in the collection (chap. 16), are all here.

We would be very much the poorer without 1 Corinthians. It is a treasure trove of practical Christian teaching.

II. Authorship

All scholars agree that what we call 1 Corinthians is an authentic product of Paul’s pen. Some (chiefly liberal) writers think they see some “interpolations” in the letter, but these are subjective conjectures with no supporting manuscript evidence. 1 Corinthians 5:9 apparently implies a previous (uncanonical) letter from Paul that the Corinthians misunderstood.

The *external evidence* for 1 Corinthians is very early, the book being specifically referred to by Clement of Rome (c. A.D. 95) as “the Epistle of the blessed Apostle Paul.” Other early church writers quoting the book are Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian. It is listed in the Muratorian Canon and comes after Galatians in the heretic Marcion’s own “canon,” the *Apostolicon*.

The *internal evidence* is very strong as well. Besides the author’s references to himself as Paul in 1:1 and 16:21, the argument in 1:12–17; 3:4, 6, 22 also supports Pauline authorship. Coincidences with Acts and with other letters of Paul, plus the strong flavor of genuine apostolic concern rule out a forgery and make the arguments for authenticity overwhelming.

III. Date

Paul tells us he is writing from Ephesus (16:8, 9, cf. v. 19). Since he ministered there for three years, 1 Corinthians was most likely written in the latter half of that extended ministry, or about a.d. 55 or 56. Some scholars date it even earlier.

IV. Background and Theme

Ancient Corinth was (and is) in southern Greece, west of Athens, strategically situated on the trade routes in Paul’s day. It became a great center for international commerce, and immense quantities of traffic came to this city. Because of the depraved religion of the people, it soon became the center also for the grossest forms of immorality, so that the name Corinth was a byword for all that was impure and sensual. So lewd was the city’s reputation, there was even a verb coined, *korinthiazomai*, which meant *to lead a debased life*.

The Apostle Paul first visited Corinth on his Second Missionary Journey (Acts 18). At first he labored among the Jewish people, together with Priscilla and Aquila, his fellow tentmakers. When most Jews rejected his message, he turned to the Gentiles in Corinth. Souls were saved through the preaching of the gospel, and a church was formed.

About three years later, when Paul was preaching in Ephesus, he received a letter from Corinth, telling of serious difficulties in the assembly there and also asking various questions as to matters of Christian practice. It was in answer to this letter that the First Epistle to the Corinthians was written.

The theme of the Epistle is how to set right a worldly and carnal church that regards lightly the attitudes, errors, and actions that the Apostle Paul viewed with such alarm. As Moffatt put it so succinctly, “The Church was in the world, as it had to be, but the world was in the Church, as it ought not to be.”

Since such a situation is still common in many congregations, the relevance of 1 Corinthians is lasting.⁵

Historical Background and Purpose of the Corinthian Epistles

⁵ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (pp. 1745–1746). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

There is a significant historical background that informs the reading of 2 Corinthians. The history between Paul and the Corinthians is largely deduced from information within 1 & 2 Corinthians. Most of this history is constructed from what is contained in the letters of 1 and 2 Corinthians. Consequently the reconstruction of the letter's background is an uncertain enterprise about which there is not complete agreement.

Graeco-Roman Corinth

The city of Corinth is located in modern-day Greece on the northeast corner of the Peloponnesian Peninsula. The religious, political, and philosophical background of the city are essential for understanding the correspondence between Paul and the Corinthian church. For more on ancient Corinth, see the section on "Graeco-Roman Corinth" in the article on First Corinthians.

Paul's History with the Corinthians prior to 2 Corinthians

Paul first visited Corinth in AD 49 during his second missionary journey. Upon his arrival, he attached himself quickly to Aquila and Priscilla. His activities as a tentmaker and preacher are recorded in Acts 18:1–18. The first part of Paul's ministry in Corinth was both to those who were Jewish, and also to Gentiles who feared God. He was opposed by the Jews in the synagogue and expelled. Still, there was fruit from this activity. Titius Justus and Crispus, the synagogue ruler, believed the message (Acts 18:8). The first church meeting may also have met in Titius Justus' house, also known as Gaius (1 Cor 1:14).

The second phase of Paul's ministry in Corinth was directed to the Gentiles. Despite his fear, the Lord spoke to him in a vision, encouraging him to continue on preaching in Corinth (Acts 18:9–10). He stayed about 18 months in the city. As a result of his efforts, Paul was the founder of the church in Corinth (1 Cor 4:14–15). Within that church were notable people mentioned within the Bible elsewhere, such as: Chloe, Erastus, Tertius, and Stephanas. After the church was founded in AD 51, Paul left for Ephesus.

After Paul left Corinth, he began writing letters to the church that he founded. The first letter that he wrote is lost, but we see evidence of it in 1 Cor 5:9–13. That letter chided the Corinthians for their sexually immoral behavior and forbade them from associating with immoral people.

After he wrote this letter, Paul received a report from Chloe's household at Corinth. They reported that there was quarreling and factions in the church (1 Cor 1:11). At about the same time, Paul also received a letter from the Corinthians asking for him to give answers concerning marriage and divorce, weak and strong brothers, spiritual gifts, and collections. As a result of this report and these questions, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in AD 55 from Ephesus.

Paul's Painful Visit

Paul returned to his work in Ephesus with the expectation that he would travel to Corinth with the collection (1 Cor 16:5–8) and sent Timothy to visit the Corinthians in the meantime (1 Cor 16:10–11; compare Acts 19:22). When Timothy arrived in Corinth, he found that the problems were much greater than anticipated. These likely came from Paul's opponents outside of Corinth. As a result, Paul decided to visit Corinth immediately. He would then go on to Macedonia and return for a second visit on his way to Jerusalem (2 Cor 1:15–16). He was expecting that his arrival at Corinth would provide a "second experience of grace" and his sincere conduct would be proved.

Instead of exonerating Paul, this visit turned into what scholars call the "painful visit" (2 Cor 2:1). A group of leaders had infiltrated the church and caused many problems. These people are known as "super apostles." They were of Jewish origin, liked to boast, and carried with them letters of recommendation (3:1; 11:13–15). They were not apostles in the way that Paul was, proclaiming the death and resurrection of Christ, but were more likely agents of others who commissioned them. These super apostles likely were influenced by the surrounding Hellenistic culture. Due to their influence, Paul's gospel message and authority were called into question. One of the leaders severely criticized Paul himself (2:5–8; 7:8–13; 11:4). It was evident that the gospel ministry in Corinth was in jeopardy.

The “Severe Letter”

Paul left Corinth for Ephesus while the Corinthians revolted against his apostolic authority (1:23–2:5; 7:12). He chose not to retaliate, but instead extended mercy to the Corinthians (1:23–24). This left him open to criticism (1:16–17). Paul decided to send Titus back to Corinth with his next letter. This letter is known as the “severe letter” since it was written “out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears” (2:4 NIV). It has also been called the “letter of tears,” the “tearful letter,” the “sorrowful letter,” or the “painful letter.”

The aim of the severe letter was to embolden the Corinthians to discipline the ones who did wrong, and thus vindicate Paul, the one who suffered the wrong (2:6, 9; 7:12). Another purpose of the letter was to spare the Corinthians and himself from another painful visit (1:23–2:4). The letter also displayed his care for the Corinthians and was designed to test the Corinthians’ obedience to his apostolic ministry (2:4; 2:9). It also was a reminder that Paul was their spiritual father (7:12). After the Corinthians received it, most were repentant (2:5–11; 7:5–16).

There have been six identifications of the severe letter. Three unlikely possibilities include: a letter written before 1 Corinthians and the letter mentioned in 1 Cor 5:9–13; the “previous letter” mentioned in 1 Cor 5:9, 11; 2 Corinthians (Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, 55–56). Other possibilities that demand more attention are: the severe letter is 1 Corinthians, a letter incorporating 2 Cor 10–13, or a lost intermediate letter following the sending of 2 Cor 1–9.

Those who support 1 Corinthians as the “severe letter” do so for three reasons. With all of the great problems within 1 Corinthians, namely, division, immorality, litigation, profaning of the Lord’s Supper, and challenges to Paul’s ministry, it is possible that it caused him much distress. Additionally, the pain expressed in 2 Cor 2:5–11 could be seen from Paul’s discipline of the man caught in incest (1 Cor 5:1–8). Further, the identity of the “one who did wrong” in 2 Cor 7:12 could be connected with the man caught in incest in 1 Cor 5:1 (Meyer, *Epistles to the Corinthians*; Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*; Hughes, *Second Corinthians*; Hyldahl, *Einheit des Zweiten Korintherbriefes*).

However, passages such as 2 Cor 2:6 and 7:12 suggest that the “severe letter” dealt specifically with the punishment of the wrong-doer instead of questions surrounding the entire Corinthian church, which is the concern of 1 Corinthians. Further, 1 Corinthians does not seem to be written in place of another painful visit (compare 1 Cor 4:18–19; 11:34; 16:2–7) as 2 Cor 1:23; 2:1–3 demands. Additionally, in 2 Cor 2:10 Paul offers his personal forgiveness to the individual whom the Corinthians are to forgive, but it is highly doubtful that he would have seen this as a personal injury. Moreover, the passages in 2 Corinthians show no rebuking of sexual immorality but rather a direct confrontation with Paul’s authority (2 Cor 7:12).

Rather than seeing 1 Corinthians as the severe letter, others divide 2 Corinthians into two parts— chapters 1–9 and chapters 10–13. In this scenario, 2 Cor 10–13 is called the severe letter, and was written before 2 Cor 1–9 (Hausrath, *Der Vier-Capitelbrief*; Plummer, *Second Corinthians*, Dodd, *New Testament Studies*, Welborn, *Politics and Rhetoric*). Some believe that 1–9 intentionally allude to portions of 10–13. However, it is just as likely that 10–13 passage are alluding to 1–9. Furthermore, it is unlikely that 2 Cor 10–13 is the severe letter since there is nothing within these chapters about the punishment of the troublemaker—a key aspect of the severe letter (compare 2 Cor 2:5–9). Finally, the contents of 10–13 do not seem to fit the description of the severe letter, which stemmed from many tears. On the whole, 2 Cor 10–13 is a vigorous self-defense, filled with irony and warnings. Thus, this popular suggestion is unlikely (Harris, *Second Corinthians*).

It is best to see the severe letter as a lost letter; there are other letters from Paul that we do not have (compare 1 Cor 5:9, 11; Col 4:16). If this is the case, the severe letter was written after 1 Corinthians and Paul’s painful visit but before the writing of 2 Corinthians (Semler, *Paraphrasis*; Harris, *Second Corinthians*; Barnett, *Second Corinthians*; Barrett, *Second Corinthians*; Martin, *2 Corinthians*; Murphy-O’Connor, *Second Corinthians*; deSilva, “Measuring Penultimate and Ultimate Reality”; Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*; Thrall, *Second Corinthians*).

The “Deadly Peril” and Reunion with Titus

After he sent this letter, several things happened to Paul. He experienced a “deadly peril” such that “he despaired of life.” He felt a “sentence of death” upon him (2 Cor 1:8–10). While some might see this as his encounter with wild beasts or opposition in Ephesus, imprisonment in Asia, or the Demetrius riot of Acts 19:23–41, it was most likely a severe physical illness. Harris sees this from the association of the distress in 2 Cor 1:8 with the thorn of 2 Cor 12:7, as well as factors which would identify the three prayers for removal with distresses in Cilicia (AD 43), Perga (Acts 13:13–14 in AD 47), and in Troas (2 Cor 1:8; 2:12; 7:5 in AD 56; Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 164–82; compare Alexander, “St. Paul’s Infirmity”). Whether it was a physical illness or something else, this affliction did cause him to abandon self-sufficiency and trust in God’s power. It also forced him to consider the significance of death for the Christian believer.

Following this severe illness, Paul continued with his gospel ministry. He traveled to Troas, where there was a door open to him, but he found no peace as Titus was not present there (Acts 20:1–11; 2 Cor 2:12–13). So, he left Troas and headed for Macedonia. While in Macedonia, he helped to organize the collection for the Christians in Jerusalem as well his gospel ministry (Acts 20:1–2; 2 Cor 8:1–4; 9:2). While his ministry was successful in Macedonia, it took him longer than expected to connect with Titus. Thus, it took him longer to hear how his severe letter had been received in Corinth (2 Cor 7:5).

Titus finally arrived with good news for Paul, which led Paul to rejoice (2 Cor 7:6–9). Paul had worried about the effects of his severe letter, fearing that he had been too harsh. Hearing Titus’ report comforted Paul greatly—the Corinthians had deep sorrow for their behavior, and were longing to see Paul. Paul was overjoyed, perhaps greater than ever with their response. If his severe letter had wounded them, it was only for a while (2 Cor 7:8).

At this point, in AD 56, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians. Chapters 1–9 exhibit grace and relief while chapters 10–13 display a noticeably harsher tone. There are also several places within the letter in which the transition is less clear. This has led to the main difficulty in studies of 2 Corinthians—the issue of integrity.⁶

CORINTHIANS, FIRST LETTER TO THE One of the letters that Paul wrote to the church at Corinth. Addresses many ethical problems, including: division and unity, the role of Christian workers, church discipline, incest, civil litigation, sexual immorality, divorce and remarriage, weak and strong Christians, and spiritual gifts. First Corinthians integrates doctrinal concerns—like the cross of Christ, the resurrection, and the nature of the Church—with practical issues.

Outline of 1 Corinthians

The book can be outlined in the following manner:

- 1:1–9—Paul’s greeting
 - 1:1–3—Salutation
 - 1:4–9—Thanksgiving
- 1:10–4:21—Corinthian division and the cross of Christ
 - 1:10–17—Party factions and the cross
 - 1:18–25—Condemning false wisdom
 - 1:26–31—Reminder of true calling
 - 2:1–5—True preaching of the cross
 - 2:6–16—Paul’s wisdom in a mystery
- 2:6–10—What human senses cannot grasp
- 2:12–16—The mind and Spirit of Christ
- 3:1–4—Paul’s rebuke for people of the flesh
- 3:5–17—The role of the Christian servant in God’s work
- 3:6–9—Laborer in God’s field
- 3:10–15—Builder in God’s building
- 3:16–17—Servant in God’s temple
- 3:18–23—Summary: No more boasting in human leaders

⁶ Williams, D. (2016). [Corinthians, Second Letter to the](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

- 4:1–6—True attitudes for the Christian servant
- 4:7–15—The Corinthians’ pride versus Paul’s conduct in the cross
- 4:16–21—Imitate Paul, their father in the faith
- 5:1–6:20—Discipline your bodies properly
 - 5:1–6:20—Purify yourselves from immorality
 - 5:1–13—Discipline the man with the incestuous relationship
 - 6:1–11—Do not take your brothers to court
 - 6:12–20—Flee immorality
 - 7:1–40—Marriage and celibacy
 - 7:1–5—Spouses wholly devoted to each other
 - 7:6–16—Do not divorce
 - 7:17–38—Remain in your calling
 - 7:39–40—Remarriage guidelines
- 8:1–14:40—Idolatry and true worship
 - 8:1–11:1—Weak and Strong brothers
 - 8:1–13—Take care of the weak
 - 9:1–27—Paul as the exemplary strong brother
 - 9:1–14—Workers are worthy of their wages
 - 9:15–27—Paul willingly renounces these rights
 - 10:1–11:1—Warning to the strong
 - 10:1–13—From Israel’s history
 - 10:14–11:1—Flee idolatry
 - 11:1–16—Head coverings in worship
 - 11:17–34—Unity in taking the Lord’s Supper
 - 12:1–14:34—Spiritual gifts
 - 12:1–7—Unity and diversity
 - 12:11–21—Diversity amongst the gifts like the body
 - 12:22–25—Importance of least visible gifts
 - 12:27–31—Everyone does not have every gift
 - 13:1–13—Use of gifts in love
 - 14:1–28—Gift of Tongues
 - 14:29–40—Gift of Prophecy
- 15:1–58—The resurrection and consummation
 - 15:1–11—Things of first importance
 - 15:12–19—Consequences of denying the resurrection
 - 15:20–28—Significance of the resurrection
 - 15:29–34—Exhortations in light of the resurrection
 - 15:35–49—Answers to objections
 - 15:50–57—The resurrection secures victory
 - 15:58—Be steadfast
- 16:1–24—Letter conclusion
 - 16:1–4—Collection for church in Jerusalem
 - 16:5–9—Travel plans
 - 16:10–20—Coworkers’ news
 - 16:21–24—Farewell

Graeco-Roman Corinth

The city of Corinth is located in modern day Greece on the northeast corner of the Peloponnesian Peninsula. It is about 90 kilometers (48 miles) west of Athens. Its location on the narrow isthmus between the Peloponnesian Peninsula and mainland Greece made it a great place for commerce. Corinth controlled the land route between Italy and Asia and also between two ports: Lechaemum just to the north and Cenchræa to the east.

Near Corinth was a road called the *diolkos*. This road was made in the sixth century BC with large paving stones and was 6 kilometers long (3.7 miles), running from the Saronic Gulf in the east to the Gulf of Corinth in the west. Due to the dangers of sailing around the Peloponnesian Peninsula, ships would unload at Corinth, then haul the cargo in carts along this road to the other side. Many ships used the *diolkos*, and the nearby city of Corinth became a thriving metropolis from charging tariffs on cargo. In Paul's day, there may have been as many as 800,000 inhabitants in Corinth. Ships today use the Corinth canal, which was dug in the 19th century to take the place of the ancient road.

The Corinth that Paul knew was not only wealthy but thoroughly influenced by Graeco-Roman culture. While the history of the city can be dated to the eighth century BC and prospered as a Greek-city state, Rome destroyed it in 146 BC. Julius Caesar then established Corinth as a Roman colony in 44 BC. He also settled his veteran Roman soldiers and their families in the city. Entrepreneurs, traders, freedmen, and slaves swelled the population. Though located in Greece, Corinth was also thoroughly Roman.

Corinth also contained a significant Jewish community. Archaeologists have found a lintel inscribed with the words "Synagogue of the Hebrews" (Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 79). The city of Corinth has also been listed as one of the cities of the Jewish Diaspora (Philo, *On the Embassy to Gaius*, 281–82) (Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 23).

In ancient Corinth, worldly values like honor, prestige, and self-promotion were desired. Traveling bands of speakers called Sophists made their way through Corinth, persuading followers with their rhetoric. The city contained many wealthy benefactors who used their money to advance their reputation. These influences can be seen in 1 Corinthians (Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth*; Litfin, *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation*; Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*).

Ancient Corinthians worshiped a wide range of deities. There was a large temple dedicated to Apollo, the sun god. Corinthians would seek healing from Asclepius, the god of healing and medicine. There were also temples to Roman imperial personalities, such as a temple to Octavia, the sister of the Roman emperor Augustus. People also worshiped Dionysius, Neptune, Pan, Artemis, Zeus, Athena, Poseidon, and Aphrodite.

The Graeco-Roman society in Corinth valued status and power. Wealth was a key to social standing, and many Corinthians worshiped it like a god. The citizens competed for honor, and each promoted his own accomplishments and possessions in order to win praise from others (Savage, *Power through Weakness*, 19–53).

Paul's History with the Corinthians until the Writing of 1 Corinthians

Paul first visited Corinth in AD 49 during his second missionary journey. He lived with Aquila and Priscilla and worked with them as tentmakers (Acts 18:1–18). The first part of Paul's ministry in Corinth was to those who were Jewish—but also to Gentiles who feared God. He was opposed by the Jews in the synagogue and then expelled. However, Titius Justus and Crispus—the synagogue ruler—believed the message (Acts 18:8). The first church meeting may also have met in Titius Justus' house; he was also known as Gaius (1 Cor 1:14).

The second phase of Paul's ministry in Corinth was directed to the Gentiles. The Lord spoke to him in a vision and encouraged him to continue preaching in Corinth. He stayed about 18 months in the city. As a result of his efforts, Paul was the founder of the church in Corinth (1 Cor 4:14–15). Within that church were notable people mentioned within the Bible elsewhere, such as Chloe, Erastus, Tertius, and Stephanas. In AD 51, after the church was founded, Paul left for Ephesus.

After Paul left Corinth, he began writing letters to the church that he founded there. The first letter that he wrote is lost, but we see evidence of it from 1 Cor 5:9–13. That letter chided the Corinthians for their sexually immoral behavior and forbade them from associating with immoral believers who refused to repent.

After he wrote this letter, Paul received a report from Chloe's household at Corinth and learned that there was quarreling and factions in the church (1 Cor 1:11). At about the same time, it seems that Paul also received a letter from the Corinthians asking for him to give answers concerning marriage and divorce, weak and strong brothers, spiritual gifts, and collections. As a result of this report and these questions, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in AD 55 while in Ephesus.

The Message of 1 Corinthians

(This section is adapted from Brown and Twist, *Lexham Bible Guide: 1 Corinthians*, 2013.)

First Corinthians represents Paul's response to the report from Chloe's household and the letter from the Corinthian church (1:11; 7:1). Yet Paul does not write to the Corinthians as an unknown authority figure, but rather as the apostle who founded the church and whose apostolic leadership had been challenged by rival leaders. Paul's main goal in the letter is to teach the Corinthians to think according to true wisdom—which comes only from the Spirit of God—so that they can live holy lives until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ (1:4–8).

