

1 Corinthians

Summary

The book of 1 Corinthians is a letter written by Paul to the church in Corinth. After spending a year and a half in Corinth, a central and diverse Roman city, and establishing a church among the lowborn and elite alike, Paul left Corinth for Ephesus. He had received word from multiple sources that immorality and division had broken out in the church in Corinth, so he wrote this letter in response. The letter addresses a number of matters, including spiritual immaturity, immorality, quarrels among believers, abuse of certain practices, false teachings, and spiritual gifts. Paul answers a wide breadth of concerns the church was facing, and these remain relevant issues in our modern church.

Author

Paul declares he is the author of this letter to the Corinthians. In addition, the letter testifies to Paul's authorship and the leaders of the early church attributed this letter to the apostle Paul. To this day, scholarship broadly affirms Pauline authorship of this letter to the Corinthians. .

Date

Biblical scholars place this first recorded letter to the Corinthians in A.D. 55 near the end of Paul's three-year season of ministry in Ephesus.

Primary Characters

Paul (1 Corinthians 1-16)

Timothy (1 Corinthians 4)

Apollos (1 Corinthians 1)

Cephas/Peter (1 Corinthians 1)

Historical Moments

Paul Writes His First Recorded Letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 1-16)

Paul Gives Warnings From Israel's History (1 Corinthians 10)

Paul Speaks of Witnesses to the Resurrection of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15)

Paul Speaks of His Time in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:8)

Major Theological Themes

The Church: Of One Mind and Purpose - The church in Corinth had other teachers come in after Paul left to feed the church that he had planted (Romans 3:6). Unfortunately, the result was that the church began to divide into different camps. Paul writes to remind them of the importance of unity, and he reminds them that all the teachers are mere servants of the gospel under Christ. The church is meant to be of one mind and one purpose. It is not to be burdened by worldly wisdom, which was largely responsible for the division, but it is to rely on the power of God to use the weak. Paul claims that the church in Corinth is too immature to understand true wisdom, and therefore, they should simply focus on Christ's crucifixion and rising. This would have struck a particular chord in Corinth because it was known for intellectual elitism.

Objective Morality - Corinth was a Greek city, which meant Jewish customs were often foreign to the diverse Gentile population. The Corinthian church wrote Paul with a number of questions about specific moral matters, as they were still having trouble separating their new faith from their old culture. Paul is careful to be specific in addressing these matters, which included church discipline, lawsuits, sexual immorality, marriage, questionable practices, public worship, etc. Paul makes it clear that the decisions we make and how we live our lives matters. This is a concept that is unfortunately blurred in a modern context, where the truth and morals are said to be relative to each person.

Christ Is Risen and Alive - Corinth was an intellectual epicenter, and the Christian message was being challenged by an opposing argument. Paul reminds the church in Corinth of the original message *on which they have taken their stand* (Romans 15:1) - that Christ died for our sins and was resurrected. He presents evidence for the resurrection and emphasizes the importance that Jesus rose from the dead. *Without this truth, our preaching is useless and so is your faith* (Romans 15:14). Paul risked his life daily for the gospel because of the truth of the resurrection. He challenges any arguments against the resurrection of Christ and he pointed out that death was defeated by Christ; therefore, it is not an obstacle to Him or His people.

Lessons Learned from 1 Corinthians

Stick Together - We can often be guilty of competing with other Christians or other churches. Paul reminds us that we are all on the same team, and we have the same goal and the same God. He emphasizes that teachers and leaders in the church are mere servants under Christ. We need to be careful to not confuse following our teachers with following Christ. We should celebrate the differences in style and culture while working with other Christians and churches to do what is most important; to reach the lost for the sake of the gospel.

The Way We Live Matters - We live in a relativistic world that encourages us to live however we want. Paul's letter makes it clear that this is a flawed way of thinking. As Christians, we are called to a standard, which is set by God. Though it feels more natural to pursue what makes us happy, Paul reminds us that we have new life in Christ. Christ calls us to a higher and more challenging way of living. Nobody is perfect, and Christ died to make up for that, but the decisions that we make day-to-day reflect who or what our master really is.

We Are All Gifted - Paul writes that everyone in the Church has an important role and that we are all gifted with God-given spiritual gifts. Paul makes it clear that all these gifts come from the same Spirit and are therefore all useful in the church. He lists some of these gifts in (1 Cor. 12:8-10). It is here that Paul uses the analogy of the Church being like a body, a unified unit made up of many different parts (1 Cor. 12:12-31). He concludes his discussion on gifts by reminding us that in all these things if we do not have love, our gifts are worthless (1 Cor. 13:1-13).