

1st Corinthians

Introduction, Background and Argument

1. Title and Destination

1.1 *Pros Korinthious A* - “*First to the Corinthians.*” The letter *A* was probably added later.

1.2 Corinth was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia just east of the narrow isthmus that connected the Peloponnesian peninsula to mainland Greece.

1.3 Corinth was at the foot of a rocky acropolis called the Acrocorinth that towered 1,800 feet above the city.

1.4 Corinth was home to several temples of the gods and goddesses. 1) Aphrodite, the goddess of love, which boasted a thousand priestesses serving as sacred prostitutes. 2) Apollo, the god of music, poetry, purification, healing, and medicine. 3) Her, the goddess of marriage, women, family and protector of women in childbirth. 4) Poseidon, god of the sea, earthquakes, and horses. 5) Athena. 6) Hermes. 7) Pantheon, to all gods. 8) Isis, an Egyptian god. 9) Serapis, another Egyptian god.

1.5 Corinth was major commercial center strategically located between two gulfs: 1) Corinthian and 2) Saronic, thus controlling commerce between Asia and Italy, and three harbors: 1) Cenchreae (Acts 18:18), 2) Lechaem, and 3) Schoenus, thus controlling traffic between the Ionian and Aegean seas.

1.6 Corinth was home of the Diolkos (“haul across”), which enabled ships to port in one harbor and haul their merchandise across to the other harbor in order to avoid sailing around the dangerous southern Cape Melea which also added another 200 miles.

1.7 Corinth was home to the Isthmian Games which were held near the harbor at Schoenus and attracted thousands of visitors every four years.

1.8 Corinth was a cosmopolitan city where east met west, full of idolatry, sophistry, pleasure, and thus a place of great temptation.

When a sailor visited it was popular to “Corinthianize” which meant to have sex with a temple prostitute.

2. Authorship

2.1 Paul

2.2 Internal Evidence

2.2.1 1 Cor 1:1 Paul is named as the author along with Sosthenes

2.2.2 1 Cor 1:14 Crispus was converted under Paul and it stands to reason he was baptized by Paul (cf Acts 18:8).

2.2.3 1 Cor 3:4-6 Paul refers to himself in the 1st person as the one who founded the church and as writing the letter.

2.2.4 1 Cor 16:21 Paul wrote the greeting in his own hand

2.3 External Evidence

- 2.3.1 Clement of Rome (AD95)
- 2.3.2 The Didache
- 2.3.3 Barnabas
- 2.3.4 Ignatius
- 2.3.5 Polycarp
- 2.3.6 Justin Martyr
- 2.3.7 Athenagoras
- 2.3.8 Irenaeus
- 2.3.9 Clement of Alexandria
- 2.3.10 Tertullian
- 2.3.11 Basilides
- 2.3.12 Marcion (the heretic even listed it)

3. Date

- 3.1 Paul visited Corinth in AD51 and remained there for 18 months.
- 3.2 He was in Ephesus at the time he wrote 1 Corinthians, where he spent three years (1 Cor 16:8, 9, 19). Some time had to pass for several things to take place before writing.
- 3.3 Time for Paul to write a previous letter (1 Cor 5:9)
- 3.4 Time for Apollos to minister there (Acts 18:26-27; 1 Cor 1:12; et. Al)
- 3.5 Timothy was on his way and would likely arrive after 1 Corinthians arrived (Acts 19:22; 1 Cor 4:17)
- 3.6 It was almost Pentecost (1 Cor 16:8-9).
- 3.7 Spring of AD55 or 56 is most likely.

4. Occasion

4.1 On Paul's first visit to Corinth he stayed at least year and a half (Acts 18:11). During this time he wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians to encourage them and settle doctrinal questions stirred up by someone who forged a letter in Paul's name. Meanwhile in Corinth, Jews stirred up trouble for Paul again, bringing him before the proconsul Gallio who dismissed the case as being a dispute within Judaism. Afterward, Paul left Corinth with Priscilla and Aquila and went to Ephesus, leaving them there while he moved on to Caesarea, presumably Jerusalem, and then Syrian Antioch (Acts 18:18-22). During this time Priscilla and Aquila met Apollos and sent him to Corinth to minister in Paul's absence (Acts 18:24-19:1). After Paul spent some time in Antioch he departed on his third missionary journey (Acts 18:23ff) eventually returning to Ephesus where he remained for three years. During this time Paul seems to have received correspondence regarding the Corinthians. Reports of immorality spurred Paul to write his first letter to them known as the "former letter" (1 Cor 5:9). Later, reports from Chloe's house revealed factions within the church (1 Cor 1:11). The bearer of that report further revealed incest, lawsuits, and prostitution taking place within the assembly (1 Cor 5-6). Paul immediately sent Timothy to correct the situation and gather more information (1

Cor 16:10-11). After his departure, Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus arrived from Corinth with financial support for Paul as well as some written questions (1 Cor 16:17-18). Rather than waiting for Timothy to return with his report, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to address these issues. The letter was written from Ephesus probably in late winter or early spring of AD 55 or 56 (16:8, 9, 19).