Paul communicates this overarching message throughout two main sections of the letter. In the first part of the letter he addresses problems mentioned by Chloe's household (1:10–6:20). In particular, Paul writes about divisions within the Corinthian church and reminds them of their status as the holy temple of God's Spirit (3:16–17). He also condemns the church's deplorable tolerance of sexual immorality (5:1–11) and lawsuits between believers that further fragmented the community (6:1–11). In the second part of the letter, Paul responds to questions raised by the Corinthian believers (7:1–15:58). These questions touch on various issues concerning singleness, marriage, sexual relationships (7:1–40); food sacrificed to idols and challenges to Paul's apostleship (8:1–11:1); the importance of orderliness and intelligibility in worship including the proper use of spiritual gifts (11:2–14:40); and questions about the resurrection of the dead (15:1–58).

Unity of 1 Corinthians

Most scholars view the letter of 1 Corinthians as a unified work. Some, however, view the letter as partitioned for various reasons. One of these is the length of 1 Corinthians; at 16 chapters, it is significantly longer than most of Paul's other letters. It is also lengthier than many other letters written at that time.

Helpful in this matter is the possession of the entire letter in the Papyrus Chester Beatty (P46). This papyrus is dated to AD 200—approximately 150 years after Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. This is significantly earlier than any full manuscripts that we have on the canonical Gospels. Also significant is that in this manuscript, only 1 Cor 9:3; 14:15; and 15:16 are missing.

While the majority of scholars currently favor 1 Corinthians being viewed as a unity, earlier in the 1900s several scholars proposed a variety of partition theories. These individuals offered various opinions on the points of division within 1 Corinthians. The main problematic issues include:

- supposed tensions between 1:10–20 and 11:18–19;
- supposed tensions within 1 Cor 8–10;
- supposed differing sources of information (Schrage, *Brief*).

J. Weiss viewed 1 Corinthians as a composite of two letters but later changed his mind, arguing that the letter was composed of three separate letters (Weiss, *Earliest Christianity*). Weiss' revised theory sees one letter as being 10:1–23; 6:12–20; 10:23–30; and 11:2–4. A second letter would be 7–8; 9:1–23; 12–16. A third letter would include 1:1–6:11. W. Schmithals proposes nine letters that then formed 1 Corinthians. These divisions differed significantly from Weiss' proposal. G. Sellin viewed the letter as

composed of three letters; Khiok-kng Yeo, four separate documents; and R. Jewett, six separate letters (Yeo, *Rhetorical*).

Of the partition theories, M. C. de Boer provides the most plausible alternative. He postulates that Paul stopped writing and then resumed twice following the visit of Chloe's people. By de Boer's thinking, Paul addressed the envy and jealousy at Corinth in 1 Cor 1–4. Then Stephanas arrived with the Corinthians' letter, which led to Paul's responses in chapters 7, 8, and 12 with the greetings in chapter 16. Chapters 5–6 were then initiated from conversations that were held by the Stephanas delegation (de Boer, "Composition").

Several aspects of these theories are striking. Weiss and Schmithals have changed their minds on the identity of the various portions that make up 1 Corinthians, indicating uncertainty on their parts. Also, these scholars cannot come to agreement as to the various portions that make up the letter. When compared with recent studies that examine thematic coherence within 1 Corinthians, it is more likely that the letter is a unified whole. There are many scholars who advocate for the integrity of 1 Corinthians, including G. Fee, J. C. Hurd, H. Merkelein, J. Murphy-O'Connor, F. Lang, R. F. Collins, W. Schrage, and M. Mitchell.

Mitchell's study is significant on this matter. In her work *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, Mitchell depicts 1 Corinthians as a single letter that is united by the theme of promoting unity within a divided Corinthian church. Against the background of Greek deliberative rhetoric, she examines 1 Corinthians in relation to Graeco-Roman deliberative rhetoric, using 1:10 as the thesis statement in the epistle. In her view, 1:11–17 contains the facts of disunity at Corinth. The majority of the remaining text provides arguments for unity. In 1 Corinthians 1:18–4:20, she finds Paul censuring Corinthian factionalism. The next section, 5:1–11:1, encourages the unity of the Corinthian community against outside defilement. The following section, 11:2–14:40, details manifestations of Corinthian disunity when coming together. The last section points to the resurrection as a common rallying point for unity (15:1–58). Her overall analysis concludes decidedly on the epistle's overall unity.

Several recent commentaries on 1 Corinthians identify various thematic ideas that would unite the entire letter:

- Thiselton's early work identified the problem in Corinth as an over-realized eschatology and a hyper spirituality (Thiselton, "Eschatology"). He later revised this, suggesting instead that the Corinthians misunderstood grace and the proclamation of the cross and resurrection within a secular Graeco-Roman society (Thiselton, *Corinthians*).
- Dale Martin and A. R. Brown also see the letter as Paul's gospel confronting the secularity of Graeco-Roman society. For them, 1 Corinthians is a reproclamation of the different values of the cross and resurrection. The virtues of love and respect for the less esteemed are important counters in a society focused on status and wealth (Martin, *Body*; Brown, *Cross*).
- Ciampa and Rosner understand Paul as addressing immorality and idolatry. Rather than seeing the letter partitioned, they see it organized around encouragements to purity and exhortations against two vices—immorality and idolatry.

These recent studies and commentaries all favor seeing 1 Corinthians as one letter rather than separate ones that were sewn together. Current scholarship clearly favors viewing 1 Corinthians as a unity.

Major Interpretive Issues within the Letter

Paul mentions many topics in his letter—human wisdom, food sacrificed to idols, head coverings, and others—but gives little explanation. His readers would have understood these matters, but 2,000 years later, they are not as clear. There are many conflicting interpretations of this letter. It is widely accepted that Paul was the author and that he wrote the letter from Ephesus between AD 55–56. There is also widespread agreement that it was accepted into the canon quite early. The two contested points concern the nature of Paul's opposition at Corinth and the unity of the letter.

Paul's Opposition at Corinth at the Time of Writing 1 Corinthians

Due to the varied history of the Corinthian letters, it is necessary to be clear about the opponents within each letter (see extended history of Paul and the Corinthians in “Second Letter to the Corinthians”). Within 1 Corinthians, the opposition is internal (compare 1 Cor 4:18; 15:12). There is no mention of specific opponents—unlike 2 Corinthians, in which Paul addresses certain men who had slipped into the community (2 Cor 3:1; 11:13–15).

Some believe that the problem is false teaching within the Corinthian church (Goulder, *Paul*; Baur, *Paul*). They see the mention of party factions in 1 Cor 1:12 and 3:22 as showing that different teachings from Peter and Paul are the cause of the conflict. However, this assertion does not make sense of the rest of the letter, as Peter is not mentioned.

Others have proposed different false teachings within the Corinthian community; Schmithals and Winter have proposed Gnosticism as the source. However, this is unlikely because Gnosticism originated in the second century (Schmithals, *Gnosticism*; Winter, *Pneumatiker*, Wilckens, *Weisheit*). Some have assumed that the false teaching originated from charismatics or from a misunderstanding of the resurrection (Baumann, *Mitte und Norm*; Käsemann, *Jesus*). Although it is likely that the Corinthians misunderstood many of these issues, none of them seems to be the prime element that Paul refutes throughout 1 Corinthians.

J.C. Hurd and J. Drane have claimed that Paul is correcting his own previous teaching (Hurd, *Origin*; Drane, *Paul*). However, this is unlikely—Paul does not draw attention in 1 Corinthians to any previous errors of his that needed fixing. Others have assumed that those with Jewish viewpoints are the ones causing difficulties (Davis, *Wisdom and Spirit*; Pearson, *Terminology*; Horsley, “Wisdom of Words”). However, Paul does not mention Jewish opposition (2 Cor 11:13–15). Furthermore, Paul would not address concerns about idolatry if his opposition had only been encouraging a more “Jewish” outlook (compare 1 Cor 10).

Others have found the source of Paul’s opposition to be a misunderstanding of eschatology within the Corinthian church. In 1978, Anthony Thiselton proposed that the Corinthians had an over-realized eschatology (Thiselton, “Realized Eschatology”). In other words, they were living as if the end of time had already come. This triumphalism of the Christians in Corinth distorted their view of ethics and worship. They were believing that the kingdom of God had come and thus were acting rich, powerful, and wise (1 Cor 4:8–10) (Barrett, *First Corinthians*).

Another suggestion is that the source of the opposition was a personal conflict between Paul and the Corinthians. Gordon Fee sees the opposition between Paul and the Corinthians as evident from 1 Cor 4 and 9, in which Paul defends his apostolic ministry. His demands that the Corinthians submit to his apostolic authority supports this viewpoint further (14:37–38; Fee, *First Corinthians*, 5ff). However, the Corinthians did seek Paul’s opinion on several matters, and he feels that he can ask the Corinthians to contribute to the collection for saints in Jerusalem (16:1–4). Thus, while certain passages exhibit conflict with Paul, this is not the main opponent in his writing of 1 Corinthians.

A better proposal for the source of the opposition comes from those who have read the letter in relation to the Graeco-Roman background of 1 Corinthians, including Bruce Winter, Duane Litfin, and Stephen Pogoloff. They have drawn connections with the Sophistic movement that was active in cities like Corinth. The Sophists were traveling speakers who would use rhetoric to draw people away to follow their wisdom. They were divisive—they made disciples, boasted of their own abilities, and demanded respect. If they had any influence on the church at Corinth, this probably would have led to division amongst the Christian community (Winter, *Paul and Philo*; Litfin, *St. Paul’s Theology*; Pogoloff, *Logos*). In this case, it would make sense for Paul to preach the cross rather than human wisdom (compare 1 Cor 1:17–2:5).

Further connections to first-century Graeco-Roman culture infiltrating the Corinthian church have been noticed. Clarke sees that secular leadership practice has been evident within the Corinthian community from his reading of 1 Cor 1–6 (Clarke, *Secular*). Chow sees Graeco-Roman patronage significantly influencing the life of the church. Basing his view that there were at least a few influential people within the Corinthian church on 1:26, he finds the problems at Corinth were due to a network of patrons within the church. These used their status or riches to exercise influence over a group who

depended on them for some favors (Chow, *Patronage*, 87–93). In *Enmity in Corinth*, Peter Marshall finds Graeco-Roman social conventions throughout Paul’s address to the Corinthians. Ben Witherington has also examined 1 Corinthians to find many other Graeco-Roman ideas infiltrating the community at Corinth (Witherington, *Conflict*).

Another likely solution is that worldly Graeco-Roman values were the source of opposition. This solution has led Thiselton to modify his view on over-realized eschatology and admit secular influence within the Corinthian church (Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 40). This viewpoint is reflected in major commentaries on the letter—even those that are not directly concerned with examining the Graeco-Roman background (compare Ciampa, *First Corinthians*).

Theological Unity of the Letter

A second important issue for understanding 1 Corinthians is the letter’s unity. Those who propose a unified letter describe a variety of unifying themes.

Rhetorical studies on 1 Corinthians effectively argue that the letter was originally a single whole. These studies affirm that Paul’s appeal for unity in 1:10 not only influences the immediate chapters, but can be seen to extend throughout the entire letter. For example, Paul shows concern for unity in chapter 1, but also in his statements on church discipline in chapter 5; on civil litigation in chapter 6; on weak and strong brothers in chapters 8–10; on the Lord’s Supper in chapter 10; and on the proper use of spiritual gifts in chapters 12–14. This viewpoint agrees with the understanding of the earliest interpreters of the letter—the writer of *First Clement* and Ignatius of Antioch. Several scholars see 1 Corinthians as an example of deliberative rhetoric—an ancient Greek means of arguing that addressed both the heart and the intellect and compelled an audience to come to a decision. These scholars have seen the influence of this rhetoric in 1 Corinthians and view the entire letter as an appeal for unity (Mitchell, *Rhetoric*; Wuellner, “Greek”; Kennedy, *Interpretation*).

Others see the theological themes of 1 Corinthians as proof of its original unity. Instead of being a series of unconnected ethical instructions, 1 Corinthians is a letter in which the role of the cross and resurrection are everywhere at the center. Paul appeals to the death of Jesus in order to promote a community ethic consistent with the values shown by His death (Pickett, *Cross*). The cross plays a clear role in Paul’s instruction for unity in chapter 1, Christian stewardship in chapter 4, community exclusion in chapter 5, civil litigation in chapter 6, weak and strong brothers in chapters 8–10, and the Lord’s Supper in chapter 11 (Williams, “Living”). First Corinthians is about the reproclamation of a different value set based on grace, the cross, and the resurrection (Brown, *Cross*; compare Martin, *Body*). W. Schrage sees Paul’s proclamation of the cross as “ground and criterion of church and apostle” (Schrage, *Der erste Brief*, 1:165).

Another newer approach to proving the letter’s original unity is that of Ciampa and Rosner. Rather than seeing the letter partitioned or organized around the theme of unity or the reproclamation of the cross and resurrection, they see the composition of the letter organized around purity and vices: immorality and idolatry. These are the two main Gentile vices, and they consume the majority of the letter. Paul argues against immorality in chapters 5–6. In chapter 7, he promotes sexual purity through the proper use of the body in both marriage and celibacy. In chapters 8–10—in the context of weak and strong brothers and food offered to idols—Paul encourages the Corinthians to flee idolatry (compare 6:18; 10:14). He then discusses how proper traditions of worship and use of spiritual gifts in love foster right worship of God (1 Cor 11; 12–14; Ciampa, *Corinthians*).

Ciampa and Rosner also discuss the role of the Old Testament in 1 Corinthians. There are 18 citations from or allusions to Old Testament material found within the letter. Many of these come from the books of Deuteronomy and Isaiah. Other less explicit references to Scripture have also been noted within the book, and thus, a greater amount of Jewish influence may be seen than previously acknowledged (compare Hays, *Echoes and Corinthians*; Rosner, *Paul*; Kuck, *Judgment*, Tomson, *Paul*; Williams, *Wisdom*). Further attempts to show the letter’s unity will likely involve an examination of the influence of the letter’s Graeco-Roman setting, the Jewish Scripture Paul quotes, and the role of the cross of Christ.

Theology of 1 Corinthians

First Corinthians is filled with many ethical injunctions. While Paul could have simply declared “do this” or “do not do this,” appealed to community dynamics to resolve issues, or forcefully used his own authority, he instead employed theological arguments to convince his audience. Theological ideas are found multiple places throughout the letter; three of the most important are:

1. the cross;
2. the Christian recapitulation of Old Testament theology;
3. the lordship of Christ.

The Cross

The role of the cross of Christ is the most significant theological idea within 1 Corinthians, just as the cross is pivotal to understanding much of the ethics of the New Testament (Hays, *Moral Vision*). Paul appealed to the death of Jesus in order to promote a community ethos and ethic consistent with the ideals and values it symbolized (R. Pickett, *Cross*; Williams, “Living”). As Paul begins to address party strife and division at Corinth, he ties these ideas directly to the cross in 1 Cor 1:17. Surprisingly, the gospel message of the cross is the first theological item he uses to encourage unity—he could have simply urged the Corinthians to be united without referring to Jesus’ death at all.

The cross is found throughout Paul’s arguments for unity. In 1 Cor 1:26–31, Paul shows how all of the Corinthians—regardless of their wisdom, power, and wealth—are saved by the message of the cross and can boast only in it. Thus, the cross draws the divided Corinthians’ attention to the one calling that they share in Christ (1:24, 26). The message of the cross cuts across divisions based on worldly claims of wisdom, power, and wealth and treats everyone the same in saving them.

In 1 Cor 2:1–5, when Paul speaks about his manner of preaching, the cross functions as a unifying factor. It helps to unify the Corinthians by causing them to focus on the one message that Paul, their founding father, preached (compare 2:1–5; 4:14–15). He claims only to know Christ crucified and preach the cross. In these ways, Paul uses the cross to create unity amid a divided situation.

While the cross is not explicit in 1 Cor 4 (as it is in 1 Cor 1), it exerts influence there as well (see Fee, *Corinthians*; Fitzgerald, *Vessel*; Marxsen, *Foundations*; Schrage, “Leid”). As Paul describes his apostleship, he declares himself to be weak, in disrepute, reviled, and persecuted. He declares that he has “the sentence of death” and perceives himself to be a “spectacle to the world” and the “scum of the earth” (4:10–13). All these are aspects of the cross, and the effect of these descriptions is to connect Paul’s leadership directly with the cross—the message that he preached (1:17; 2:1–5). While other leaders in Corinth were fascinated with human wisdom, riches, power, and honor, Paul’s leadership style has a theological basis in his theology of the cross.

Paul will also apply the cross to the problem of exclusion in 1 Cor 5. In this chapter, Paul rebukes the Corinthians because they have done nothing about a man in their midst who was caught in incest. In the midst of this argument, Paul writes, “Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (5:7 NIV). As in previous situations, the cross works as theological support in a section that could have been argued solely sociologically.

Cross-related ideas are also found within Paul’s next ethical injunction in 1 Cor 6. In the midst of arguing against civil litigation between Christian brothers, Paul states in 6:7, “The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?” (NIV) These questions recall Paul’s example of disregarding himself in 4:11–13—a passage that concerned Christian leadership in light of the cross (Rosner, *Paul*). In this case of civil litigation, Christ’s death functions as the basis for self-sacrifice. Rather than choosing the ways of Graeco-Roman secular society and flaunting their status or social privilege, the Corinthians should look to Christ crucified as a model for sacrificing their rights for one another.

In 1 Corinthians 10:32–11:1, Paul writes, “Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ”

(NIV). These are the final verses from Paul's discussion about weak and strong brothers. Throughout much of 1 Corinthians, Paul has been advocating for the protection of the weak brothers. As he concludes this three-chapter section, he refers again to the cross. This passage contains the matter of self-sacrifice—a theme linked with the cross earlier. He also repeats the imitation idea that was found in chapter 4, a section with influence from the cross. As imitation is now clearly linked with Christ, who went to the cross, it thus recalls the theological foundation of the cross within 1 Corinthians.

A direct reference to the cross appears in 11:17–34, where Paul passes along a tradition that he received from the Lord regarding the Lord's Supper—the body and blood of Christ. The cross can also be seen here in that Paul recognizes that the tradition he is delivering to the Corinthians is from the night that the Lord was betrayed before His crucifixion (11:23). Furthermore, according to Paul, the remembrance of this tradition results in the Corinthians proclaiming Christ's death on the cross until He comes again (11:26). This section then encourages self-sacrifice by waiting for others before eating together.

Sacrificial love that is found within 1 Cor 13 also carries with it cross-related ideas. This chapter, which is found between discussions on spiritual gifts, provides a model for how these gifts are to be practiced (Ciampa, *First Corinthians*). Rather than using a gift like tongues or prophecy for one's own benefit, Paul encourages the Corinthians to forego their rights (see especially 13:4–7). His words echo ideas about the cross that have been found prominently within other passages in 1 Corinthians.

One final appearance of the cross indicates its theological importance. At the end of 1 Corinthians, following many chapters of correction, Paul mentions the things of first importance. In 1 Corinthians 15:3–5 he writes, "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve." Of first importance is the cross of Christ. Thus, it makes sense that this is of influence within the rest of 1 Corinthians.

Old Testament Ideas

First Corinthians draws a significant amount of its theology from the Old Testament Scriptures. There are 18 quotations from or allusions to the Old Testament within 1 Corinthians that have been identified in major studies on Paul's use of Scripture (Koch, *Schrift*; Stanley, *Paul*). These come from books including Genesis, Job, Psalms, Jeremiah, and Hosea (Williams, *Sources*). Of particular interest are the large number of references from Deuteronomy and Isaiah.

Deuteronomy. Within the Pentateuch, the book of Deuteronomy explains the response to God's calling His people out of bondage in Egypt. The book calls God's people to worship Him at a particular place and in a particular way (Deut 12; 14:23–24; 16:1–11). God's people are to be careful especially to avoid idolatry (6:14–15; 12:1–6) and immorality (22:13–30; 23:2, 17–18; 31:16). As a result, Moses appoints judges (1), urges the people to heed his instruction (particularly the Ten Commandments; 6:1–13), to celebrate the Passover (Deut 16), and to inaugurate the covenant (Deut 29).

Deuteronomy as a whole has a sense of warning to it—God's people are in danger of failing. In Deuteronomy 2, God's people are compared with the pagan nations. Deuteronomy 31:16–18 already anticipates the Israelites' failure to keep the covenant. Throughout the book, there are repeated appeals to remember, pay attention, and heed Moses' words (5:1; 6:1–14; 7:12–15). Other sections also anticipate Israel's inability to keep God's laws (12:28–32; 13:18; 31:16–18; 32:19–26). There is, however, a sense of promise within Deuteronomy on the condition that God's people respond obediently (11:13–15, 22–25; 15:5–6; 28:1–14).

