

INTRODUCTION TO 1 CORINTHIANS

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Circumstance and Synopsis

- The letter was probably written circa A.D. 54-56 from Ephesus during Paul's third missionary journey.
- Paul wrote to the church in the city of Corinth, the capital city of the Roman province Achaia. Paul had planted this church during his second missionary journey only a few years earlier.
- The original audience in Corinth contained members from all levels of society, but consisted mostly of people who were neither rich, wise, nor of noble birth.
- The original audience had sat under the ministry of Paul, Apollos and Peter.
- Subsequent to the ministries of Paul, Apollos, and Peter, the Corinthian church had begun to place improper value on worldly wisdom, including probably Greek philosophy.
- The letter is occasional, written both in response to reports Paul received about conditions in the Corinthian church, and in response to a letter Paul received from the Corinthian church.
- Paul wrote the letter largely to correct the problems he saw in the Corinthian church, although he also included praise for certain things the church was doing well.
- Literary form: epistle
- Doctrinal themes:
 - The nature of the church, and the implications thereof;
 - The nature of believers' union with Christ, and the implications thereof;
 - God's wisdom;
 - Proper worship;
 - The Lord's Supper;
 - Spiritual gifts;
 - Resurrection of the dead.
- Practical themes:
 - The importance of unity in the church;
 - Proper valuations and roles of church leaders;
 - The importance of church discipline;
 - Lawsuits;
 - Prostitution;
 - Marriage and Divorce in light of famines;
 - Christian freedom and responsibility;
 - Interaction with secular world;
 - Proper roles and honor in worship;
 - Love;
 - Ministering to the physical needs of others.

Author

- The apostle Paul wrote this letter.
- He was not one of the original twelve.
- He had formerly been named Saul (Acts 13:9).
- He had formerly been a zealous Pharisee (Acts 23:6; 26:5; Phil. 3:5).
- He had formerly persecuted the church (Acts 8:3; 9:1-2; 22:3-4; 26:9-11; 1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:14,23; Phil. 3:5).
- He had been Converted and appointed to his apostleship by direct encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-19; 22:6-16; 26:12-18).
- He was one of the church's earliest missionaries, and was especially commissioned to evangelize the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; 15:12; 18:6; 22:21; Gal. 2:9).
- He planted churches all over the Mediterranean world.
- He authored more New Testament books than any other writer: Romans; 1 & 2 Corinthians; Galatians; Ephesians; Philippians; Colossians; 1 & 2 Thessalonians; 1 & 2 Timothy; Titus; Philemon.

Outline

- I. Introduction (1:1-9)
 - A. Salutation (1:1-3)
 - B. Thanksgiving (1:4-9)
- II. Paul's Response to Reported Matters (1:10-6:20)
 - A. Divisions in the Church (1:10-4:21)
 1. Appeal in Response to Divisions (1:10-12)
 2. Divisions are Contrary to Paul's Ministry (1:13-17)
 3. Divisions are Contrary to the Gospel of Christ (1:18-2:5)
 - a. Worldly Wisdom and the Wisdom of the Gospel (1:18-25)
 - b. Worldly Wisdom and the Experience of the Gospel (1:26-31)
 - c. Worldly Wisdom and the Preaching of the Gospel (2:1-5)
 4. The Message of Wisdom (2:6-16)
 - a. Wisdom for the Mature (2:6-10a)
 - b. The Spirit of Wisdom (2:10b-12)
 - c. Spiritual and Unspiritual People (2:13-16)
 5. Personalities in the Church (3:1-23)
 - a. The Worldly Practice of Divisions (3:1-4)
 - b. The Proper Role of Church Leaders (3:5-15)
 - c. The True Nature of the Church (3:16-23)
 6. Following the Apostles (4:1-21)
 - a. Obligations of Leaders (4:1-5)
 - b. The Responsibility of Followers (4:6-7)
 - c. Sarcasm (4:8-13)
 - d. Paul's Purpose as a Spiritual Father (4:14-17)
 - e. Paul's Upcoming Visit (4:18-21)

