INTRODUCTION TO 1 CORINTHIANS

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with Ra McLaughlin

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)
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      1. Appeal in Response to Divisions (1:10-12)
      2. Divisions are Contrary to Paul’s Ministry (1:13-17)
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         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)
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         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)
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      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)
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   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)
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   2. Stay Where You Are (7:17-24)
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      b. The Implications of an Eternal Perspective (7:29-35)
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B. Food Sacrificed to Idols (8:1-11:1)
   1. Dining in an Idol’s Temple (8:1-13)
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      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)
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C. Worship and Spiritual Gifts (11:2-14:40)
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      a. Words of Rebuке (11:17)
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   a. Serving Each Other with Spiritual Gifts in Worship (12:1-30)
      i. Identifying the Spirit (12:1-3)
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      i. Introduction (12:31)
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      iii. The Characteristics of Love (13:4-7)
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      i. Love and Gifts Together (14:1-5)
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         a) The Limitations of Tongues (14:6-12)
         b) Tongues and Edification within the Church (14:13-19)
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D. Controversy over the Resurrection (15:1-58)
   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)
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IV. Final Greetings and Closure (16:19-24)