The book of 1 Corinthians continues many of the ethical principles that Deuteronomy encouraged. For example, Paul promotes the appointing of judges (1 Cor 6:1–6) and gives exhortations for the keeping of the Passover meal (5:7; 10:16–21; 11:23–26). Particularly striking is the emphasis on fleeing immorality and idolatry (6:18; 10:14). These are the only two vices discussed in 1 Corinthians that are "to be fled." Other sections within 1 Corinthians urge the Corinthians to clean out impure elements amongst them—such as immorality (1 Cor 5). Sexual purity is the concern of several other sections of 1 Corinthians (6:16–19; 7:1–40).

Idolatry is the focus of 1 Cor 8–10. Paul begins his discussion in 8:7–13 with warnings about food sacrificed to idols. The subtleties of idolatry are the concern of 10:12–33. Instead of repeating the failures of God’s people from the time of the Pentateuch, the Corinthians are to “do all to the glory of God” (10:31). In 1 Corinthians 11–14, to prevent the Corinthians from falling into idolatrous practices, Paul promotes the proper worship of God (Ciampa, *First Corinthians*).

Isaiah. As with the book of Deuteronomy, the book of Isaiah contributes significant influence to 1 Corinthians. The opening two chapters in 1 Corinthians contain several references to Isaiah, providing an explanation of the two types of salvation-wisdom that Paul opposes and endorses (Williams, *Wisdom*).

The first type of salvation-wisdom—one that Paul opposes (1 Cor 1)—is human wisdom that derives from the nations of this world and their rulers (1 Cor 1:23; 2:6). Paul quotes Isaiah 29:14 in 1 Corinthians 1:19 to argue that human wisdom is the opposite of the plan of God and will be brought to nothing. The larger passage of Isaiah 29 depicts those who follow human wisdom as following the path to destruction. By referring to human wisdom with reference to Isaiah, Paul explains why he opposes mixing the message of the cross with human wisdom: Following human wisdom leads to destruction, for it rejects the cross of Christ.

The second type of salvation-wisdom in 1 Corinthians is true wisdom, which triumphs and which comes from God (1 Cor 2). In 1 Corinthians 2:9, Paul refers to Isa 64:3 in conjunction with Isa 65:17. In both Isaiah’s original context and Paul’s use of the quotation, God’s plan will be a dramatic one that surprises those with a worldly mindset. The context of Isa 64:3 concerns the hidden nature of God’s revelation among people. This overlaps with Paul’s thoughts in 1 Cor 2:7–8, where he describes a secret and hidden wisdom that none of the rulers of this age understood. That wisdom is hidden from some, but it is revealed to those whom the Lord calls to Him. The context of Isa 65:17 suggests a similar idea, as the redeemed are able to see and appreciate God’s revelation with the new creation of the heavens and the earth.

Isaiah’s influence continues into Paul’s discussion about the mind in 1 Cor 2, where he refers to Isa 40:13. Here Paul speaks of the mind that is able to understand the ways of the Lord within history. Those without the Spirit cannot comprehend it, but those to whom the Spirit is given are able to understand (1 Cor 2:12–16). When read in the context of Isa 40:13, the understanding mind is found in a series of questions that indicate that God alone is able to reveal His mind and His ways (Isa 40:12, 14). Seen in context of Isaiah, the “mind” refers to the salvation plan of God, which is also an overlap with the wise plan of God in 1 Cor 2.

Isaiah’s theological influence regarding wisdom can also be seen in 1 Cor 14, where Paul quotes Isa 28:11–12 in his discussion concerning tongues. In this section, Paul challenges the Corinthians about using indiscernible tongues during worship. Rather than simply saying not to use them, he refers to Isa 28, in which the inability to understand language referred to being captured by God’s opponents.

When Paul concludes his discussion in 1 Corinthians 15 regarding the resurrection, he also refers directly to Isaiah. Paul quotes from Isa 22:13 in 1 Cor 15:32 when he writes, “If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’ ” The main ideas from the context of Isaiah fit with a world without a resurrection. Isaiah 22 concerns a siege that is due to occur upon the people of Jerusalem. Rather than repenting, they decide to “party like there is no tomorrow” since there is no hope (Hays, *Corinthians*). This context of Isa 22 fits the hopeless existence without a resurrection that Paul is describing in 1 Cor 15. Hopelessness leads to indulgence.

One final explicit reference to Isaiah is found within the section that speaks of the believer’s resurrection body in 1 Cor 15. Paul quotes from Isa 25:8 when he states, “When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory’ ” (1 Cor 15:54 NIV). In this section there is a sense of victory, thanksgiving, and celebration. Overtones from the Isaianic banquet from Isa 25:8–9 can also be detected.

The lordship of Christ is the final significant theological theme. Paul encourages his readers to acknowledge this lordship from the beginning of his letter: “To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours” (1:2). He then stresses Christ’s lordship repeatedly throughout 1 Corinthians. The word “Lord” occurs 56 times in the letter, and the phrase “Lord Jesus Christ” occurs eight times. Jesus is referred to as “Lord Jesus” four times. Within the first 10 verses of 1 Cor, Jesus is explicitly referred to as “Lord” five times. The epistle concludes with a blessing in the name of the “Lord Jesus” (16:23).

Throughout the letter, Paul asks the Corinthians to change their behavior so that it might be in line with Christ’s lordship:

- The church must be unified so that it reflects the mind of Christ (1:10; 2:16).
- The church be cleansed from the man caught in incest so that it might reflect the sacrifice of Christ (5:7).
- It is improper to have relations with a prostitute as that violates the body of Christ (6:18–20).
- The Corinthians should not eating food sacrificed to idols, since it can harm the conscience of some for whom Christ died (8:11).
- When the Corinthians are worshipping corporately, head coverings or the lack of wearing head coverings reflects the headship of Christ (11:3).
- The Lord’s Supper is to be observed by discerning the body of Christ (11:29).
- Spiritual gifts are to be practiced by using them in relation to the Christian body, of which Christ is the head (12:27).

Paul even stresses that all of history is about the subjection of all things under Christ’s feet (15:24–28).

Reception of 1 Corinthians

First Corinthians is one of the best received documents from the New Testament within early church history. In the writings that can be dated to the late first century and early second century, there are many places in which references from 1 Corinthians can be found. Quotations are found within *First Clement*, the *Letters of Ignatius*, and the *Letter of Polycarp to the Philippians*. It is also likely that 1 Corinthians can be recognized within the *Shepherd of Hermas*. Portions of 1 Corinthians may possibly be found within the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the *Didache*, and *Second Clement* (Oxford Historical Society, *Reception*). Later church fathers such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine all referred to 1 Corinthians. The church fathers John Chrysostom and Origen wrote a series of homilies on 1 Corinthians (Kovacs, *Corinthians*). Additionally, Cyril of Alexandria and Theodoret wrote commentaries on this epistle. In his *Handbook on Faith, Hope, and Love*, Augustine uses 1 Corinthians as the foundational text for his treatise.

The reception within *First Clement* is especially significant, as it is one of the earliest books written following the New Testament (AD 95–97) and was highly respected within the early church. Some even placed it on par with other New Testament writings. Not only does *First Clement* quote portions of 1 Corinthians, but it reveals that the letter is to be considered as authoritative. Clement writes in *1 Clement* 47:1, “Take up the epistle of the blessed Apostle Paul. What did he write to you at the time when the Gospel first began to be preached? Truly, under the inspiration of the Spirit, he wrote to you concerning himself, and Cephas, and Apollos, because even then parties had been formed among you” (Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene*).

This quotation indicates that Paul’s exhortation for unity found in 1 Cor 1–3, and other portions of 1 Corinthians, was still seen to be authoritative some 40 years after the time that Paul wrote. This is particularly striking since Paul’s relationship with the Corinthians was evidently one that fluctuated, as is clear from sections within 2 Corinthians (compare 2 Cor 2:1–5; 7:2–4; 10:1–5, 10; 13:1–10).

Besides being cited within early Christian literature, 1 Corinthians was received into the earliest lists of the New Testament canon. In fact, it is found in all significant canon listings within the early church.

Even when the heretic Marcion composed his shortened list of canonical books in AD 140, he included 1 Corinthians. The following early canon lists include 1 Corinthians:

- the Muratorian Canon (AD 180);
- the listing of canonical books in the Codex Barococcio (AD 206);
- Eusebius' canonical listing (AD 325–40);
- the Canon of Cyril of Jerusalem (AD 350);
- the Cheltenham Canon (AD 360);
- Athanasius' canon listing in his *Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter* (AD 367).

One of the most significant receptions of a portion of 1 Corinthians can be found in the early Christian creeds. The Nicene Creed borrows wording from 1 Cor 15:4 when it reads, “On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures.” The words “suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried” may have come from 15:3. It is also possible that 8:4–6 influenced, “I believe in one God, the Father Almighty.” The phrase “resurrection of the body” may have been influenced by 15:49–58. The Apostles' Creed can claim influence from the same texts.

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DRAKE WILLIAMS⁷

The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the: CORINTHIANS

Author: Paul

Date: A.D. 56

Theme: Resolving Doctrinal and Practical Church Problems and Growth of a Church in Christ

Key Words: The Cross, Sexual Sins, Spiritual Gifts, Love, the Resurrection

Author. The authenticity of 1 Corinthians has never seriously been challenged. In style, language, and theology, the letter belongs to Paul.

Occasion and Date. Paul established the church at Corinth about A.D. 50–51, when he spent eighteen months there on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1–17). He continued to carry on correspondence and exercise care for the church after his departure (see 1 Cor. 5:9; 2 Cor. 12:14). During his three-year ministry in Ephesus, on his third missionary journey (Acts 19), he had received disturbing reports concerning moral laxity among believers in Corinth. To remedy the situation, he sent the church a letter (1 Cor. 5:9–11), which has since been lost. Shortly afterward, a delegation sent by Chloe, a member of the church in Corinth, reported to Paul concerning the existence of divisive factions in the church. Before he could write a corrective letter, another delegation from Corinth arrived with a letter asking him certain questions (1 Cor. 7:1; 16:17). Paul immediately sent Timothy to Corinth to help correct conditions there (1 Cor. 4:17). He then wrote the letter that we know as 1 Corinthians, expecting it to reach Corinth before Timothy (16:10). Since Paul apparently wrote the letter near the end of his Ephesian ministry (16:8), it may be dated about A.D. 56.

Purpose. 1 Corinthians is a pastoral letter, written to resolve doctrinal and practical problems within the local church. Paul's authorship gives the letter apostolic application to all "the churches of God" (11:16).

Background. The letter reveals some of the typical Greek cultural problems of Paul's day, including the gross sexual immorality of the city of Corinth. The Greeks were known for their idolatry, divisive philosophies, spirit of litigation, and rejection of a bodily resurrection. Corinth was one of the most important commercial cities of the day and controlled much of the shipping between the East and the West. It was located on the narrow neck of land which served as a land-bridge between the mainland of Greece and the Peloponnesian peninsula. The city was infamous for its sensuality and sacred prostitution.

⁷ Williams, D. (2016). [Corinthians, First Letter to the](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Even its name became a notorious proverb: “to Corinthianize” meant to practice prostitution. The city’s chief deity was Aphrodite (Venus), the goddess of licentious love, and a thousand professional prostitutes served in the temple dedicated to her worship. The spirit of the city showed up in the church and explains the kind of problems the people faced.

It also reveals some of the problems the former pagans had in not transferring previous religious experiences to the ministry experience of the Holy Spirit. They may have associated some of the frenzied antics of paganism with the exercise of spiritual gifts (see 12:2).

Content. The letter consists of Paul’s response to ten separate problems: a sectarian spirit, incest, lawsuits, fornication, marriage and divorce, eating food offered to idols, wearing of the veil, the Lord’s Supper, spiritual gifts, and the resurrection of the body.

Personal Application.

No epistle in the New Testament gives a clearer insight into the life of the first-century church than 1 Corinthians. In it Paul provides straightforward instructions for such moral and theological problems as sectarianism, spiritual immaturity, church discipline, ethical differences, the role of the sexes and the proper use of spiritual gifts. Where these same problems exist in the modern church, the remedies are the same. Those from non-Pentecostal or non-charismatic churches may receive a fresh challenge from the vitality and spiritual gifts evident in the Corinthian church, and may lay aside traditional prejudices against such things. Those from charismatic and Pentecostal churches, where worship is less structured and spiritual gifts are prominent, may reexamine their own practices in the light of Paul’s guidelines for congregational services.

Christ Revealed. The letter contains an unmatched revelation of the Cross of Christ as a counter to all human boasting (chs. 1–4). Paul cites Christ as our example in all behavior (11:1) and describes the church as His body (ch. 12). Especially important are the powerful consequences of Christ’s resurrection for the whole of creation (ch. 15).

The Holy Spirit at Work. The manifestations or the gifts of the Spirit make up the best known passages about the Holy Spirit (chs. 2–14). But we should not overlook the role of the Holy Spirit in revealing the things of God to the human spirit in a way that prevents all grounds for pride (2:1–13). Perhaps most illuminating amid current debate in the church at large is the way the apostle leads the Corinthians into a balanced employment of speaking with tongues, affirming this practice and refusing any the right to prohibit it (ch. 14).

Outline of 1 Corinthians *Introduction with greetings and thanksgiving 1:1–9*

- I. The problem of a sectarian spirit which arose from a preference for religious leaders because of their supposed superior wisdom 1:0–4:21
 - A. The contrast between human and divine wisdom over the Cross shows the fallacy of a sectarian spirit which stems from human wisdom 1:0–3:4
 - B. The role of religious leaders show they are important but never the cause for boasting 3:5–4:5
 - C. An open rebuke by ironic comparison of the Corinthians’ pride with Paul’s foolishness 4:6–21
- II. The problem of internal church discipline brought on by a case of incest 5:1–13
- III. The problem of lawsuits between Christians before public courts 6:1–11
- IV. The problem of a sexual misuse of the body from a misapplication of Paul’s ethical teaching 6:12–20
- V. The problem of the relationship between the secular sphere and the believer’s spiritual life, especially in the areas of sex, marriage, and slavery 7:1–40
- VI. The problem of ethical differences between brethren caused by the eating of food offered to idols 8:1–11:1
 - A. The basic principle of love versus knowledge 8:1–13
 - B. Paul’s personal example in foregoing his rights 9:1–27
 - C. The application of the principle in attitude and action 10:1–11:1
- VII. The problem of the role of the sexes in light of the removal of the veil 11:2–16
- VIII. The problem of desecrating the Lord’s Supper 11:17–34
- IX. The problem of spiritual manifestations which arose from a misuse of the gift of tongues 12:1–14:40
 - A. The need for variety 12:1–31
 - B. The need for love 13:1–13
 - C. The need for control 14:1–40
- X. The problem of the resurrection of the dead 15:1–58
- XI. Concluding personal remarks 16:1–24⁸

⁸ Hayford, J. W. (Ed.). (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., Ro 16:26). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

1:2 Paul addressed the Corinthian believers as saints (Gk. *hagiois*, lit. “set apart” or “holy” ones), a favorite description for Christians in this corrective epistle. He used the word more than 60 times in his letters. Through Jesus, believers have been forgiven and set apart from sin. Paul reminded the Corinthians of this fact. They were saints—God’s holy, sanctified people—and they ought to be acting as such.

HERESIES: FALSE DOCTRINES IN THE CHURCH

Heresy (Gk. *hairesis*) is properly defined as “the taking” of a choice, option, way, plan, or philosophic set of principles. The basic idea is “choice.” The word most often denotes the existence within a parent body of a group of self-willed individuals who have a sectarian spirit. However, the term was also used in the New Testament to refer to Christians who were considered separatists or sectarians by some of the Jewish religious leaders (Acts 24:14; 28:22).

Paul refers to heretic parties appearing within the church and implies that these divisions demonstrate the falsity or genuineness of our faith (1 Cor. 11:18, 19). Heretic divisions occur when God’s people are not walking in the Spirit (Gal. 5:20), and heretics are to be admonished twice, then disciplined or rejected (Titus 3:10).

“Heresy” in the sense of doctrinal error occurs when the person and work of Jesus Christ is denied (2 Pet. 2:1). Gnosticism (Col. 2:8–23; 1 Tim. 6:20) and Docetism (1 John 4:2, 3; 2 John 7) are among the doctrinal heresies challenged in the New Testament.

Modern heresies show a startling resemblance to the ancient ones. The New Age movement tends to regard everything as a part of God rather than acknowledging God as transcendent. Heresies often reject the full deity or full humanity of Christ and typically add some form of human works to the finished work of Christ on the Cross.

See also John 1:4, note; Acts 5:17; 15:5; notes on Cults (2 Cor. 11); Goddess Religion (Ex. 20); Idolatry (Is. 42); Liberation Theology (John 8)

1:11 Contentions (Gk. *eris*) suggests a “sharp challenge,” “quarreling,” or “strife.” Paul received information about these “contentions” from members of Chloe’s household (see Chloe).

Chloe

A Founding Mother of the Faith

Paul’s letter to the Corinthian church addresses the influences of their pagan culture. The apostle is disturbed that members of Chloe’s household have reported among believers disputes which threaten to divide the local body at Corinth. Regardless of whether or not Chloe was from Corinth, she was certainly well known by the Corinthians.

The term “household” could mean immediate members of her family, fellow-worshippers of the church meeting in her house, or servants belonging to her. Whether those in Chloe’s household were involved in the disputes or merely relating details about the group is uncertain. They did report the matter to the apostle Paul.

Little is known about Chloe, but Paul called her by name. This passage supports the fact that Paul had many women as friends and he esteemed them as co-heirs in the gospel. In contrast to their places in secular society, women were considered to be valuable and influential participants in the building up of the Christian church.

See also notes on Influence (Esth. 4); Feminine Leadership (1 Sam. 25)

1:21 Quarreling and divisiveness had erupted among the Corinthians in the name of “wisdom.” The people within the church had aligned themselves with various Christian leaders, boasting in the wisdom of one over the other. The theme of wisdom dominated Paul’s discussion (1 Cor. 1–3). Paul argued that God’s wisdom is foolishness to humanly-conceived wisdom. On their own, people fail to know God. They can only gain a true knowledge of God through the Spirit, whom they receive upon believing the “foolishness” of the gospel. Paul asserted that it pleased God to arrange things in this manner. If God were to be found through human wisdom, He would only be accessible to the elite. But by extending salvation through His “foolishness” (which is wiser than men, 1 Cor. 1:25), God forces His creation to trust and glory in Him, and not in the wisdom of sinful flesh (v. 29).

1:26–28 Paul explained that the gospel of Christ appears foolish to human reason. To further his point, he encouraged the Corinthians to remember their own humble origins. According to human standards, most of them were not intelligent, influential, or rich. On the contrary, they were members of the common lower class and would have been considered weak, lowly, and even despised. Nevertheless, God called them. A “call” (Gk. *klesis*) is an invitation or an official summons by God to enter into a personal relationship with Him. A call is not based on human wisdom or status but on the grace of God who, in His “foolishness,” has chosen the unworthy things of the world to shame those of high human worth. This was done so that His chosen people would glory in *Him* and not in their own status or accomplishments.

2:6–8 God’s wisdom is a “mystery” that was formerly hidden from human eyes but was revealed through Christ and made understandable to believers through the Spirit. The Corinthians had the wisdom of God, yet were living by the wisdom of men (1 Cor. 3:1).

WIDOWHOOD: *FILLING EMPTINESS*

During intense grief, widows need intimate times with family. In quietness and seclusion anxious hearts express heartache, fears, loss, and pain (Phil. 4:6). Communication flows; prayer times increase; God’s plans are seen more clearly as He is allowed to fill our emptiness with Himself (Eph. 5:17, 18).

Often without realizing it, an outpouring of God’s grace comes through obedience (2 Kin. 4:5). No one is exempt from its overflow. Family and friends are touched by its reality. And hope is renewed through faithfulness in doing God’s implicit will (Jer. 29:11–14).

Offering empty vessels to God involves hands, bodies, brains, emotions, thoughts, dreams (Rom. 12:1, 2). It is giving Him all we are, have, or hope to be. Behind shut doors we can immerse ourselves in His presence (Ps. 139:23, 24).

God could go on filling cleansed, empty vessels, but He knows just how much is needed (Phil. 4:6, 19). His ending of the flow is as deliberate as the beginning. His oil will always be in sufficient supply (2 Kin. 4:6).

God’s intentions for women emerging from the life-changing experience of widowhood and child rearing are unlimited. He has provided material needs (2 Kin. 4:7). And He sent His Son that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly (John 10:10). With the presence of God’s Spirit within, widows can find new relationships and responsibilities, which should be accepted by them with great joy, realizing that each is a gift from God’s heart (Eph. 3:16–21).

See also Matt. 18:3, note; notes on Brokenheartedness (Ps. 34); Children (2 Sam. 21; Ps. 128; Prov. 22; Luke 15); Death (1 Cor. 15); Family (Gen. 32; 1 Sam. 3; Ps. 78; 127); Grief (Is. 53); Loneliness (Eccl. 4); Sorrow (Rev. 21); Widowhood (2 Kin. 4; Ps. 68; Jer. 29); portraits of the Prophet's Widow (2 Kin. 4); Widow with Two Mites (Mark 12)

2:11 The key to understanding God's wisdom lies with the Spirit. No individual possesses the ability to know God or God's wisdom; only God can know God. The thrust of Paul's argument was easily understood by the Corinthians, who were familiar with the Greek philosophic principle of "like is known only by like." The Spirit knows the things of God because the Spirit *is* God. The Spirit is therefore the link between God and humanity that makes knowing God possible.