5. Purpose(s) of Writing

5.1 To address church faults reported by the house of Chloe and the bearer of the letter (1 Cor 1:11).

5.1.1 Factions (1 Cor 1-4)

5.1.2 Incest (1 Cor 5)

5.1.3 Lawsuits (1 Cor 6:1-11)

5.1.4 Prostitution (1 Cor 6:12-20)

5.1.5 Women in Worship (11:2-16)

5.1.6 Lord's Supper (11:17-34)

5.1.7 Collection for the Saints (16:1-14)

5.2 To answer the written questions brought by Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus.

Each question is indicated by the *περι δε* (now concerning) construction

5.2.1 Marriage (1 Cor 7)

5.2.2 Food Sacrificed to Idols (1 Cor 8-11:1)

5.2.3 Use of Spiritual Gifts (1 Cor 12-14)

5.3 To address doctrinal faults

5.3.1 Resurrection (1 Cor 15)

5.4 Paul addresses the faults and questions in alternating fashion

6. Argument

Paul addressed the church faults, written questions, and doctrinal faults at Corinth. In chapters 1 through 4 He addresses the four factions as evidence of their carnality, showing that only Christ should be the object of our worship and that his workers only serve minor roles comparably. In chapters 5 he addresses a case of incest and teaches the doctrine of church discipline, as well as the inappropriateness of suing other believers. In chapter 7 he addresses the sin of prostitution by teaching that we become one body with her and that this is inconsistent with our bodies being members of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit. In chapter 7 he answers questions about the use of the body in marriage and how one should marry if they burn, how the wife should not divorce her husband, but if she did she must remain unmarried, how the husband should not divorce his wife, and generally how it is better to remain as one is during this present distress (famine). In chapters 8-10 he answers questions about eating food sacrificed to idols and shows that there is no such thing as an idol, so it is okay to eat the meat, but that it is a matter of conscience and we should not wound a brother's conscience. In chapter 11 he addresses faults in how women were worshipping and shows the order of headship. He also

mentions how the Lord's Supper was being taken in a faulty manner and how they should correct that by waiting for one another and not getting drunk, but doing things in an orderly manner. In chapters 12 through 14 he answers questions about the proper use of spiritual gifts, showing that the Corinthians were exalting the lesser gifts and not exercising the gifts in love, which is paramount. In chapter 15 he addresses doctrinal fault concerning the resurrection among some who were destroying the faith of others. In chapter 16 he addresses how the offering is to be collected. He closes with greetings from those in Asia.

7. Theme(s)

- 7.1 Practical application of Christian principles on an individual and social level
- 7.2 The cross of Christ is designed to transform the believer's life so he lives a separate life from the surrounding world.
- 7.3 Failure to live a separate life results in loss of reward and lack of a good testimony
- 7.4 Factions cause disunity in the body of Christ which manifests carnality.

8. Outline

- 8.1 Concerning Factions (1-4)
- 8.2 Concerning Incest, Lawsuits, and Prostitution (5-6)
- 8.3 Questions About Marriage (7)
- 8.4 Questions about Food Sacrificed to Idols (8-10)
- 8.5 Concerning Women in Worship and the Lord's Supper (11)
- 8.6 Concerning Use of Spiritual Gifts (12-14)
- 8.7 Doctrine of Resurrection (15)
- 8.8 Collection for the Saints (16)

9. Uniquenesses

- 9.1 The simplest and most direct language of any of Paul's epistles.
- 9.2 The most practical of Paul's epistles.
- 9.3 Extensive description of carnal Christians (1 Cor 3).
- 9.4 The most extensive development of marriage in the Bible (1 Cor 7).
- 9.5 Extensive description of the value of the OT for believers today (1 Cor 10).
- 9.6 The only description of the Lord's Supper outside of Acts.
- 9.7 The most extensive development of spiritual gifts in the Bible (1 Cor 13).
- 9.8 The most extensive development of the doctrine of resurrection in the Bible (1 Cor 15)

10. Controversial Passages

1 Cor 2:14, “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”

1 Cor 6:9-10, “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.”

1 Cor 9:20, “To the Jews I became a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without the law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law.”

1 Cor 11:25, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”

1 Cor 13:9-10, “For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.”

1 Cor 15:3-4 “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,”

11. Keys to 1 Corinthians

Key Word: Carnality

Key Verse(s): 1 Cor 2:2, “For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”

1 Cor 1:17, “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.”

1 Cor 3:11, “For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

1 Cor 3:15 “If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

1 Cor 5:7, “For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.”

1 Cor 10:13, “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.”

1 Cor 12:13, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

1 Cor 13:4-7 “Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

1 Cor 15:3-4 “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,”

1 Cor 15:10, But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

1 Cor 15:16-17, “For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; 17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.”

1 Cor 15:22-24, “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming, 24 then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.”

1 Cor 15:51-52, “Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”

Key Idea: The simplicity of Christ and Him crucified should govern our practical sanctification.