- B. A Situation of Immorality (5:1-13)
 - 1. Report and Instructions (5:1-5)
 - 2. A Supportive Illustration (5:6-8)
 - 3. A Point of Clarification (5:9-13)
- C. The Problem of Litigations (6:1-11)
 - 1. An Incredible Problem: Mishandling Lawsuits (6:1-6)
 - 2. An Underlying Problem: Not Living the Gospel (6:7-8)
 - 3. The Root Problem: Misunderstanding the Gospel (6:9-11)
- D. Prostitution (6:12-20)
 - 1. Opposing Their Slogans (6:12-14)
 - 2. The Nature of Sexual Union (6:15-17)
 - 3. Uniqueness of Sexual Sin (6:18-20)
- III. Paul's Response to the Corinthians' Letter (7:1-16:18)
 - A. Issues Related to Marriage (7:1-40)
 - 1. General Outlooks on Marriage and Divorce (7:1-16)
 - a. Marriage (7:1-9)
 - b. Divorce (7:10-16)
 - 2. Stay Where You Are (7:17-24)
 - 3. Virgins and Marriage (7:25-40)
 - a. Virgins (7:25-28)
 - b. The Implications of an Eternal Perspective (7:29-35)
 - c. Final Concessions (7:36-40)
 - B. Food Sacrificed to Idols (8:1-11:1)
 - 1. Dining in an Idol's Temple (8:1-13)
 - a. Love, Not Knowledge (8:1-3)
 - b. Believers' Knowledge (8:4-6)
 - c. Dealing with Others' Ignorance (8:7-13)
 - 2. Freedom and Rights (9:1-27)
 - a. We've Got Every Right (9:1-14)
 - b. We Give Up Our Rights (9:15-27)
 - 3. Eating Meat Sacrificed to Idols (10:1-11:1)
 - a. Idolatry in the Old Testament (10:1-13)
 - i. An Historical Example (10:1-5)
 - ii. The Relevance of the Old Testament Example (10:6-13)
 - b. Idolatry and the Lord's Supper (10:14-22)
 - c. Practical Directions on Meat Offered to Idols (10:23-11:1)
 - C. Worship and Spiritual Gifts (11:2-14:40)
 - 1. Head Coverings, Hair, and Honor (11:2-16)
 - a. Words of Praise (11:2)
 - b. The Divine Order (11:3)
 - c. Responsibilities to Heads (11:4-12)
 - d. Cultural Considerations (11:13-16)
 - 2. The Lord's Supper (11:17-34)
 - a. Words of Rebuke (11:17)

- b. Divisions at the Table (11:18-22)
 - c. The Central Focus of the Supper (11:23-26)
 - d. Take Great Care (11:27-34)
- 3. Spiritual Gifts (12:1-14:40)
 - a. Serving Each Other with Spiritual Gifts in Worship (12:1-30)
 - i. Identifying the Spirit (12:1-3)
 - ii. Diverse Spiritual Gifts (12:4-11)
 - iii. Unity and Diversity of Members in the Body (12:12-30)
 - b. The Most Excellent Way (12:31-13:13)
 - i. Introduction (12:31)
 - ii. Priority of Love (13:1-3)
 - iii. The Characteristics of Love (13:4-7)
 - iv. The Superiority of Love (13:8-13)
 - c. Edification and Order (14:1-40)
 - i. Love and Gifts Together (14:1-5)
 - ii. Tongues (14:6-25)
 - a) The Limitations of Tongues (14:6-12)
 - b) Tongues and Edification within the Church (14:13-19)
 - c) Tongues and Unbelievers (14:20-25)
 - iii. The Practice of Worship (14:26-40)
- D. Controversy over the Resurrection (15:1-58)
 - 1. The Reality of Christ's Resurrection (15:1-11)
 - 2. The Hope of Believers' Resurrection (15:12-34)
 - a. If There is No Resurrection, Then Christ has not been Raised (15:12-19)
 - b. Christ has been Raised, Therefore Believers will be Raised (15:20-28)
 - c. If There is No Resurrection, Christian Life is Meaningless (15:29-34)
 - 3. The Nature of Resurrection (15:35-58)
- E. Instructions on Collections (16:1-4)
- F. General Exhortations (16:5-18)
- IV. Final Greetings and Closure (16:19-24)