2:14–16 The natural woman cannot receive the things of God, for they are foolishness to her. "Foolish" means dull, insipid, or tasteless, and this is precisely how spiritual things are perceived by those who do not have the Spirit. Such individuals lack the capacity to discern the truth, excellence, or beauty of divine things, judging them to be absurd and distasteful. Paul valued self-judgment (1 Cor. 11:31), constructive criticism (1 Cor. 11:17), and church discipline (1 Cor. 5:3–5), but he argued that believers are ultimately accountable to God alone and cannot be judged by those who are operating out of a carnal mind-set. Because the Corinthians were not demonstrating "the mind of Christ," they were not in a position to judge Paul.

3:2, 3 The Corinthians thought of themselves as spiritual. They were preoccupied with attaining wisdom and in wisdom's name had aligned themselves with their favorite leader. Their divisiveness revealed human pride at the root of their desire. According to Paul, true spirituality does not lead to an elitist attitude but rather to a deeper understanding of the profound mystery of God—Christ crucified (1 Cor. 3:2).

COMPETITION: WHEN SISTERS FIGHT

Competition in the sense of a common struggle for the same objective can be a healthy thing. It can inspire us to study harder and run faster. To be challenged and pushed to reach a goal is not wrong in itself. However, when sin starts to edge its way into the competition, the goal of personal achievement is distorted into an obsession to "show up" someone else. Such competition can move our eyes from focus on the intended goal and instead make us dwell upon comparing ourselves to another. This makes competition wrong (2 Cor. 10:12).

Competition has become so commonplace in our culture that we assume it is acceptable to God in any form. Scripture does not support that position. The ideal advocated in the Bible is cooperation, agreement, and unity among believers. Several metaphors are used to describe such cooperation among believers: we are a "building" with parts jointly fitted together, a "body of Christ," a "chosen generation," and a "royal priesthood" (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 2:20–22; 1 Pet. 2:9). The bestowal of the Holy Spirit upon the early church came as those gathered reached "one accord in one place" (Acts 2:1). The apostle Paul spoke on numerous occasions of the need for unity of spirit (Eph. 4:3).

When Jesus came to visit, Mary and Martha started using their gifts of service. Mary sat at Jesus' feet, loving and being loved by Him. Martha, a practical "doer," started preparing food and a place to rest. However, Martha looked away from her goal of serving Christ and began to

evaluate Mary's performance. Both women were serving in meaningful ways. The problem came when Martha overlooked the fact that they were both on the same team and began to sit in judgment of her sister (Luke 10:41, 42).

The gifts of the Spirit are to work in harmony with one another as the Holy Spirit directs, so that the entire body of believers is built up (1 Cor. 12:7, 11, 12). We are responsible for one another's welfare; we are to pray for one another; we are called to be one-minded and to live in peace (2 Cor. 13:11). Indeed, when arguments arise, we are to give "preference" to one another—or to defer for the sake of achieving harmony (Rom. 12:10).

See also notes on Conflict (Song 5; Matt. 18); Forgiveness (Ps. 51; Luke 17); Friendship (Luke 1); Fruit of the Spirit (Col. 3); portraits of Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4); Martha (John 11); Mary of Bethany (John 11)

3:10–15 The judgment seat of Christ (Gk. *bema*) is not the place for assigning eternal destiny but rather for determining rewards for believers (see Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10; chart, Judgments in the New Testament). This judgment is marked by these characteristics:

Only those whose foundation is laid in Jesus Christ will appear (1 Cor. 3:11);

Every believer has a choice to build with the valuable and lasting or with the worthless and fleeting (vv. 12, 13);

These works will be judged by the discerning gaze of Christ Himself (v. 13; see Rev. 1:14; 2:18);

Rewards will be given for those works of permanent value (1 Cor. 3:14);

Worthless and insincere works will be destroyed, but the believer will be saved, even without reward (v. 15).

3:16, 17 Paul described the Corinthians as God's temple (Gk. *naos*), referring to the innermost dwelling place of God, the Most Holy Place, in contrast to the entire temple complex (Gk. *hiera*). Because of the indwelling Holy Spirit, the Corinthians were God's Most Holy Place. The words "defile" and "destroy" are the same in the Greek text, meaning "spoil" or "ruin" instead of "annihilate." The idea then is that when an individual spoils God's temple, God will then spoil him. Paul pointed out that God had only one temple in Corinth, and the Corinthians were that temple.

4:1 Many Corinthian believers were rejecting both Paul's teaching and his authority. Paul reasserted his authority over them, all the while emphasizing his role as "servant" and "steward" of the mysteries of God—the truths of the gospel. A "steward" (Gk. *oikonomos*) is the servant who is entrusted with the administration of his master's business or property.

4:3–5 Paul left the judgment of motives and thoughts of others completely in God's domain. He affirmed his own indifference to the Corinthians' judgment of him; he lacked fear for any judgment of himself by others; and he refused to judge himself (v. 3). Nevertheless, Paul did not consider his thoughts and actions automatically justified, and he continued to declare that ultimately God was his judge (v. 4; chart, The Judgments in the New Testament). This "time" (Gk. *kairos*) is the Lord's chosen time rather than "time" (Gk. *chronos*) in the sense of merely a sequence of chronological events. "The counsels of the hearts" suggests the motives behind actions.

4:7–9 The Corinthians viewed their gifts as personal accomplishments, and they were critical of others, particularly Paul. Conquering Roman generals staged parades to display their armies as well as the booty of their conquest. At the end of the procession, positioned as a “spectacle,” were the prisoners who had been condemned to die in the arena. Paul used this imagery to convey the utter humiliation and degradation with which he was being treated by the Corinthians. The Corinthians were puffed up with their own self-worth. Figuratively, they had positioned themselves at the front of the parade as the victors and Paul at the end as a condemned prisoner.

JUDGMENTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Name	Description	Scripture
1. The judgment of the Cross itself	All who have accepted Christ as Savior have passed from death to life, and sin is thus judged.	Rom. 8:34
2. The judgment of angels	According to Peter, this judgment is in the future; according to Paul, believers will be judges.	1 Cor. 6:3; 2 Pet. 2:4
3. The judgment of the church	The church must exercise judgment within its own fellowship.	1 Cor. 5:13
4. The judgment seat of Christ	Believers face this judgment immediately upon their translation into heaven. This becomes the reward seat of Christ.	Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10
5. The Sheep and Goat Judgment	This judgment determines who will enter the millennial kingdom at the end of the Great Tribulation.	Matt. 25:32–46
6. The Great White Throne Judgment	This judgment apparently takes place at the end of earth’s history after the millennium. It is God’s ultimate judgment against the lost.	Rev. 20:11–15

4:18–20 Some Corinthians had become puffed up in their own wisdom. They claimed to be spiritual, but Paul reminded them that the true religion does not consist in the professions of the mouth, but in the reality of the Spirit’s control of one’s life.

5:1 Jewish law forbade a son to marry his stepmother (Lev. 18:8; Deut. 22:30). This incest was also taboo in Greek culture. Nevertheless, a man in the church at Corinth was sexually involved with his father’s wife or perhaps was even married to her. Paul was incredulous that in the name of “wisdom” they could bring the gospel into disrepute and condone a kind of sexual immorality even disallowed by pagans.

5:6–8 Israelite women used the sourdough process for making their bread. Every week they would withhold a small portion of bread dough and allow it to ferment as a “starter” for the following week’s batch. When added to new ingredients, the leaven “starter” would ferment the whole lump. This process continued for an entire year until the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Ex. 12:15; 13:6) when all the old leaven from the house was cleared so that a completely fresh start might be made. Leaven is symbolic of the process by which evil spreads to affect an entire community. The Corinthians failed to realize that the incestuous man’s sin was like leaven.

Religious commitment to a monogamous relationship, seeing your spouse’s needs as equal or even more important than our own, give the Christian marriage an edge in marital and sexual satisfaction.

Mary Ann Mayo

5:13 While believers are to associate freely with all people outside the church, their fellowship within the church is to be limited to those who are committed to holiness. Those who persist in sinning—not those who are struggling to *overcome* sin—do not belong to the community.

6:1–8 Two members of the church in Corinth had taken a grievance before the civil magistrates at the judgment seat (Gk. *bema*), publicly located in the midst of the city marketplace. Paul was appalled that Spirit-filled believers should submit their disagreements to the judgment of non-believers, who were totally lacking in spiritual insight (vv. 5, 6). Pagan courts were not the proper arena for the administration of justice between Christians. The ethics of Christian behavior demanded that either the dispute be resolved within the church (v. 4), or that the wronged party choose the more excellent way and endure the injustice without seeking redress (vv. 7, 8).

6:9 Sodomites is a reference to men who engage in sexual acts with other men (see Lev. 18, Homosexuality).

FORNICATION: A SIN AGAINST THE BODY

Those who will inherit the kingdom of God are not merely those who are “saved from sin” but those who actively pursue and manifest a righteous, changed, sanctified life. They are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus. Those who continue in a lifestyle of fornication, theft, idolatry, adultery, or drunkenness cannot “inherit” or experience the blessings of the kingdom of God on this earth. Fornication (Gk. *porneia*) may include being unfaithful to the vows of marriage (Judg. 19:2; 1 Cor. 7:2; 1 Thess. 4:3), but the term covers any sinful sexual activity, whatever a person’s marital status happens to be. Thus, it can describe harlotry and prostitution (Rev. 2:14, 20) and various other forms of unchastity (John 8:41; Acts 15:20; 1 Cor. 5:1).

Paul made special mention of sins related to the body. He clearly stated that the body of the believer belongs to the Lord (1 Cor. 6:19). It is His temple (1 Cor. 3:16). A believing woman is to use both her body and spirit to bring glory and praise to God (1 Cor. 6:20).

Fornication—engaging in sexual activity with a person outside the commitment of marriage—is a sin against your own body. Physically, this sin can reap diseases from which those who keep themselves sexually pure are protected. This sin also can reap emotional distress that those who practice purity do not experience. Spiritually, those who habitually practice this sin will miss the fullness of His blessings.

See also Rom. 3:23, note; Gal. 5:19–21; Eph. 5:5; notes on Purity (1 John 3); Sexuality (Song 4); Sexual Immorality (Prov. 6); Sexual Purity (1 Cor. 7)

6:12 All things are lawful for me was the theological slogan the Corinthians had adopted to justify their behavior. Paul affirmed his own doctrine of Christian liberty. But the Corinthians needed to understand that the “lawfulness” of any given behavior was qualified by its “helpfulness.” Freedom to act as one pleases is not really freedom at all. It is the most insidious form of bondage. Paul provided guidelines for decision making (see 1 Cor. 8, Decision Making).

6:18, 19 Some within the Christian community had continued to visit prostitutes, arguing that they were unaffected by behavior that merely involved the body. Paul sternly pointed out that what Christians intimately do with their bodies affects the spiritual state of their souls. This is particularly the case with sexual sin. The “one flesh” union of marital sex reflects realities about God. Sexual activity outside of this context violates the image that He has stamped into our psyches and even into our bodies as male and female.

SEXUAL PURITY: PASSION HELD BY PRINCIPLE

The love life of a Christian is a crucial battleground. Each Christian woman must consider the authority of Christ over human passions, then set her heart on purity. Chastity means abstention from sexual activity outside of marriage and is a Christian obligation. For the Christian there is one rule and one rule only: total abstention from sexual activity prior to marriage and total faithfulness within marriage (1 Cor. 7:1–9).

Christians are to prize the sanctity of sex. This means learning the disciplines of longing, loneliness, uncertainty, hope, trust, and unconditional commitment to Christ—a commitment requiring that regardless of what passion we may feel, we must be pure.

Chastity presupposes not taking lightly any act or thought that is not appropriate to the kind of commitment you have to God. To equate any and every personal sexual desire as natural,

healthy, and God-given is a powerful lie. God does not give desires that cannot be fulfilled according to His standards of holiness, wholeness, and purity. Sexual purity is one of the foremost means of safeguarding a marriage from that which pollutes, corrupts, infects, or destroys—physically, emotionally, or spiritually.

Purity means freedom from contamination, from anything that would spoil the taste or the pleasure, reduce the power, or in any way adulterate what a thing is meant to be. Within marriage, sexual union is natural, healthy, and pleasurable not only for the moment—but for all of life together. Sexual intimacy is natural, in the sense in which the original Designer created it to be. When virginity and purity are no longer protected and prized, there is dullness, monotony, and sheer boredom. By trying to grab fulfillment everywhere, you find it nowhere.

Purity before marriage consists of giving ourselves to and for each other in obedience to God. Passion must be held by principle. The principle is love—not merely erotic, sentimental, or sexual feeling. There is no other way to control passion and no other route to purity and joy. If you choose to avoid the sin of sexual immorality, that is God’s ideal; but if you have already given away your virginity, the message of the gospel proclaims New Birth, a new beginning, and a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

See also 1 Cor. 6:13–18; 1 Thess. 4:3–6; notes on Dating (1 Tim. 4); Marriage (Gen. 2; 2 Sam. 6; Prov. 5; Hos. 2; Amos 3; 2 Cor. 13; Heb. 12); Sexual Immorality (Prov. 6); Sexuality (Song 4)

7:4 Normal sexual behavior is summarized by the apostle as an intimacy in which the bodies of husband and wife belong to one another. The phrase “authority over” (Gk. *exousiazō*, lit. “has rights over”) applies equally to both and connotes exclusivity (see 1 Cor. 6:16). Furthermore, neither is to withhold marital rights from the other except for a spiritual pursuit, and that only with consent and limitation (1 Cor. 7:5; see 1 Cor. 6:17). Paul may have been addressing some who were trying to practice celibacy within marriage under the guise of spiritual superiority (1 Cor. 7:5). Nevertheless, Paul is also making clear the importance of physical intimacy in marriage by speaking in the strongest terms (“deprive,” meaning “defraud”) of sexual abstinence within marriage.

7:8 Marriage is a temporary institution and thus will not continue throughout eternity (Matt. 22:30). Being married is of no greater value than being single but is simply a picture of the greater relationship that exists between Christ and the believer. Those who are called to singleness for the sake of the gospel are in a unique position, not “distracted” by the day-to-day realities of the human marital relationship but can concentrate more fully on the eternal relationship to which marriage points and to which all of us are ultimately called (1 Cor. 7:35; see Ps. 62; Celibacy; 1 Cor. 12, Singleness; John 2).

7:9 To burn has been interpreted primarily in two ways: as a reference to the fires of judgment, which might ensue as a result of sexual sin, or as a metaphor for unbridled passions. The latter seems more likely since the emphasis is on self-control and since Paul is here addressing believers.

7:14–16 In this example, two non-Christians married, and one was converted. The emphasis is redemptive, though the passage itself is difficult to interpret. Some consider “sanctified” to be a reference to the legitimacy of the marriage (v. 14). Others consider the apostle’s concern to be the believer’s moral and spiritual impact on the unbelieving partner and the couple’s children. The latter seems more accurate—not suggesting that salvation comes to all through the believer but suggesting that the sanctified

life of a believer can channel the blessings of God to all in the household. The redemptive theme is that eventually the unbelieving partner would be won to Christ (1 Cor. 7:16; see 2 Cor. 6, Husbands; 1 Pet. 3:1, 2, note).

7:17–19 Celibacy, circumcision, and freedom were no more or less spiritual than marriage, uncircumcision, and slavery. Paul was concerned that the Corinthians not seek change as though it had spiritual significance, which it did not.

SINGLENES: THE STATE OF BEING SINGLE

Singleness is a permanent state in life for some people and a temporary state in life for most. Adam was created by God and knew an experience of solitude in the garden before God created Eve. Most teen-agers and young adults today experience a similar period of aloneness. The response of faith is to see singleness as a call to a committed life, not a lonely life. Made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26), the single woman ideally lives in a covenant relationship with God and is called to develop her gifts—human and spiritual—to contribute to the building up of the church (1 Cor. 12:7).

St. Francis deSales observed that the single person who later marries faces the challenge of preserving a heart capable of love—as opposed to a heart “quite worn out, spoiled, and weary with love instead of a whole and sincere heart.”

The single woman is called to develop a deep love relationship with the Lord and to channel her love in pure, productive, and generous ways to the service of others. A vital spiritual life can be her anchor for chastity and a source of stability in an evil and perverse generation (Luke 9:41; 11:29).

The single person can experience great freedom to devote herself to work, friendship, and service—all of which can contribute greatly to the church and the extension of God’s kingdom on the earth.

See also Dan. 2:23, note; Gal. 5:16–26; Phil. 4:11; notes on Celibacy (1 Cor. 7); Dating (1 Tim. 4); Singleness (Ps. 62; John 2; 1 Cor. 12)

CELIBACY: A VOW OF ABSTINENCE

To be celibate is to refrain from sexual intercourse. In Scripture, sexual behavior is always considered subject to the will. For a believer to live in purity is a personal obligation to obey fully the commandments of the Lord.

For some, celibacy becomes a lifelong vow so that they might more fully and completely give themselves to the Lord and His church (1 Cor. 7:32–34). It can be a call to love Christ wholeheartedly just as Christ loves the church (Eph. 5:29), to be “holy both in body and in spirit” (1 Cor. 7:34).

Celibate Christians have the opportunity to imitate Christ in a unique way during their earthly pilgrimage. Dying to self, they can focus their love on God for the sake of His kingdom (Matt. 19:12). For those who make such a commitment by faith, the Lord gives the grace to withstand sexual temptation and to live a sexually pure life (1 Cor. 7:17; 2 Cor. 12:9).

The Bible does not advocate celibacy within marriage (1 Cor. 7:3–5), and Paul advises those who have strong sexual desires to marry rather than “to burn with passion” (v. 9).

See also notes on Commitment (Matt. 16); Sexual Purity (1 Cor. 7); Singleness (Ps. 62; John 2; 1 Cor. 12)

7:29–31 Paul reminded the Corinthians of the impermanence of the world and the shortness of their lives. To describe the shortness of time, Paul used a word (Gk. *sustello*, lit. “to send together”) that suggested “short” in the sense of all events were drawing together toward the time of the Lord’s return. Therefore, the Corinthians were to keep themselves as free as possible from the ordinary pressures and distractions of life. Marriage, the processes of birth and death, material possessions, and all the other things that belong to this age are of a temporary nature. These are legitimate, but Christians are to view them from the perspective of eternity. Their lives are to focus on the eternal and not on the temporal.

7:36, 37 The action of a father toward his daughter seems to be in view, or perhaps a man and his fiancée, though this passage cannot be interpreted with certainty. Paul continued to be clear in upholding the sanctity of marriage, while indicating the beauty of a celibate life committed unto God.

7:39, 40 Clearly marriage is a life-long commitment. Though a woman is free to marry after her husband’s death, Paul considered her to be freer and happier if she were to remain unmarried.

8:1, 2 Things offered to idols could allude to meat sold in the markets or specifically to meat served at such banquets. The feasts were attended by some converts to Christianity who argued that since idols were “nothing,” they were free to eat the meat. Furthermore, they looked down upon those whose consciences prohibited their participation. Paul argued that love and not knowledge was the basis of Christian conduct. Although idols were indeed “nothing,” this little bit of knowledge had puffed them up and had prevented their correct behavior toward their Christian friends.

THE TWO TYPES OF WISDOM

Worldly Wisdom

Sees the message of the Cross as foolishness (1 Cor. 1:18)

Does not know God (1 Cor. 1:21)

Boasts in men (1 Cor. 3:21)

Spiritual Wisdom

Realizes the message of the Cross is the power of God (1 Cor. 1:18)

Demonstrates the power of God (1 Cor. 2:5)

Glories in the Lord (1 Cor. 1:31)

Takes pride in human knowledge (1 Cor. 8:2)	Knows the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16)
Is puffed up (1 Cor. 4:6)	Seeks meekness and humility (1 Cor 2:3)
Criticizes leadership (1 Cor. 4:8)	Submits to spiritual leadership (1 Cor. 14:37; 16:16)
Relies on the power of words (1 Cor. 4:20)	Relies on the power of God (1 Cor. 4:20)
Takes pride in personal accomplishments (1 Cor. 4:7)	Recognizes God as source of everything (1 Cor. 6:19, 20)
Scoffs at differences (1 Cor. 12:21)	Respects diversity (1 Cor. 12:11)
Insists on personal rights (1 Cor. 8:9)	Becomes servant of all (1 Cor. 9:19)
Is insensitive to others (1 Cor. 8:11)	Edifies others (1 Cor. 8:1)
Arrogantly wounds others (1 Cor. 8:12)	Seeks another's well-being (1 Cor. 10:24)
Leads to envy, strife, and division (1 Cor. 1:10; 3:3)	Pursues unity (1 Cor. 12:13)
Is full of malice (1 Cor. 14:20)	Walks in the way of love (1 Cor. 13:1)
Is subject to "fall" (1 Cor. 10:12)	Stands up under temptation (1 Cor. 10:13)
Will be caught in its own craftiness (1 Cor. 3:19)	Maintains self-control and discipline (1 Cor. 6:12; 9:27)
Has immature understanding (1 Cor. 3:1; 14:20)	Develops maturity (1 Cor. 2:6)
Will not last (1 Cor. 3:15)	Will last (1 Cor. 3:10–14)

8:10–12 Real idolatry, not just the eating of meat, was the issue at hand. Paul denied that any true “gods” were involved in paganism but pointed out what the Corinthians failed to note: Pagan religion was often the locus of demonic activity. The issue was not that of merely “offending” someone in the church

but of weakening someone's commitment to Christ. The Corinthians had arrogantly insisted on their own rights and freedoms and had jeopardized the spiritual well-being of others.

8:13 See 1 Corinthians 6:12, note.

DECISION MAKING: TOUGH CHOICES

Every person faces decisions with immediate and long-term consequences. For the Christian woman, wise decisions can be made with the confidence that God directs her every step as she seeks His will in prayer, Bible study, and listening to the Holy Spirit, the divine Counselor (John 14:26; 15:26). While Scripture offers precise guidance for many issues in our daily lives, the Bible appears silent on others.

In all cases, you can benefit from the principles Paul offered to the first-century Corinthian believers who were facing the moral dilemma of eating meat sacrificed to idols:

1.) Will the course considered lead a fellow Christian to sin by your example? (1 Cor 8:13)
2. Will the action provide strength and encouragement to your own life? (1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23)
3. Will the action ultimately glorify God? (1 Cor. 10:31)

These same questions are appropriate for your prayerful consideration in every decision you make.

See also notes on Access to God (Rom. 10); Authority (John 19); Change Points in Life (Eccl. 3); God's Will (Eph. 5); Intuition (Heb. 5); Priorities (Matt. 6)

9:10, 11 Though Paul may have been supported financially in some way by patrons like Lydia (see Acts 16:15), he seemed to favor supporting himself through tentmaking. Problems arose when the Corinthians observed other teachers (perhaps Apollos and Peter) accepting patronage. Because of Paul's refusal to do the same, they began to question the authenticity of his apostleship. Paul argued that although he had the *right* to be supported by them, he also had the right to *refuse* support. He had chosen to preach the gospel without pay so that he could not be accused of benefiting financially from what he taught. By presenting the gospel "free of charge," he himself was "free from all men," constrained to preach only by obedience to Christ (1 Cor. 9:19).

9:19 Paul conformed to the culture and practices of those with whom he worked. When with Jews, he observed Jewish custom; when with Gentiles, Gentile custom. With the "weak," those who were over-scrupulous in their observances, he was particularly careful to regulate his conduct to their standards. Paul's adaptability appeared as "inconsistency" to his critics. They had failed to note that his "inconsistency" was governed by a greater principle to which he consistently yielded. "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22). Paul was uncompromising on beliefs and behaviors that were governed by the gospel but flexible and adaptable on those matters that were not.

MISSIONS: PREPARED TO SERVE

Anyone with a mission to win someone to Christ becomes a missionary. You become a missionary because you have a mission to share the message of salvation. There are ways to equip yourself for the greatest effectiveness:

Become acquainted with the customs of those to whom you minister (1 Cor. 9:22).

Learn to speak the language of those with whom you work.

Make an effort to eat their foods (1 Cor. 10:27).

Be willing to wear their ethnic clothing, especially for festive occasions.

Listen to their problems (Gal. 6:2).

Pray for individuals and specific needs (James 5:16).

Avoid local politics (Acts 5:29).

Treat others as you yourself wish to be treated (Matt. 7:12).

Never compromise your faith (Rom. 1:16).

See also notes on Evangelism (Matt. 28; John 6; Col. 4; 1 Pet. 3); Missions (Acts 1); Prejudice (Acts 15); Racial Relations (Acts 10); Salvation (Eph. 2)

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: SELF-CONTROL: *PRACTICING HIS PRESENCE*

Self-discipline is essential to personal development, spiritual growth, and Christian service. However, self-discipline does not “just happen” or appear as a natural trait. People must practice self-control in order to lead disciplined lives. For the Christian woman, God’s unlimited power can be added to limited human willpower to develop divine discipline. Divine discipline requires a personal action to receive the Holy Spirit’s power.

Christians must learn to discipline both outward behaviors and inward feelings in order to be godly. Words and actions as well as thoughts and passions must be acceptable to God (Ps. 19:14). A disciplined life involves a genuine, personal commitment to obey God’s statutes, and frequently it requires lifestyle changes. God’s supernatural power is added to personal willpower as believers practice His presence, receive His power, and seek His joy.

The acceptance by, affirmation from, and accountability to other people also help a believer develop self-control. Divine discipline should be a part of every believer’s spiritual growth. A personal choice to become disciplined can effect change in others as well.

Scripture teaches that self-control is the crowning fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Without self-control, the believer has little opportunity to experience fully the blessings of God.

See also 1 Tim. 4:7, 8; Titus 2:4, 5; Heb. 12:11; 2 Pet. 1:5–7; notes on Fruit of the Spirit (Ps. 86; Rom. 5; 15; 1 Cor. 13; Gal. 5; Eph. 4; Col. 3; 2 Thess. 1; Rev. 2); Perseverance (Rev. 14); Spiritual Discipline (2 Pet. 3)

9:27 The Greeks hosted the great athletic festivals of the Olympic and Isthmian games. The latter were held at Corinth and were therefore familiar to the recipients of Paul’s letter. Contestants in the games participated in ten months of mandatory training. If they failed to complete this training, they were barred from competition. The major attraction at the games was the lengthy race, and that was the illustration Paul used to depict the faithful Christian life. Paul contended that his actions had not been

those of an aimless competitor but were comparable to those of the athlete who had trained with the goal of winning. Paul had disciplined himself—curtailing his own rights or exercising his freedoms—all for the sake of the gospel. He admonished the Corinthians to do the same so that they, too, might attain the eternal prize.

10:4 The Israelites were supplied with water from the rock of Meribah both at the beginning (Ex. 17:1–7) and toward the end of their desert wanderings in the Pentateuch narrative (Num. 20:2–13). Jewish legend referred to a water-supplying “rock” which traveled alongside the people throughout their 40-year journey. Paul did not endorse this account as literal history but affirmed that a supernatural “Rock” had indeed accompanied them, and that “Rock” was Jesus.

10:11, 12 The Corinthians had become overconfident in their spirituality; so Paul directed their attention to the example of the Israelite people. He pointed out that although the Israelites had consumed the same spiritual food and drink as the Corinthians, they had failed to please God (vv. 3, 4). They had fallen into sins of idolatry and sexual immorality, complaining against God and tempting Him. To “tempt” (Gk. *ekpeirazo*, lit. “to put to the test”) God is to try or test His patience thoroughly (v. 10). The Israelites had pushed God to the limit by constantly compromising His commands. Paul admonished the Corinthians to exercise caution, for they were beginning to place confidence in their own spiritual state and were thus susceptible to falling into sin just as the Israelites had done.

10:21, 22 The cup of libation poured at the end of pagan feasts in honor of the sponsoring deity was incompatible with drinking the cup of the Lord. The Lord’s cup, symbolic of the believer’s relationship to God, excluded the possibility of any relationship to demons. Furthermore, sharing the bread of the Lord, which was symbolic of the believer’s commitment to Christ’s body—the church—barred them from communing (and therefore being bound) with people who communed with demons (v. 17). Attendance at pagan feasts therefore violated both the vertical dimension of their relationship to God and the horizontal dimension of their relationship to each other.

10:23 See 1 Cor. 6:12; note; 8, Decision Making.

10:31 See 1 Cor. 6:12; note; 8, Decision Making.

WEIGHT CONTROL: A DISCIPLINED BODY

If you struggle with weight control, God has words of admonishment and encouragement for you.

1. Be accepting. God designed your physical make-up. Refrain from criticizing His creation (Ps. 139:13–16).
2. Be grateful. God has given you a triumphal new nature at your conversion. You are admonished to give thanks to God who gives you victory in the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:57).
3. Be careful. The Bible, speaking for moderation and against gluttony, condemns over-indulgence (Prov. 23:20–21). Resist extra helpings and rich foods that add additional inches.
4. Be disciplined. Achieving temperance in eating will strengthen other areas in your life. Paul proclaimed that although all things were lawful for him, he refused to be brought under the power of any (1 Cor. 10:23) because all things were not helpful to him (1 Cor. 6:12).

5. Be active. Regular exercise will help you to reach and maintain your ideal weight. Activity also improves productivity, cardiovascular stamina, and mental alertness. The writer of Hebrews encourages believers to run with endurance (Heb. 12:1; see also 1 Tim. 4:8).

6. Be persistent. Just as Paul finished the race (2 Tim. 4:7), you, too, can persevere if you set a goal and move forward victoriously to achieve it!

See also 1 Cor. 10:23–11:1; Phil. 4:13; notes on Fitness (Phil. 1); Fruit of the Spirit (1 Cor. 10); Health (Prov. 3); Nutrition (Lev. 11)

11:3 Paul presented headship as divinely ordered: God-Christ, Christ-man, man-woman (see chart, Theological Foundation for Headship). A Christian perspective on authority radically differs from that of the world. To begin, Christian authority is for the purpose of service. Jesus commanded those in authority to exercise their roles with love, humility, and justice (Luke 22:24–27). Husbands, for example, were instructed to imitate Christ’s servant leadership in their relationship to their wives (Eph. 5:25–29; see chart, Role Relationships Between Men and Women). Also, the husband’s headship is not based upon any inherent virtue of the male. Rather, the relationship between redeemed man and woman is a model that is to reflect to the world the nature of the relationships within the Godhead as well as God’s relationship to His church. Finally, the relationship between God and Christ helps us understand what headship means. The Father and Son are always equal in essence, including the time of Jesus’ subordination during His Incarnation; yet they have different roles (Phil. 2:6, 7). Likewise, the different roles of man and woman do not imply the superiority of one, or the inferiority of the other. Paul was careful to point out that they are interdependent and equal—“all things are from God” (1 Cor. 11:8–12).

11:3–16 Paul argued that head coverings appropriately symbolized a divine order (v. 3; see chart, Head Coverings for Women).

WOMEN’S MINISTRIES: THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

The Bible abounds with many examples of women who ministered prophetically. The prophetess Miriam led the women to celebrate the Lord’s triumph over Egypt (Ex. 15:20, 21). Deborah was a prophetess who functioned as a judge (Judg. 4:4, 5), and the prophetess Huldah was consulted on behalf of the king (2 Kin. 22:14–20). Other Old Testament women had prophetic ministries as well (Is. 8:3).

In the New Testament, we encounter Anna (Luke 2:36–38) and the four daughters of the evangelist Philip (Acts 21:9). Joel foretold that both sons and daughters would prophesy after God poured His Spirit out on all flesh (Joel 2:28)—a promise that was cited by Peter at the time of Pentecost (Acts 2:17, 18). Paul encouraged women to exercise the gift of prophecy and instructed them how to do so in the public assembly of the church (1 Cor. 11:5).

The nature of prophecy changed with the outpouring of God’s Spirit. Old Testament prophets, individually commissioned by God, were to be put to death if they misrepresented God’s message to the people (Deut. 13:1–5; 18:20–22). New Testament prophecy, on the other hand, was a gift given to many believers, and its transmission was not guaranteed as infallible. It needed to be sifted, weighed, and evaluated by the leadership of the church (1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:20, 21). Nevertheless, it was regarded as a valuable and necessary gift for the church and an area of effective ministry for women.

See also chart on Spiritual Gifts of Women in the Bible (1 Cor. 12); notes on Spiritual Gifts (Rom. 12); Women’s Ministries (John 4; Acts 2; Eph. 2; 1 Tim. 3; Titus 2)

11:23–34 The observance of the Lord’s Supper begins with giving “thanks” (Gk. *eucharisteo*, lit. “give thanks,” transliterated “eucharist,” (v. 24). This experience is also a memorial of Christ’s atonement on the Cross (vv. 24, 25), an experience of fellowship among believers (v. 18); a testimony of Christ’s death in their behalf (v. 26), and a means by which believers are challenged to examine their spiritual lives (v. 28). The sharing of a common loaf indicated the unity of the body of Christ. Eating the bread and drinking the cup are also a reminder of our Lord’s sacrificial death on the Cross.

11:29 As an alternative to the cultic feasts of the pagans, the Corinthians had begun to sponsor their own “love feasts,” celebrated in conjunction with the Lord’s Supper. Apparently, the rich Christians were feasting and drinking in isolated cliques, while the poor remained hungry. Emphasizing social divisions among themselves was an offense against the body of Christ, for it contradicted both the purpose of Christ’s self-sacrifice and the spirit in which it was made. The reality of the Corinthians’ common standing in the Lord was not to be compromised by prejudice and divisive, judgmental spirits (v. 30).

HEAD COVERINGS FOR WOMEN

Type of Covering	Description
Headband (Heb. <i>shabis</i>)	Probably a head ornament or front-band of gold or silver (Is. 3:18, 20; v. 18, “scarves” in NKJV).
Headdress (Heb. <i>pe·er</i>)	Ornamental head covering worn by wealthy women, probably wound about the head (Is. 3:20; Ezek. 24:17). Also used to describe the garland of the bridegroom or turban worn by men as well as the cap worn by priests (Is. 61:10; Ezek. 24:17, 23; 44:18).
Head covering (Gk. <i>peribolaios</i> , lit. “covering”)	First Corinthians probably refers to some kind of hair covering—perhaps even a shawl. The wearing of long, loose hair by an adulteress confirms that such would be considered shameful (Num. 5:18). The importance of the covering seems to be twofold: to show clear distinction between the sexes and to affirm publicly a wife’s

commitment to her husband's leadership (1 Cor. 11:2–16).

This custom may have been especially important to the Corinthians because of the pagan and immoral influence around them.

Veil

(Heb. *tsaciph*)

Rebekah put on a veil when she approached Issac before her marriage, perhaps as a sign of her betrothal. The veil was to be removed at the time of marriage (Gen. 24:65).

Tamar used the veil to trick Judah (Gen. 38:14, 19).

(Heb. *redid*)

The veil-like, thin garment was probably for summer (Song 5:7; Is. 3:23).

(Heb. *tsamah*)

This face veil (lit. "locks") was probably ornamental, perhaps a long train of adornment for women of high social standing (Song 4:1, 3; 6:7; Is. 47:2).

(Heb. *mispachoth*)

This covering (probably a cap fitting close to the head) is associated with the activities of false prophetesses (Ezek. 13:18, 21).

Full veiling does not seem to be part of the Old Testament culture. However, head coverings were important to women in biblical days. They not only offered protection from the elements but also served as symbols of modesty and, for a married woman, as a token of her commitment to her husband.

The theological principle of divine order remains unchanged even though its specific manifestations, such as a woman's covering her head in Corinth, may differ from place to place and culture to culture (see chart, Theological Foundations for Headship). This order was evident in the chronological sequence of creation (1 Cor. 11:8, 9). Furthermore, woman was man's "glory" (v. 7). This concept refers to the act of "manifesting or pointing to the role of another." The woman, who pointed to the man, was to be covered in the presence of God; while man, who pointed to God, was not. The practice was also followed "because of the angels" (v. 10). Paul reasoned that angels, the most submissive of all creatures, would be offended by non-compliance. Furthermore, God had provided a natural analogy that emphasized the appropriateness of the head covering: "Nature" favors women over men in the provision of hair on the head (vv. 13–15). Finally, Paul appealed to the universality of Christian practice (v. 16). The principle of headship was important, and its symbol was to be observed in all the churches.

12:3 The title Lord (Gk. *kurios*), a term of respect for people of high rank or distinction, was also used in a unique way to refer to God. Confessing Jesus as Lord was understood as confessing Jesus as God. Whether or not the Spirit of God was guiding someone was determined by whether or not that person would confess “Jesus is Lord.”

Unconditional love is the kind of love that makes no requirements before extending favor.
Jan Silvius

SINGleness: A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR SERVICE

The single person has an opportunity to give a unique level of service to the church and to those in need—a level of service that is unfettered and “without distraction” (1 Cor. 7:35). The single woman does not have the practical “cares” of a husband to keep her from responding wholeheartedly and with all her energy to meeting needs which are revealed to her by the Lord and about which she feels compelled to take action. An attitude of serving others should be in imitation of the Lord Jesus, “who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant” (Phil. 2:6, 7).

A generous willingness to assist others can lead to happiness and fulfillment for the single woman. Psalm 41 offers the beatitude “Blessed is he who considers the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive, and he will be blessed on this earth” (Ps. 41:1, 2). A spirit of generous service is a gift to be sought from God. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above” (James 1:17). Generous service is itself a witness to the power of God.

See also 1 Cor. 7:32–35; notes on Celibacy (1 Cor. 7); Sacrificial Living (Mic. 7); Servanthood (Mark 10); Singleness (Ps. 62; John 2; 1 Cor. 7)

12:13 All Christians, regardless of race, social standing, or gender, are baptized into Christ’s body and receive Christ’s Spirit (Gal. 3:28). The implication is not that social, cultural, or gender differences be obliterated but rather that these differences are of no consequence with regard to one’s access to God.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS OF WOMEN IN THE BIBLE

Spiritual Gift	Scripture Reference	Function	How to Recognize	Gifted Woman
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Prophecy	Luke 2:36–38	Proclamation in order to edify	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to address Anna audiences with inspired message 	
Serving (Ministry, Helps)	Luke 4:38, 39	Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joy in doing for others and meeting needs 	Peter's Mother-in-Law
Teaching	Acts 18:24–28	Instruction that is understood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding difficult matters; • Ability to deliver instruction effectively 	Priscilla
Exhortation	John 4:28–30	Persuasion and encouragement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to inspire and persuade 	Samaritan Woman
Giving	Luke 21:2–4	Undergirding and supporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joy in giving, expecting nothing in return 	Widow with Two Mites
Leading (Administration)	Judg. 4:4–14	Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organized; inspires cooperation and teamwork 	Deborah
Mercy	Acts 9:36–42	Tender sensitivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern for those who are hurting 	Dorcas
Wisdom	Luke 1:46–56	Application of truth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to apply knowledge and understanding to life situations 	Mary of Nazareth
Knowledge	1 Sam. 2:1–10	Insight and perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of facts and situations 	Hannah
Faith	Matt. 15:21–28	Optimism and confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence in the Lord and ability to inspire others 	Syro-Phoenician Woman

Discernment	1 Sam. 25:2–42	Ability to make judgments	• Ability to determine good or evil and see beyond surface	Abigail
Evangelism	Acts 21:9	Ability to witness in any situation	• Loves people; talks easily; rejoices to share Christ	Daughters of Philip
Hospitality	John 12:1, 2	Assistance and service	• Unselfish desire to meet the needs of others	Martha
Speaking	Ex. 15:20, 21	Talks easily and inspires others	• Likes to talk; interested in others	Miriam
Celibacy	Acts 16:11–15	Devotion	• Content to remain single	Lydia (possibly single)

God's spirit is present from the beginning and is the giver of life (Gen. 1:2; Job 33:4). The coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell permanently in the hearts of believers is specifically recorded in the New Testament to coincide with the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17, 18) and is a direct partial fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 2:28, 29. Thus, the attributing of gifts to Old Testament women or New Testament women ministering before the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost would be considered inappropriate by some and difficult to define by all. Even after Pentecost, the possible reference to a gift is so brief as to make it impossible to identify the assignment with certainty. Nevertheless, we can be inspired by gifted women who have gone before.

Spiritual gifts cannot be sought or grasped; rather, they are divinely bestowed, not to magnify the individual possessing the gift but to enhance her efforts for ministry. The gifts were poured out upon women and men, but without requirement that every gift be found in either sex. For example, there is little evidence that the gift of apostleship was given to a woman, nor do we see clear examples in the text of the gifts of healings and miracles given to women.

Though everyone has some gift(s), no one has all the gifts. Never does God give a gift to be used in contradiction to His written Word just as His Spirit never leads anyone to exercise a gift that contradicts Scripture. The sovereignly bestowed gifts are to be used according to the purposes of the Holy Spirit for the edification of the church.

12:20–24 The Corinthians regarded some spiritual gifts as superior to others. Paul argued that just as the physical body is comprised of parts with different roles and functions, so the body of the church exhibits variety in the giftedness of its members. Furthermore, he argued that the appearance of bodily parts is deceptive. Their apparent “weakness” has no direct relationship to their value or necessity.

The hidden internal organs are not attractive, yet are much more essential to one's health than the visible, external ones. Also, the "unpresentable" sexual organs are given higher honor by being carefully clothed (v. 23). The members of the church body that appear to be weak and less worthy are accorded greater honor either by the importance of their function or by the special attention they require.

12:31 The Corinthians were preoccupied with who was wiser, more spiritual, more liberated, or more important. Therefore, they desired to have what they viewed as the "best" spiritual gift—speaking in tongues. Paul did not rebuke them for seeking "the best" but pointed out that their assessment of the value of tongues was erroneous. The "best" gift, he argued, was not the flashy outward one, but rather a gift such as prophecy, which edified the whole church (1 Cor. 14:12). Paul wanted them to use their gifts in "a more excellent way"—the way of love.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: LOVE: UNCONDITIONAL DEVOTION TO OTHERS

In both Hebrew (*ahab*) and Greek (*agap*), words translated "love" are action words, indicating conscious acts on behalf of a beloved. However, biblical love seems to demand going beyond merely a particular behavior to include a certain inner attitude, that is, a positive inner response (1 John 3:17).

While several Greek words describe specific forms of love, the Greek word *agap* most expresses Christlike, selfless love. Unselfish, loyal, benevolent concern for the well-being of another is called by Paul "the greatest" gift of all (1 Cor. 13:13). Christian love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, a virtue of godly living (Gal. 5:22).

The attributes of love reflect both feelings and loving acts (1 Cor. 13:4–8). True love is characterized as

- patient and slow to anger (v. 4)
- kind and gentle to all (v. 4)
- unselfish and giving (v. 5)
- truthful and honest (v. 6)
- hopeful and encouraging (v. 7)
- enduring, without end (v. 7)

Biblical love is not envious, proud, self-centered, rude, or provoking (vv. 4, 5).

Without love, the gifts of the Spirit are deemed worthless and the fruit of the Spirit incomplete (v. 8). Christian love is eternal. While all else fails, love never fails. It is a permanent, unconditional concern for others that results from the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, rather than from human effort or desire.

See also Lam. 3:22, note; John 15:13; 1 John 3:11–18; notes on Attributes of God (Ex. 33; Deut. 4; 32; 2 Chr. 19; Job 23; 42; Ps. 25; 90; 102; 119; Is. 6; 65; Jer. 23; Rom. 2; Eph. 1; 1 John 5); Fruit of the Spirit (Ps. 86; Rom. 5; 15; 1 Cor. 10; Gal. 5; Eph. 4; Col. 3; 2 Thess. 1; Rev. 2); Love (1 John 4); Marriage (Gen. 2; 2 Sam. 6; Prov. 5; Hos. 2; Amos 3; 2 Cor. 13; Heb. 12); Romance (Song 2)

13:2 Paul considered the gift of prophecy to be of primary significance for the Christian community (1 Thess. 5:19, 20; 1 Cor. 14:1–25). The Corinthians, on the other hand, favored "knowledge" (1 Cor. 1:5; 8:1). Love is the essential undergirding for the proper management of any spiritual gift.

WHAT IS LOVE?

Word	Meaning	Comments	Biblical Usage
<i>Agapē</i> (Gk.)	Indicates a choice to serve God, to love neighbor, to accept self without expecting something in return (Matt. 22:34–40).	Appears rarely in secular Greek writings; Coined by New Testament writers to describe God's love (John 3:16); Christian love is based on the deliberate choice of the lover rather than the worthiness of the one loved (1 Cor. 13:1–13).	Love: is longsuffering is kind is not jealous is not boastful is not arrogant is not rude is not selfish is not resentful does not think evil rejoices in truth bears all things believes all things hopes all things endures all things (1 Cor. 13:1–13).
<i>Philos</i> (Gk.)	Refers to esteem and affection reflected in the loving concern friends have for one another.	Used in the New Testament (John 21:15–17; Titus 2:4); Sometimes used interchangeably or synonymously with <i>agapē</i> .	The nature of Peter's love is the question. Jesus uses <i>agapē</i> (unselfish commitment) in His questions; Peter uses <i>philos</i> (esteem or high regard) in his response. Perhaps his caution comes from his bitter experience of denying the Lord (John 21:15–17). The love of a woman for her husband and children must be marked with <i>philos</i> or esteem and respect, not just <i>agapē</i> or unselfish

commitment (Titus 2:4;
see also Eph. 5:33).

<i>Eros</i> (Gk.)	Describes appetitive, self-centered love, including sexual desire and physical craving.	Does not appear in the New Testament.
<i>Stergos</i> (Gk.)	Alludes to affection, especially among family members.	Does not appear in the New Testament.

13:12, 13 The city of Corinth was famous for producing some of the finest bronze mirrors in antiquity. Paul used the analogy of looking in a mirror to explain the indirect nature of one's view of God and His ways. One "sees" God and His "mysteries" only indirectly and partially. Although good, the image is limited (v. 12) and falls short of the real thing. Spiritual gifts were undoubtedly good but were only necessary for the present age of partial seeing and knowledge. Christian love, on the other hand, was eternal. Paul wanted the Corinthians to correct their perspective and focus on the greatness of the eternal rather than that of the temporal.

14:1 The verb to prophesy (Gk. *propheteuo*, lit. "to speak forth") is found more than 25 times in the NT. Paul used it 11 times, all in 1 Corinthians. To prophesy is to speak a divine message as directed by the Spirit of God. The message may be ethical, that is, to comfort, exhort, teach (1 Cor. 14:3); revelatory or revealing supernatural knowledge of a particular situation (Matt. 26:68); or it may point to the future or foretell (Matt. 15:7). Prophecy is Spirit-inspired speech from God to His creation (1 Cor. 14:2, 3). All prophetic messages were to be "tested" for their prophetic character (1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:19–21) and for their agreement with the teachings of Scripture (Deut. 13:1–5; Matt. 7:15; 24:11; 2 Pet. 2:1).

14:5 The Corinthians had a tendency to exaggerate the importance of the gift of speaking in tongues. This gift, they reasoned, constituted the highest and greatest form of spirituality. Paul disagreed. He compared the gift of tongues with that of prophecy. He pointed out that the benefit of tongues was limited by the ability of the congregation to understand what was said. Prophecy, on the other hand, was intelligible; thus, it was "greater" because it served the *whole* body: In order to be "great" in the kingdom, one must become the servant of all (Mark 10:43). Since the Corinthians were intent on seeking the greatest gifts, Paul argued that they should seek those which served the whole body rather than those that merely benefited themselves.

14:26 Everyone had opportunity to participate in the corporate ministry of the church in NT times. During worship, various members offered psalms, teachings, tongues, revelations, and interpretations. Paul encouraged this practice, but stressed that all aspects of corporate worship were to edify the church. "Edification" (Gk. *oikodome*, lit. "house building") was used figuratively as growing, improving, or maturing. Paul was concerned that spiritual gifts not be exercised in the interest of self-development or self-display, but rather according to the law of love that served and built others up.

14:34, 35 Paul recognized that women were praying and prophesying in public worship and did not condemn them for doing so (1 Cor. 11:5). Yet here he commanded that women “keep silent in the churches” (1 Cor. 14:34). One way of resolving what some consider a discrepancy is by considering the particular type of speech that Paul disallowed. In this passage, he was probably discussing the gift of prophecy, and more specifically, the evaluation or judgment of prophecy (1 Cor. 14:29–39). Paul allowed women to participate in worship and, indeed, expected that they would do so (v. 26), but here he may have been forbidding them from giving spoken criticisms of the prophecies that were made because he was concerned that the principle of headship be evidenced in the public assembly of believers. Women’s silence during the evaluation of prophecy was one of the ways in which this was to be accomplished. Another way to understand this command for women to be silent is in relationship to Paul’s command to the believers to do all things “decently and in order” (v. 40). God “is not the author of confusion” (v. 33). The women could have been displaying some kind of disorderly conduct (v. 35). Others suggest, since the subject of major discussion in chapter 14 is tongues, that the prohibition to women is to refrain from ecstatic utterance. Clearly this cannot mean that women are forbidden altogether to speak in the assembly (1 Cor. 11:5).

15:2 To hold fast means to keep in memory and to hold firmly. It implies continued holding and lasting possession. Paul wanted the Corinthians to hold fast to the essence of the gospel—Jesus’ death and Resurrection—lest their faith be “in vain,” that is, without cause or purpose.

15:4 The Resurrection body of Christ had these characteristics: He could pass through shut doors (John 20:19, 26); He could vanish from view (Luke 24:31); His body was real and could be touched (Luke 24:39; John 20:17, 27); He was able to eat (Luke 24:42, 43).

THE APPEARANCES OF THE RISEN CHRIST

The Resurrection has been interpreted as

- false information
- fictitious story
- * factual event

By recording the appearance of Christ after His Resurrection, the New Testament removes all doubt. He has risen!

Location	People	Reference
In or around Jerusalem	To Mary Magdalene	John 20:11–18
	To the other women	Matt. 28:8–10
	To Peter	Luke 24:34
	To ten disciples	Luke 24:36–43; John 20:19–25
	To eleven disciples, including Thomas	John 20:26–29

	To those who observed His Ascension	Luke 24:50–53; Acts 1:4–12
On the Emmaus Road	To two disciples	Luke 24:13–35
In Galilee	To the disciples	Matt. 28:16–20 John 21:1–24
Unknown	To 500 people	1 Cor. 15:6
Unknown	To James and the apostles	1 Cor. 15:7
On the road to Damascus	To Paul	Acts 9:1–6; 18:9, 10; 22:1–8; 23:11; 26:12–18; 1 Cor. 15:8

15:17 Some Ancient Greek philosophy viewed everything spiritual as intrinsically good and everything physical as intrinsically evil. To those holding this view, the idea of a resurrected body would have been repugnant. The Corinthians were affected by contemporary philosophy. Although they had faith in the Resurrection of Christ, some had begun to question the resurrection of believers. Paul demonstrated that the two go hand in hand (vv. 13–19). Resurrection is not only possible but is essential to the Christian faith. In order to vindicate the work of His Son, God raised Christ from the dead. Therefore, a denial of the resurrection of the dead is a denial of the gospel. Paul argued that if Christ were not risen from the dead, all believers throughout history would have believed for nothing, lived for nothing, and died for nothing.

15:23 Prior to reaping their fields, Israelites were to bring a representative sample of their crop to the priests as an offering to the Lord (Lev. 23:10). Full harvest was not allowed until this sample, called the “firstfruits,” was offered. This practice was behind Paul’s imagery of Christ as the “firstfruits.” Christ’s Resurrection was the first sample of the coming harvest of the resurrection of the believing dead. He Himself was the offering made to the Father on their behalf. In referring to Christ as “firstfruits,” Paul furthered his resurrection argument. The “firstfruits” were only the initial installment; the rest of the crop would follow. Therefore, in order to complete the Father’s harvest, it was necessary that all those who believed in Christ also be resurrected.

15:29 A difficult and obscure text cannot structure biblical doctrine. Though there is no easy explanation, the sense seems to be that the preposition “for” (Gk. *huper*) is better translated “concerning” so that Christian baptism “concerning” death as it relates to the Resurrection is meaningless unless the Resurrection is, in fact, true.

15:45 Paul concluded his presentation on the doctrine of the Resurrection by explaining that there were two types of bodies, “natural” and “spiritual” (v. 46). The first man, Adam, was created with a

natural, physical body, which became subject to decay and death. Jesus Christ, “the last Adam,” overcame death and was given a “spiritual” (glorified), immortal body. Therefore, by virtue of creation, Adam was “of the earth,” and by virtue of the Resurrection, Christ was “from heaven” (v. 47). Paul said that these two were prototypes: the first bearers of the two kinds of bodies. The first man Adam represents all those who share in having a physical body. The last Adam represents all those who bear His spiritual likeness. The first Adam was human, the last, infinitely more. Believers have borne the image of the former, and they shall someday also bear the image of the latter (v. 49).

15:50–52 Paul affirmed that some Christians would not face death. When Christ returns, the dead in Christ will be raised first (v. 52), but then those believers who are alive will be caught up to meet Him (vv. 51, 52; see 1 Thess. 4:17, note; chart, Glossary Terms in Eschatology).

DEATH: THE END OR THE BEGINNING?

Jesus Christ repeatedly overturned the enemy, Death, and robbed Death of its sting (1 Cor. 15:26; 2 Tim. 1:8–10). After Lazarus’ dead body had been in its grave for four days, Jesus prayed, then called Lazarus back to life (John 11:1–44). When Jesus arrived at the house of Jairus, He found the ruler’s twelve-year-old daughter dead. He took the child by the hand and told her to arise. To her parents’ astonishment, she came back to life (Mark 5:38–42). Jesus stopped a funeral procession in Nain. He touched the open coffin of a widow’s only son and commanded him back to life. Then Jesus presented the living son to his mother (Luke 7:11–15).

In Scripture, death is often connected with sin (Rom. 6:23; 5:12–21). Death was considered a curse when it occurred to someone in the prime of life or to a childless person.

Death has two stages: 1) The permanent cessation of all bodily vital functions and the separation of the spirit and soul from the body (James 2:26); and finally 2) Resurrection in Christ (Is. 26:19). Through His death and resurrection, Jesus gives to all hope for everlasting life (John 5:24).

See also Mark 9:43–48, note; Luke 8:41–56; notes on Euthanasia (Gen. 4); Grief (Is. 53); Heaven (2 Tim. 4)

16:2 Paul had solicited various churches for contributions for the needy Christians in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:1–5). In NT times, Jerusalem was a poor city. The area had experienced a severe famine some years earlier, and many residents remained financially stressed (Acts 11:28). Paul instructed the Corinthians to set aside some money each week according to how much they had prospered. This amount was not to be a certain percentage of their income. It was, rather, to be based upon the believer’s personal examination of his own heart. The Corinthian contributions not only brought relief to the poor but also brought unity between Gentile and Jewish Christians. Paul reasoned that since the Gentiles had shared in the Jew’s spiritual blessings, they ought to reciprocate by giving some of their material blessings to the Jews (Rom. 15:27; 2 Cor. 9:12–14).

16:14 Paul did not use the word love frequently in this letter, but two crucial passages (1 Cor. 8:1–3; 13), as well as this closing imperative, indicate that he regarded love as the essential girder for all of his ethical instructions. “Let all that you do” would have included the divisive quarrels (1 Cor. 1–3), their attitude toward him (1 Cor. 4; 9), church discipline (1 Cor. 5), the lawsuits (1 Cor. 6), marital relationships (1 Cor. 7), the abuse of the “weak” (1 Cor. 8–10), the abuse of the poor at the Lord’s

Supper, and the failure to edify the church in worship (1 Cor. 11–14). Had they followed the way of love, they would not have encountered many of these problems. The Corinthians had all the gifts, but love is what they needed most.

16:19 Aquila and Priscilla were a unique husband-wife team who were viewed as capable teachers in the early church. Both had a significant influence on the learned Apollos (see Acts 18, Priscilla).

Love begins at home, and it is not how much we do ... but how much love we put in that action.

Mother Teresa

2 CORINTHIANS

AUTHOR In style and content, no other letter is more characteristic of the apostle Paul than 2 Corinthians. This letter contains much autobiographical information as well as references to people, situations, and events with which Paul and his readers were obviously familiar. The conclusion that Paul is the author of 2 Corinthians is indisputable.

DATE Second Corinthians was written from somewhere in Macedonia (2 Cor. 2:13; 7:5–7) during Paul's third missionary journey (see map, Paul's Third Missionary Journey). Paul was revisiting the churches that he had founded during his second journey; so he may have composed the letter in Philippi or Thessalonica (see map, Paul's Second Missionary Journey). Second Corinthians is closely related to 1 Corinthians; only a few months had elapsed between the writing of the two letters. Therefore, this epistle was written during the late summer or autumn of the year 56 A.D. After writing, Paul continued to travel in Macedonia as far as the borders of Illyricum (Rom. 15:19). Then, as

promised in the letter, he journeyed to Corinth to spend the winter months of 56–57 A.D.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Setting: For information on the city of Corinth, see the Introduction to 1 Corinthians. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to resolve doctrinal and ethical problems in the church at Corinth. He also sent Timothy to help the Corinthians correct the problems in their congregation (1 Cor. 4:17). Apparently, these measures did not have the desired effect. Therefore, Paul sailed directly from Ephesus to Corinth, seeking personally to resolve the matters. This second visit was painful for him (2 Cor. 2:1). One man in particular took the lead in defying Paul's authority.

Paul returned to Ephesus disheartened, full of sorrow, and humiliated (2 Cor. 2:5; 7:12; 12:21). He sent the Corinthians a third letter, scathingly disciplinary in nature (2 Cor. 7:8, 9). It was borne by Titus, but this third letter is not extant today (2 Cor. 2:3, 4). Paul left Ephesus in the spring of A.D. 56, bound for Macedonia (Acts 20:1; see map, Paul's Third Missionary Journey). He planned to rendezvous with Titus on a stopover in Troas in order to receive news about the situation in Corinth (2 Cor. 2:13).

Paul waited anxiously for Titus until the opportunity for navigation across the Aegean had ceased for the winter. Then, knowing Titus would need to take the land route through Macedonia, Paul departed. He finally met Titus in Macedonia and received good news about the general condition of the Corinthian church as well as bad news about a small faction that continued to oppose him. Paul wrote a fourth letter—the epistle we call 2 Corinthians—to prepare the Corinthian church for his third visit (Acts 20:2, 3). The first letter (1 Cor. 5:9) and third letter (2 Cor. 2:3, 4) have been lost. The second letter is 1 Corinthians, and the fourth, 2 Corinthians.

Purpose: Paul was overjoyed to hear from Titus that the Corinthians had accepted the reproofs of his disciplinary letter and had dealt with the offender. To vindicate himself in their eyes, Paul explained his conduct in the matter and defended his integrity. He reinforced the authenticity of both his apostleship and his

message. The dominating purpose of this epistle was to prepare the Corinthian church for Paul's impending third visit.

Audience: The church in Corinth consisted mainly of converted Gentiles, some Romans, and a few Jews. Most of these had little education and were low in social status. According to 1 Corinthians, immorality was rife in the church, and the believers had become proud and divisive. Second Corinthians was written after most of these problems had been resolved. However, a small faction of anti-Paul activists remained.

Literary Characteristics: Second Corinthians is the most personal and intimate of all Paul's letters as well as the one containing the majority of autobiographical references. The tone of the first seven chapters is loving and gentle, but after that point the tone becomes quite severe. Some scholars have suggested that the latter portion of 2 Corinthians was part of the "tearful letter," but little evidence exists to support this theory. The transition in tone from chapter seven to eight is substantial. However, transitions to difficult subjects are always awkward. Paul needed to confront the Corinthians directly in order to win their affections for a singular devotion to Christ and to himself as Christ's apostle. That he put off his severe remarks until the end of his letter is not surprising.

THEMES In 2 Corinthians, Paul was seeking to vindicate himself and expose the false apostles who were disrupting the Corinthian church. He discussed the correct motives for serving Christ and pointed out that he, as an apostle, had served both diligently and faithfully. The primary theme of the letter is that obedience to Christ means respect and submission to the authority of Christ's messenger—in this case, Paul. A second, underlying theme is that of selfless giving—both in Christian service and in the sharing of personal possessions and resources.

OUTLINE I. Paul's Explanation of His Recent Conduct and Defense of His Integrity (1:12–2:13)
A. Paul's sincerity (1:12–14)

- B. Paul's reasons for changing his plans (1:15–2:2)
 - C. Paul's motivation behind his disciplinary letter (2:3, 4)
 - D. A call to forgiveness (2:5–11)
 - E. An explanation of events in Troas (2:12, 13)
- II. Paul's Apostolic Ministry (2:14–6:10)
- A. Thanksgiving for God's sufficiency (2:14–3:6)
 - B. The glory of the New Covenant (3:7–18)
 - C. The source of Paul's ministry and knowledge (4:1–6)
 - D. Divine treasure in mortal flesh (4:7–15)
 - E. An eternal perspective on circumstances (4:16–5:10)
 - F. The ministry of reconciliation (5:11–21)
 - G. The marks of ministry (6:1–10)
- III. The Corinthians' Repentance and Reconciliation (6:11–7:16)
- A. Paul's call to holiness (6:11–7:1)
 - B. Paul's affection for the Corinthians (7:2–4)
 - C. Paul's joy at the Corinthians' repentance (7:5–16)
- IV. The Collection for the Poor in Jerusalem (8:1–9:15)
- A. The example of the Macedonians (8:1–7)
 - B. The example of Christ (8:8, 9)
 - C. The rationale for sharing material blessings (8:10–15)
 - D. The commendation of Titus and the other delegates (8:16–9:5)
 - E. Principles of sowing and reaping (9:6–15)
- V. Paul's Defense of His Apostolic Authority (10:1–12:13)
- A. The reality of spiritual warfare (10:1–6)
 - B. The reality of Paul's spiritual authority (10:7–11)
 - C. The parameters of Paul's authority (10:12–18)
 - D. Paul's concern for faithfulness (11:1–4)
 - E. The confrontation of false apostles (11:5–15)
 - F. Paul's reason to boast (11:16–12:6)
 - G. Paul's dependence on Christ's strength (12:7–10)
 - H. Paul's genuine apostleship (12:11–13)

- VI. Paul's Impending Visit to Corinth (12:14–13:10)
- A. Paul's parental love for the Corinthians (12:14–19)
 - B. His apprehension regarding their spiritual condition (12:20, 21)
 - C. Paul's use of his authority for their edification (13:1–10)

The earth-laden weak are recipients of the heaven-imported strength.
Dorothy Kelley Patterson

1:4 Paul mentioned tribulations (Gk. *thlipsis*, lit. “burdens,” “afflictions,” or “troubles”) nine times in this letter (twice in v. 4; see also v. 8; 2 Cor. 2:4; 4:17; 6:4; 7:4; 8:2, 13) and the corresponding verb three times: “afflicted” (2 Cor. 1:6); “hard pressed” (2 Cor. 4:8); “troubled” (2 Cor. 7:5). Paul experienced numerous troubles as did many because of their allegiance to the gospel. These believers not only endured trials, but they were actually able to derive benefit from them. Difficult experiences forced them to focus on the internal rather than the external, and the eternal rather than the temporal (2 Cor. 4:17, 18). They received the comfort of God in time of trial. This consolation enabled them, in turn, to help others through difficult experiences.

1:12 In a previous letter, Paul expressed the hope of visiting Corinth for an extended stay after visiting Macedonia (1 Cor. 16:5–7). However, he modified his original plan and passed quickly through Corinth en route to Macedonia, intending to return for a lengthy visit later. Paul encountered strong opposition and public insult in Corinth and therefore canceled his return visit (2 Cor. 2:5; 7:12; 12:21). The Corinthians did not understand the rationale behind Paul's twice-changed travel plans and accused him of duplicity and fickleness. Paul defended his integrity and explained that his recent conduct was sincere and true to a higher power—being guided not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God. “Sincerity” connotes the idea of being found unstained when examined in sunlight. Paul was not fickle, but reliable. His character would be found pure beneath the searching gaze of God (1 Cor. 4:4, 5).

CONSCIENCE: RIGHT OR WRONG?

Conscience is a universal, innate, God-given capacity to distinguish between right and wrong (Rom. 2:14, 15). It has two functions: to urge an individual to do what is perceived to be right; and subsequently to commend or condemn, depending on whether the individual did what was

perceived as right. A person who has a “good” and “pure” conscience consistently and genuinely acts in conformity with an inner set of godly standards (2 Cor. 1:12; 1 Tim. 1:5, 19; 3:9).

Conscience can be distorted, however. While this inner set of standards will be accurate if it is based on biblical truth, the conscience will be unreliable if faulty standards have been consistently presented to it as being true. The old saying, “Let your conscience be your guide,” will only be true if the individual’s conscience has been infused with godly principles. Thus, Christian parents have the important responsibility of communicating accurate standards of right and wrong to their children.

Conscience can also be disabled. For example, it can become insensitive and calloused if the person consistently acts contrary to its standards (Eph. 4:19). Even more seriously, the conscience can become “seared” and of no value through deliberately choosing to believe the lies of deceiving spirits rather than God’s truth (1 Tim. 4:2).

See also 2 Tim. 1:3; Titus 1:15; notes on Decision Making (1 Cor. 8); Problem Solving (John 5); Wisdom (James 1)

1:18–20 The Corinthians had accused Paul of being shifty, of saying “yes” and “no” in the same breath. Paul explained that his twice-changed travel plans were associated with the well-being of the Corinthians and not suggestive of a lack of reliability (v. 23). God is faithful, and the message preached by Paul was based on the Person of Jesus Christ, who completely affirms all of God’s promises to His people. “Amen” (v. 20; Heb. and Gk., lit. “let it be so”) was the response of those who accepted the gospel, experiencing security in Christ. Paul’s actions were prompted by God, who was and is completely and totally faithful.

2:7 Paul’s authority as an apostle had been publicly challenged during his last visit to Corinth. Following this painful visit, Paul apparently wrote the Corinthians a letter (which has since been lost) that helped them understand the connection between a challenge to his authority and their own spiritual well-being as a body of believers (2 Cor. 2:3, 4). In wronging Paul, the offender had wronged the church (2 Cor. 2:5). In response to Paul’s letter, the Corinthians disciplined the offender, who was apparently penitent. Therefore, Paul urged the church to forgive and comfort him.

Many of us don’t need a facelift; we need a heart transplant.

Rhonda H. Kelley

2:14 Paul’s image of a triumphal parade was based on the Roman victory procession in which enemy prisoners were forced to march to reward a conquering general. God through Christ, has vanquished His enemies (Rom. 5:10; Col. 2:15). Paul, who had formerly been an enemy of God, was now taken captive by Christ and led in triumph. In the Roman parade, incense was burned. Paul compared this aroma to the knowledge of Christ, diffused like a fragrance through those whom Christ had captured.

God intended for believers to be people with a distinctive fragrance that can be identified. This fragrance should be recognized everywhere, including your jobs, homes, communities, social engagements.

Scripture teaches that the aroma of Jesus Christ has different effects on different people (2 Cor. 2:14–16). To those who know Christ or are searching to know the truth, it is the aroma of life. But to those who are perishing and who have no desire to live any other way, it is the aroma of death. The fragrance of Jesus Christ will attract some people, and it will repel others. God has purposely placed you with this distinctive fragrance among different kinds of people.

The fact that not all with whom you come in contact are impressed with your Christian aroma should not be surprising. Jesus warned that in this world believers will suffer persecution (Matt. 5:11, 12). However, you need to be certain that the aroma of Jesus and not an aroma that comes from your lack of compassion and love for others causes the adverse reaction.

Being a witness on the job is much tougher than most can imagine. Often ears are deaf and hearts are cold to even the most effective witness (Acts 26:28). If you are not spreading the fragrance of the Lord Jesus Christ, then you are failing those around you who are searching for truth. The most effective sharing of your faith begins with a heart of love and caring, seeing people through His eyes, the way God sees them. God has given you the opportunity in the marketplace to be His fragrance to a lost world.

See also 2 Kin. 5:1–15; Acts 16:11–15; notes on Employment (Prov. 24; Eccl. 9; Acts 16; 18; Col. 3; Heb. 13; 1 Pet. 2); Evangelism (Matt. 28; John 6; Col. 4; 1 Pet. 3); Friendship (Luke 1); Salvation (Eph. 2)

2:16 OT animal sacrifices were a sweet aroma to God (Gen. 8:21; Ex. 29:18). However, after Christ offered Himself as the ultimate sacrifice for sin (Heb. 9:12), animal sacrifices became unnecessary. God now desires that an aroma be offered up to Him through the holy lives of Christians (Rom. 12:1). To God, this aroma is sweet; and to those who are being saved, it is the aroma of life. But to those who reject God, the aroma of Christ is a repugnant death stench.

APPEARANCE: UNFADING BEAUTY

A Christian should be a complement to the kingdom of God in every aspect of life (2 Cor. 3:2, 3). Maintaining a clean, neat, modest, and appropriate appearance is a responsibility. To neglect how you look can diminish your total effectiveness since Scripture describes your body as the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 6:19, 20)! What is nurtured internally is ultimately manifested externally (Prov. 23:7).

Appropriate attire is essential for women who represent Christ. Women are admonished not merely to have outward adornment but to use such adornment to emphasize what is within (1 Pet. 3:3, 4). A Christlike spirit is preferred over excessive make-up, gaudy jewelry, or revealing clothes. Style and beauty, however, need not be compromised. We can be stylish with modesty and flair!

Good manners also blend into your total image. Consideration of another's feelings and opinions is an opportunity to reflect the character traits described in Scripture as the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23). Having appropriate social skills can relax and free you to impart energy and concentration in other areas, such as sharing a witness for Christ or extending hospitality. Christians are watched, and their lives are scrutinized (Matt. 5:16). How others interpret your words and actions will be, to a great extent, how they regard Christ. Christ's love ought to shine!

Unfading beauty is not dependent upon the outer frame but is achieved with the balance of personifying Christ's love and taking care of God's handiwork (1 Pet. 3:3, 4).

See also Prov. 31:22, 30; notes on Beauty (Prov. 4); Femininity (Ps. 144); Modesty (Is. 3); Self-esteem (2 Cor. 10)

3:3 Emissaries to NT churches often bore letters of recommendation, establishing the bearer's identity and credentials. The Corinthians themselves were the epistle or letter establishing his credibility. The conversion of the Corinthians was a supernatural work, confirming that Paul, whom God used for the work, was a minister of Christ. The old covenant was inscribed on stone tablets (Ex. 24:12), but the New Covenant was written on human hearts (Ezek. 11:19).

3:5, 6 Who was sufficient for the overwhelming responsibility of being the aroma of Christ in the world (2 Cor. 2:16)? No one could possibly be adequate for such a task. Human resources are pitifully insufficient. However, Paul argued that Christ equips believers with divine resources and thus makes them sufficient as ministers of the New Covenant. Therefore, reliance on human rather than divine authority with regard to letters of commendation was short-sighted (2 Cor. 3:1–3).

3:18 When Moses came down from Sinai with the tablets of the Law, his face physically reflected the fact that he had been speaking directly to God (Ex. 34:33–35). Paul maintained that as glorious as Moses' face was, it was a fading, temporal glory. It is outshone by the glory of the gospel, which, through the Spirit, transforms believers into the image of God from glory to ever increasing glory. The New Covenant is superior to the old covenant, for the Spirit removes the veil that obscures one's view of God. With unveiled faces, believers behold God's glory and are being transformed into His image.

THE GLORY OF THE NEW COVENANT

Old Covenant	New Covenant
The Law was written on stone tablets (2 Cor. 3:3).	The New Covenant is written on human hearts (2 Cor. 3:3).
The letter of the Law kills (2 Cor. 3:6).	The Spirit of the Lord gives liberty and life (2 Cor. 3:6, 17).
The Law brings condemnation (2 Cor. 3:9).	The New Covenant brings righteousness (2 Cor. 3:9).

The old covenant was passing away (2 Cor. 3:11).	The New Covenant remains forever (2 Cor. 3:11).
The Israelites could not look on God without a veil (2 Cor. 3:13).	All can look upon the glory of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:16, 18).
The glory of the old covenant was passing (2 Cor. 3:11).	The glory of the New Covenant is ever increasing (2 Cor. 3:18).

Living by faith is not easy, but it is essential. It is the only weapon for adversity that cannot fail.

Dorothy Kelley Patterson

4:3, 4 Some of Paul's critics maintained that Paul's message was obscure. Paul argued the problem was not with his message but rather with the veil that covered people's minds and prevented them from seeing truth (2 Cor. 3:15). Unbelievers, "those who are perishing," have had their minds blinded by the "god of this age," Satan (2 Cor. 4:3, 4; see Eph. 2:2), who, though defeated by Christ (Heb. 2:14), temporarily continues his hold over the world to prevent people from seeing the light of the gospel (1 John 5:19).

4:7 Pottery, bought for one or two copper coins in the Corinthian marketplace, was often used as a receptacle for wick lamps. Though cheap and fragile they fulfilled their job as a holder for the lamp wicks. Paul used the imagery of these jars of clay to illustrate the sharp contrast between himself and the grandeur of the message he bore. He was ordinary and unimpressive, but he preached a gospel of light and power. God intended this so that the true source of the message be recognized as divine and not human.

PERSECUTION: HOPE UNDER FIRE

The Bible records examples of persecution for the faith in both Old and New Testaments. Accounts of persecution in the Old Testament involved nations as a whole and individuals in particular. The prophets were persecuted because of their faith in God and their obedience to His will (Acts 7:52). In the New Testament, the church body, the twelve disciples, and individual Christians were persecuted for taking a stand for the Lord (Matt. 5:11, 12; 1 Cor. 15:9). Jesus suffered great persecution from the religious leaders of His day (John 5:16).

Persecution typically involves harassment and oppression for religious convictions, which results in physical or emotional suffering and affliction. Tribulation is to be an expected aspect of the Christian's life, in part because Christians are to live according to standards and principles

that are more righteous than those advocated by unbelievers (2 Tim. 3:12). However, persecution for the faith is neither unbearable nor useless (John 16:33).

Although persecution may be an inevitable part of a Christian woman's life, she is neither to seek out persecution nor to bring persecution on herself. Much of what is perceived as persecution may actually be a consequence of abuse, a matter of poor self-esteem, or the result of an error in judgment. Believers must be wise in discerning the true source of persecution and the motives that evoke it.

Persecution is also inevitable for these reasons: (1) The sinful world hates God (John 15:18); (2) the things of the flesh battle the things of the Spirit (Gal. 4:29); (3) tribulation is inevitable in the midst of righteous living (Matt. 5:10); yet (4) believers are undergirded with help, strength, and power from God to face their tribulations (Rom. 8:35–39).

Christians are to face persecution with patience, endurance, and steadfastness (Rom. 12:12; James 5:7–11). They are to endure persecution and, in the process, receive strength and power to be “more than conquerors” (Rom. 8:35–39). Blessing can actually be experienced in the midst of persecution (1 Pet. 3:14; 4:12–14) because the Christian facing persecution for the kingdom's sake is not forsaken by God (2 Cor. 4:7–10).

See also notes on Adversity (Acts 5); Fruit of the Spirit (Ps. 86; Rom. 5; 15; 1 Cor. 10; 13; Gal. 5; Eph. 4; Col. 3; 2 Thess. 1; Rev. 2); Perseverance (Rev. 14); Suffering (Ps. 33; 113; Is. 43; Mark 3; 1 Pet. 5); Testing (Ps. 11)

4:17, 18 Paul suffered severely for the sake of the gospel. But when he reflected on his struggles in light of eternity, he saw them as being light and momentary. Only by comparing the *weight* of these sufferings to the *weight* of eternal glory would these sufferings pale into insignificance. Even though afflictions may cause the outer person to waste away, the life-giving Spirit renews the inner person day by day in preparation for the glory to come. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to shift their focus away from the heaviness of temporary, external circumstances toward the internal and eternal weight of glory that is the inheritance of those who believe.

5:1–4 The body is sometimes compared to a “house” in which the soul dwells and sometimes to a garment with which it is clothed (v. 1). Paul combined these two figures here. He spoke of putting on a “house” as though it were a garment. Paul longed for the day when his mortal, temporal body would be replaced by an immortal, imperishable, spiritual one (Phil. 3:21). He certainly had experienced burdens of sorrow and suffering in his life. However, Paul groaned for heaven because his deepest desire was to be fully “present” with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:6, 8).

5:9 The ultimate goal of Paul's life was to be “well pleasing” to the Lord (Gal 1:10; Col. 1:10). This aim was in effect during his time on earth (“present” in the body), and that it would remain undiminished in heaven (“absent” from the body). The certainty of judgment and the prospect of eternal glory enabled Paul to persevere through hardship and motivated him to handle the ministry of the gospel with utmost integrity (2 Cor. 6:3).

5:10 Only believers will appear before Christ's “judgment seat” (Gk. *bema*). Salvation is not the subject of judgment but rather works (see Rom 14:10; 1 Cor. 3:13; chart, The Judgments in the New Testament).

5:16 Prior to Paul's conversion, he had decided that Jesus could not possibly be the Messiah. However, his conception of Christ was based on fleshly knowledge. His view radically changed when he encountered Christ face to face on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:4). In Christ, the new way of knowing is spiritual in nature. Paul argued that spiritual wisdom does not evaluate people on the basis of external appearances, as the Corinthians were in the habit of doing. Therefore, he urged them to discard their old, carnal ways of assessment so that they could evaluate others according to the new nature that had been given them through Christ (2 Cor. 1:12).

HEALING: SHAME: NO MORE GUILT

Guilt is a God-given emotion that occurs when a woman's mistakes and faults are brought to her own mind or publicly exposed. This may be a personal reminder of her own limitations and sinfulness. Shame, however, says that the person herself is bad, of no value, or unworthy to exist—that she is hopelessly defective, unlovable, inferior, and worthless. Shame begins externally with a subtle implication through silence and neglect or with verbal denunciation through words of abuse. When such messages are repeated often enough, whether through words or actions, they become internalized into a false belief: I must be bad to deserve such terrible treatment. This becomes the core identity and the basis of thousands of future, flawed choices for the one suffering from shame.

Healing of shame begins when a woman identifies and confesses the lies she has believed about herself. She then must begin to replace those lies with biblical truth about who God is and who she is as His beloved child—a person of immeasurable worth, righteous and uncondemned (Rom. 8:1, 31–39; 2 Cor. 5:17, 21).

Sometimes the victimizing acts done to a person may be so shame-producing that she is still emotionally bound by that shame, even though she mentally understands her worth in God's eyes. Or, if she herself has actually committed shameful acts, a deep sense of shame may remain even after confession and repentance. In these situations, those acts must be brought into the presence of Jesus. Ultimately, only He brings full emotional cleansing and freedom.

See also Ps. 31:1, 2; Mark 5:2, note; Luke 7:36–50; 15:11–24; 19:1–10; notes on Family (1 Sam. 3); Guilt (2 Cor. 7); Healing (Ps. 13; 133; Eccl. 1; Gal. 6; James 5); Identity in Christ (Col. 2); Self-esteem (2 Cor. 10)

6:3–11 Paul was scrupulous to avoid behavior that would tarnish his ministry as Christ's ambassador (2 Cor. 5:20) and God's fellow worker (2 Cor. 6:1). The apostle reviewed his sufferings (vv. 4, 5): general suffering (tribulations, needs, distresses), suffering administered by others (stripes, imprisonment, tumults), and self-disciplinary suffering (labors, sleeplessness, fasting). Next, he mentioned his cultivation and outworking of inner resources, including the indwelling Holy Spirit, sincere love, the Word of truth, and the power of God (vv. 6, 7). Finally, he contrasted by pairs of paradoxes the worldly and divine perspectives through which he had been judged (vv. 8–10).

6:12 Paul's defense of his changed travel plans and description of his apostolic ministry were to influence the Corinthians to reciprocate the love that he had selflessly poured out upon them.

6:14 Opposites cannot be harmoniously joined (vv. 14–16). The alliances Paul had in mind may have been mixed marriages, improper business associations, or relationships with pagan idolaters (1 Cor. 10:14; see Neh. 10, Interfaith Marriage; 2 Cor. 6, Husbands). However, he most likely was referring to associations with false apostles. He considered these false prophets responsible for the recent schism in his relationship with the Corinthian church (2 Cor. 11:13–15).

HUSBANDS: MARRIAGE TO AN UNBELIEVER

While knowingly marrying an unbeliever violates God’s Word (2 Cor. 6:14), Scripture provides very practical encouragement to those who find themselves the wives of unsaved husbands.

Win without a word. Do not preach to an unsaved husband. He cannot comprehend spiritual truths (2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Pet. 3:1–4). Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit. God desires repentance for all (2 Pet. 3:9).

Cultivate a quiet and gentle spirit. A wife who is saved will at times disagree with her unsaved husband. You may disagree but do not be disagreeable. Avoid agitation and harshness. Concentrate on being the best wife possible. Relax and enjoy your husband. Do not condemn him. Mirror God’s love through your pure character and generosity toward him.

Be submissive in your love. Demonstrate loving respect for your husband. However, submission does not require agreeing to engage in sinful activities or living in fear (2 Tim. 1:7). If your husband dangerously mistreats you or your children, seek protection from civil authorities.

Pray for your husband’s salvation. While his salvation is not guaranteed, your faith and prayers act as a catalyst, binding Satan and opening your husband’s heart to the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:31).

See also 1 Sam. 25:2–39; notes on Evangelism (Matt. 28; John 6; Col. 4; 1 Pet. 3); Husbands (Job 31); Marriage (Gen. 2; 2 Sam. 6; Prov. 5; Hos. 2; Amos 3; 2 Cor. 13; Heb. 12); Masculinity (Gen. 2); Wives (Prov. 31); portrait of Abigail (1 Sam. 25)

6:17 To buffer his argument against alliances with pagans, Paul cited portions of Isaiah and Ezekiel referring to Israel’s redemption from bondage. God delivered the Israelites so they could be holy and free from pagan influences for fellowship with Him. Paul argued that in order to attain personal holiness and enjoy God’s presence, the Corinthians needed likewise to sever ties with pagan idolaters and false apostles. He was *not* saying that believers should avoid contact with unbelievers. On the contrary, he encouraged Christians to associate with the unsaved of the world (1 Cor. 5:9, 10). However, Paul was concerned that the Corinthians avoid fellowship or communion with pagans within the church (“religious” unbelievers). He did not want them thus to be led astray from sincere and pure devotion to Christ (2 Cor. 11:3).

7:1 God promised His presence (2 Cor. 6:16) and a special relationship to those who would obey Him (2 Cor. 6:17, 18). Because the promises are from *God*, Christians must be meticulous to fulfill their responsibilities in satisfying the conditions. First, believers are expected to cleanse themselves by turning from everything that contaminates the body or spirit—including every person who bends the truth (2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2). Second, they are to work toward “perfecting” holiness (2 Cor. 7:1). The use of the present participle in “perfecting” signifies a continual process by which their holiness is brought to completion (v. 1).

7:8 Following his painful visit, Paul wrote a harsh disciplinary letter to the Corinthians (see Introduction: Setting). He regretted doing this, but the Corinthians did respond to his correction with godly sorrow (v. 11). Such sorrow produced in them a concerted effort to make amends (“diligence”), a desire to vindicate themselves (“clearing of yourselves”), “indignation” against the person who had opposed Paul, alarm at their own passivity (“fear”), a deep longing and concern for Paul (“vehement desire and zeal”; see 2 Cor. 7:7), and a readiness to see justice done (“vindication”; see v. 11). They demonstrated that they did not, in fact, support the man who had publicly opposed Paul. Therefore, their sin was not so much that they had done wrong but that by their indifference they had failed to do what was right.

GUILT: A SPIRITUAL WEIGHT

Guilt is the emotional and spiritual weight we bear as the result of sin against others and against God. Christ taught that the acknowledgement of our true guilt is the door through which we can experience the cleansing and renewal of being forgiven (1 John 1:9, 10).

There are two kinds of guilt: false guilt and true guilt. False guilt is what the apostle Paul refers to as “the sorrow of the world” (2 Cor. 7:9, 10). He describes a nebulous sense of free-floating regret and guilt which seem to have no clear source and leave only a deep feeling of condemnation. True guilt, on the other hand, is “godly sorrow [that] produces repentance leading to salvation.”

True guilt is the gentle, persistent prodding of the Holy Spirit, which leads us to acknowledge that we have indeed failed or fallen short of God’s law (Rom. 3:23). That recognition of failure compels us to repent and seek God’s forgiveness and to experience once again the freedom and restoration made possible by Christ’s all-sufficient sacrifice (Rom. 5:10). Guilt that leads to repentance liberates the soul.

See also Gen. 3:1–7; 4:1–8; Mark 5:2, note; Luke 24:47, note; Rom. 3:23, note; 1 John 1:5–10; notes on Forgiveness (Ps. 51; Luke 17); Healing (Ps. 13; 133; Eccl. 1; 2 Cor. 5; Gal. 6; James 5); Shame (Ps. 119)

7:12 Paul explained his motivation for writing the disciplinary letter. He was not primarily seeking to correct the offender nor to vindicate himself but rather to affirm his relationship to the Corinthians as their spiritual father.

8:1, 2 Paul had organized a collection for the poor in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:10; Rom. 15:25–28). The Corinthians volunteered to contribute, but their good intentions did not translate into practical aid. Paul made another appeal to them, citing the example of the Macedonian churches, who had become involved entirely on their own initiative, though deeply poor and greatly afflicted (2 Cor. 8:2).

8:9 The supreme reason for Christian generosity is the self-giving and self-improvement of Christ, who gave up His glory and His rightful position in heaven on our behalf. Christ became what the Corinthians were (poor) so that they could become what He is (rich). Self-sacrifice is the proper test of love. The example of Christ and the debt Christians owe Him should lead them to be generous toward others.

8:15 Paul did not intend that the financial relief of the saints at Jerusalem should impoverish those in Corinth. He was not advocating an artificial equalization of property but rather the relief of need. Paul stressed that all believers had a duty to contribute out of their own abundance to the needs of the poor, but he also stressed that the poor were to work and support themselves to the best of their ability (2 Thess. 3:10). The give and take “equality” (translated “fair” in Col. 4:1) he had in mind could be illustrated by God’s provision of manna for the Israelites in the wilderness (Ex. 16:18). All the Israelites gathered manna to eat; but when they measured the amounts, the ones who had gathered more only had as much as they required, even as did the ones who had gathered less. There was neither excess nor insufficiency but equality of provision according to each one’s needs.

8:20, 21 Paul was aware that his critics would seize any opportunity to accuse him. It was not enough that honesty be practiced in the Lord’s sight; Paul also felt it imperative to be open and honest in the sight of people (Prov. 3:4). Therefore, Paul did not take the gift of money to the church in Jerusalem but sent it with Titus, whom the Corinthians loved and trusted. Furthermore, he had the churches (perhaps those of Judea, Asia Minor, and/or Macedonia) choose two other men to accompany Titus.

9:6 Paul associated the act of giving with the principle of sowing and reaping. Farmers can keep and eat all of their grain, or they can “lose” it by throwing it out over the ground. Naturally, the more generous the sowing, the more bountiful the rewards. This principle holds true in the spiritual sphere as well. The liberal giver need not fear destitution, for this giver would receive in return gifts out of all proportion to what had been given (Prov. 11:24, 25; 19:17; Luke 6:38). Christ loves givers who are sincere (not reluctant), spontaneous (not under compulsion), and joyful (not begrudging). He does not look at the amount but at the heart (Mark 12:41–44).

GIVING: A GENEROUS HEART

A generous heart is one marked by evidence of the Holy Spirit’s work in your life. God’s love is demonstrated in the giving of His Son (John 3:16). Giving your time, energies, and financial resources is the expression of a grateful heart, the natural response of a woman who realizes she has been lavished with God’s grace (Eph. 1:7, 8).

In the Old Testament, the Jewish tithe (the first one tenth) was a prescribed percentage of a person’s income. It belonged to the Lord and was used to provide for the priests, the temple, and the needy. Offerings were made on special occasions (see Ex. 35:21–36:7) and as an obligatory part of public sacrifices of thanksgiving, blessing, or sorrow.

In the New Testament, emphasis is placed upon the believer’s heart and attitude. Paul declared that a Christian’s giving should be the overflow of a worshipful heart and a matter of conviction before God (2 Cor. 9:7). Giving to others in a spirit of forgiveness—without judgment or condemnation—brings joyful, abundant rewards (Luke 6:37, 38).

See also Gal. 6:6–10; Phil. 4:10–20; 1 Tim. 6:3–10; chart on The Offerings of the Lord; notes on Debt (Ps. 37); Financial Planning (Luke 19); Gratitude (Ps. 95); Stewardship (Luke 16); portrait of the Widow with Two Mites (Mark 12)

9:10 Generous giving seems hazardous to those who have little; however, the risk dims in light of the greatness of God’s power. All resources ultimately come from God, and Paul insisted that God is able to increase these resources for the purpose of giving. God supplies the seed and also multiplies the harvest. The Macedonians had given out of extreme poverty. But such seed as God had supplied, they had sown in liberality. The results of their generosity would be—for both themselves and the recipients of their gift—of a magnitude out of all proportion to the original quantity given.

9:14, 15 This section concludes in the same way it began—by focusing on the grace of God (2 Cor. 8:1). “Thanks” (Gk. *charis*) is the same word translated “grace” or “favor” (2 Cor. 9:15). The indescribable gift is God’s grace or favor, which rests upon those who believe (v. 15). Gratitude for God’s gift brings to an end all debate on the question of giving. It is only proper that those who have benefited from such a vast, incomparable spiritual gift should generously and freely give material gifts to relieve the needs of others.

10:4–6 Paul knew that the Corinthians were in grave danger of being led astray from the gospel. The Corinthian church needed to express loyalty to Christ by demonstrating loyalty to Paul, Christ’s representative (2 Cor. 5:20; 7:15). Paul urged the Corinthians to use spiritual weapons to war against the “strong man,” Satan (Luke 11:21). Paul urged the Corinthians to pull down the strongholds that had been established in their minds by making every thought obedient to Christ. When they had “fulfilled” obedience, Paul could, with their support, punish the false apostles and those who continued to follow them (2 Cor. 10:6).

10:7 Certain religious leaders had presented themselves to the Corinthian church as ministers of Christ (2 Cor. 11:23). They brought letters of recommendation (2 Cor. 3:1), commended themselves (2 Cor. 10:12), and identified themselves with so called “super apostles” (2 Cor. 11:5). These men had credentials, social status, education, and persuasive rhetoric (1 Cor 1:26; 2:1). However, despite outward appearances, they were not genuine apostles (2 Cor. 11:13). They opposed Paul (2 Cor. 10:10), sought monetary gain (2 Cor. 2:17), and indulged in sensuality (2 Cor. 12:21). Paul urged the Corinthians to evaluate these men by spiritual rather than carnal standards.

SELF-ESTEEM: A HEALTHY YOU

Self-esteem is how each individual values herself. Poor self-esteem (bad, condemning feelings about yourself) are weights that keep believers under condemnation and cause them to be less than what God intends. Believers are to combat such feelings of inferiority (Heb. 12:1).

Proper self-esteem in a follower of Christ is a matter of recognizing and confronting yourself in your humanity, including the tendency to sin, “going astray” (1 Pet. 2:25). It is also a matter of embracing Jesus’ work on the Cross—His grace that covers a multitude of sins. The process of comprehending God’s infinite care for the individual—each with unique strengths and weaknesses—puts a perspective on self-esteem. Psalm 139 expresses the wonder of being uniquely created by God and the intimate care of His presence at all times. Jesus tenderly described His love for His children (Matt. 6:25–34).

Prerequisites to healthy self-esteem include these:

Recognize the need of a Savior (Is. 53:6).

Accept being “in the beloved” (Eph. 1:6; Rom. 8:1).

Move forward in God’s plan for your life (Phil. 3:13, 14).

Have a realistic view of yourself (Rom. 12:3).
 Avoid comparisons to others (2 Cor. 10:12).

A person with healthy self-esteem is marked by these characteristics:

Resting in “ownership” by God (1 Cor. 3:16).
 Submitting to being the “workmanship” of God (Eph. 2:10).
 Appreciating the differences of others (1 Cor. 12:1–31).
 Willingness to take risks, steps of faith (Esth. 4:13–16).
 Forging good relationships with others (Ruth 1:16, 17).

God does not evaluate human worth as we do. He looks to the heart within, while we tend to look only at the outer frame (1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Pet. 3:3, 4). The heart of a healthy self-esteem is recognizing that “self” must be seen as created for God’s glory. We might more accurately say that within every believer there must be “God-esteem,” which accepts whatever lot in life is ours.

We must be willing to change weaknesses into strengths when possible—and when that is not possible, we are to look for opportunities for God to be glorified even in our failures and suffering. God does not make mistakes, and He is never finished working in us as He continues to refine and edify, helping each woman reach her maximum potential (1 Pet. 5:10). Negatives can be changed into positives and tragedies into triumphs with the Savior’s touch.

See also notes on Appearance (2 Cor. 3); Beauty (Prov. 4); Identity in Christ (Col. 2); Image of God (Ps. 8)

10:18 The apostles who were seeking to turn the Corinthian church against Paul were frauds. They evaluated and commended themselves by human standards (v. 12). They claimed authority over the Corinthian church and by their own virtue had thus transgressed the proper limits of an apostle (v. 13, 16). Paul had limits of authority that he did not breach (v. 15). These leaders exalted themselves, claimed ownership of the ministry in Corinth, and took personal credit for the growth there. Paul argued that such self-commendation was not of Christ (Jer. 9:23, 24).

11:2 Paul used a wedding metaphor to present himself as the father of the bride, offering the Corinthians as pure and undefiled to Christ, the Bridegroom.

11:3 Paul cautioned the Corinthians that Satan, the father of all lies (John 8:44), would seek to distract them from the simplicity of the gospel. Satan would attempt to deceive them with complicated and persuasive arguments, just as he had once deceived Eve (Gen. 3:13; see 1 Tim. 2:14). The teachings of the false apostles sounded good, but in actuality they “corrupted” the Christian message (2 Cor. 11:3). The false apostles promoted a spirit of human wisdom and *gnosis* (2 Cor. 10:5; see 1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Cor. 1:12), a spirit of bondage to legalistic requirements (2 Cor. 3:6), and a spirit of compromise (2 Cor. 6:14–7:1; 12:21). This spirit was different than the spirit of liberty (2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 2:4; 5:1), the spirit of love, joy, and peace (Rom. 14:17; Gal. 5:22), and the spirit of power (Eph. 3:20; Col. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:7;) that Paul preached.

A “cult” is a religious group that has been established upon a special message not found in the Bible. Most cultic leaders testify of visions, revelations, spirit guides, or audible voices from heaven that have revealed truth to them alone. Their messages are characteristically apocalyptic and are often presented as “inspired.”

Cultic leaders are nearly always authoritarian. They typically encourage their followers to adopt a legalistic lifestyle and persecution mentality, leading to an exclusivistic outlook for the group.

Many people have suffered from the brainwashing and other fraudulent tactics of cults. Grievances include the lack of full disclosure when luring potential members into the cult through extortion, poor nutrition, sleep deprivation, auditory bombardment, as well as far more severe instances of slavery, physical abuse, and sexual exploitation. Cults tend to entice followers with what appear to be generous expressions of concern and a desire to meet the deep needs of people who are confused, suffering, dejected, or searching for meaning in life. In the minds of many Christian leaders, the increase in cult membership worldwide is a direct indicator of the church’s failure to meet these needs genuinely and fully.

See also John 1:4, note; Gal. 1:6–9; notes on Heresies (1 Cor. 1); Paganism (Jer. 7)

11:14, 15 Satan is the father of all lying, and there is no truth in him (John 8:44). His proper sphere is darkness (Eph. 6:12; Col. 1:13). However, he has the ability to transform himself or masquerade as an angel of light. He can change his outward form to appear to be what he is not. Christ has His ministers, and so has Satan. If Satan is able to present himself in a guise so foreign to his real nature, it is no surprise that those who serve him would be able to do the same. The false apostles in the church in Corinth were perverting the truth. Outwardly they appeared to be religious (ministers of righteousness), but neither their character nor their doctrine conformed to the Word of God. They were simply masquerading as messengers of light.

11:17 The Corinthians evaluated others according to external appearances; so Paul used their standard for evaluating himself. Although he regarded this to be an exercise in foolishness, he maintained that he could match and even outdo all the boastful claims of the false apostles. Paul compared his own ministry with theirs and demonstrated that even on the basis of externals, their apostleship was deficient. They had not known the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings as he had. They had not been beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, imprisoned, nor had they hungered, thirsted, or gone sleepless for the sake of the kingdom. Although they had some claim to Jewish nationality and lineage; as far as ministry was concerned, they were completely lacking. Paul could boast more than they. However, he recognized that this was foolish, for it was not his own but Christ’s power he used for all he had experienced and accomplished (2 Cor. 12:9).

12:7 Paul knew there was a danger that others would think more highly of him than they ought because of the visions and revelations he had experienced. However, he himself was protected from self-exaltation by a persistent “thorn in the flesh.” No one knows with certainty the nature of Paul’s “thorn in the flesh.” It may have been a physical malady such as defective eyesight, a lisp, epilepsy, or recurrent malaria. Or, perhaps it was spiritual in nature—temptation or satanic persecution. It may have even been an individual or group who continually harassed Paul. In any case, it was bothersome to him. But instead of removing the “thorn,” God assured Paul that His grace and strength would be sufficient for Paul to bear

it. Paul's "thorn in the flesh" destroyed his pride and kept him dependent on divine power. Therefore, although unpleasant, Paul regarded the "thorn" as an aid rather than a handicap.

PAIN: PHYSICAL: *TURNING AFFLICTION INTO JOY*

Pain was part of the God-given consequence to mankind for believing Satan and disobeying God in the Garden of Eden. Women were to experience pain in childbirth and men, the pain of labor as they worked the ground (Gen. 3:16, 17). As a result the "whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs" (Rom. 8:22). Everyone is subject to pain until God brings "a new heaven and a new earth" and "there shall be no more pain" (Rev. 21:1, 4).

Job, "a blameless and upright man" (Job 2:3), experienced pain as a result of Satan's direct attack (vv. 1–10). Job illustrates what often happens when a person experiences unrelieved pain. He isolated himself (v. 8). His wife became impatient and lacked understanding (v. 9). Job's focus was on himself, even to the point of desiring death as a release (Job 3:20, 21).

The New Testament emphasizes pain's partnership with joy. The woman, through labor, experiences the joy of new life (John 16:21). Paul and Silas sang and prayed while in pain, and the result was their deliverance and the salvation of their jailer's household (Acts 16:23–25, 34). Perhaps Paul knew of the medicinal value of a "merry heart" (Prov. 17:22). Christ, who endured the Cross for the joy that was set before Him (Heb. 12:2), understands pain. He walks with Christians through their painful hours (Ps. 9:9, 10; Is. 41:10).

See also Mark 5:2, note; notes on Adversity (Acts 5); Contentment (1 Tim. 6); Healing (Ps. 13; 133; Eccl. 1; 2 Cor. 5; Gal. 6; James 5); Suffering (Ps. 33; 113; Is. 43; Mark 3; 1 Pet. 5)

12:12 The false apostles in Corinth had many external credentials. However, Paul pointed out that they had twisted the truth of the gospel and were lacking in godly character. In contrast, Paul's character and message were above reproach. According to Paul, a genuine apostle preaches the gospel of Christ, shows the character of Christ, and ministers in the power of Christ.

12:15 Paul had determined not to accept financial support from the Corinthians while working among them. He explained that it was not their property but their hearts that he was eager to win. Furthermore, they were his spiritual children (1 Cor. 4:15). Just as earthly parents provide for their offspring, so Paul was more than glad to spend his own resources and to be "spent" personally on their behalf. To be "spent" means to be consumed, used up, or spent entirely. Despite the Corinthians' rejection of him, there was no limit to Paul's love for them.

12:20 Paul was pondering his impending visit to Corinth. He was concerned that the Corinthians deal with the contents of his letter and repent before he arrived. He explained that his boasting was not for the purpose of outdoing his opponents but for the purpose of purifying and building up the church (vv. 1–18). Paul's awareness of their sins caused him to fear lest he not find the Corinthians as he wished (repentant) and lest they find him as they did not wish (forceful and disciplinary).

13:1 Paul wrote 2 Corinthians in anticipation of his third visit. In this, more than any other letter, the apostle Paul poured out his heart. Paul deeply loved the Corinthians and endured many affronts and indignities for their sake. But he dared not endure the charge against the genuineness of his apostleship,

for such was no less than a challenge to the authority of Christ. Paul pleaded with the Corinthians to repent so that he would not need to discipline them. He much preferred for them to be strong and himself to be regarded as weak (2 Cor. 13:9). Judgment would be secured “by the mouth of two or three witnesses” (Deut. 19:15). This process was laid down in Mosaic Law and was approved by Christ as applicable to settling disputes within the church (Matt. 18:16).

13:11 Paul urged the Corinthians to become complete (Gk. *katartisis*, vv. 9, 11). The related verb (Gk. *katartizo*) is used to describe the disciples’ mending of their nets (Matt. 4:21). Paul wanted the Corinthians to repair the problems in their midst in order that they, as a body, might be whole. A list of eight sins that are characteristic of a divided church, followed by sins of immorality (2 Cor. 12:20, 21), which had earlier caused Paul to write 1 Corinthians. Paul was glad for the repentance that had already taken place (2 Cor. 7:9) but was keenly aware that the Corinthians needed more in order to become complete.

MARRIAGE: GOD’S PROVISION

After the Fall of man, Adam and Eve had continued contact with God, evidenced by the fact that Cain and Abel were taught that they were to bring an offering to God. The Lord did not withdraw His presence, even though He allowed the consequences of the sin of Adam and Eve to follow in due course.

Scripture reveals that God was available to women to aid them in their difficulties. God is never the enemy of His children but their most dependable and faithful friend (John 15:14). He assuaged Eve’s sorrow at Abel’s death by giving her another son (Gen. 4:25). He encouraged Sarah in the time of her barrenness (Gen. 18:10, 14). He answered Rebekah when she inquired of Him (Gen. 25:22, 23). God spoke to Deborah (Judg. 4:6), instructed Samson’s mother (Judg. 13:3–5), gave Ruth direction (the Book of Ruth), comforted Hannah and healed her barrenness (1 Sam. 1:26, 27), and used Esther to save her people (Esth. 8).

When Jesus was to be born, an angel of God visited Mary to describe her role in the Incarnation (Luke 1:28–33). God filled Mary with His presence, both literally (through the life planted in her womb) and spiritually (through the presence of the Holy Spirit).

Jesus, in all of His teaching, pointed to the Father’s original plan for Christian marriage in which the wife was to be an equal partner to be loved and protected (Matt. 19:4–6). Paul gave instruction to husbands and wives as to how they are to relate in the home (Eph. 5:22–33). God never gives a command to His children unless He makes provision for them to obey. He has given the power of the Holy Spirit to help believers withstand temptation (2 Pet. 2:9) and the presence of Christ that becomes their spiritual armor in withstanding the enemy’s fiery darts (Eph. 6:10–18). He also extends His presence through loving and supportive fellow believers in the church (2 Cor. 13:11). He prepares for protection from abuses through establishing civil authorities (Rom. 13:1).

When both husband and wife know the Lord as personal Savior, the Holy Spirit lives in their hearts. As they submit to His Lordship, they are enabled to follow His directions. The husband will be empowered to love his wife as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25), and the wife will be inspired to submit as unto the Lord (Eph. 5:22, 24). The atmosphere of the home will become one of joy (Eph. 5:19–21) as hurtful attitudes are laid aside (Eph. 4:25–31). Forgiveness and kindness will become house rules (v. 32).

Couples are enabled to overcome temptation with faithfulness to each other (see 1 John 5:4, 5). When husband and wife give their expectations to God and focus on the good, then peace will rule in their hearts and in their home (Phil. 4:6–8).

See also notes on Complementarity (Eph. 5); Family (Gen. 32; 1 Sam. 3; Ps. 78; 127); Husbands (Job 31; 2 Cor. 6); Marriage (Gen. 2; 2 Sam. 6; Prov. 5; Hos. 2; Amos 3; Heb. 12); Providence (Eccl. 7); Wives (Prov. 31)⁹

⁹ Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). [*The Woman's Study Bible*](#) (1 Co 1:2–2 Co 13:11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.