

NAME

The book is named for the church it is addressed to. For a discussion of Corinth see below: Recipients. Paul wrote three letters to Corinth (1 Corinthians 5:9). While at Corinth Paul also wrote his letter to the Romans (Romans 16:23). The title line of the letter means that it is the first of two canonical letters by Paul to the Corinthians, not that it was Paul's first letter to them (5:9)

AUTHOR

The first word of 1 Corinthians states that Paul is its author. There is no good reason to doubt this. The Apostle Paul is widely accepted as the writer of 1 Corinthians. Though the authorship of a number of Paul's letters is disputed by some historical-critical scholars, no one questions the authorship of 1 Corinthians. The theological concerns of the letter, the energy of its style, its vocabulary, and its historical connections with the other Pauline letters and Acts mark it as Pauline. Some, however, question the authenticity of 14:34,35. In line with common practice of the ancient world, Paul used an amanuensis (secretary) to do the actual writing of this letter (see 16:21). For a discussion of the Apostle Paul see the introduction to Romans

DATE

Written in Ephesus circa 56 A.D. during Paul's third missionary journey.

Paul came to Corinth from Athens late in 52 A.D. while on his second missionary journey. He resided in Corinth until the spring of 54 A.D. (about 1½ years). While in Corinth, he earned his living by making tents with Aquila and Priscilla and lived at their house. At Corinth he was strongly opposed by the Jews and called before Gallio (Seneca's brother). Yet despite opposition a church was founded and two epistles were written (the Thessalonian epistles). Finally, Paul left Corinth and proceeded to Ephesus. From Ephesus he wrote this letter to the believers in Corinth probably at the end of his three-year stay in Ephesus (16:5-9; Acts 20:31). Note: Ephesus is 275 miles east of Corinth across the Aegean Sea.

Mitchell:

This letter was occasioned by two factors:

First: A report from the household of Chloe (1:11) of terrible spiritual conditions in the church. The church was terribly divided. Some were acting disorderly in the worship services, some doubted the doctrine of resurrection, etc.

Second: A delegation from the church had evidently been sent to Paul in Ephesus to seek his advice on matters perplexing the young church (e.g. marriage, divorce, dietary regulations, spiritual gifts, etc.). Hence this epistle is not an exposition of fundamental doctrines (cf. Romans) nor a refutation of serious doctrinal error (cf. Galatians). It deals essentially with practical problems. It pertains mainly to heresies of life and conduct.

THEME

Halley (page 44): *"Various Church Disorders"*

Mitchell: *"To Promote Sanctification by Correcting Evils and Answering Questions."*

Mitchell:

These were recent converts from the lowest possible paganism. In these letters Paul not only rebukes and exhorts but also sets forth principles of conduct. This is one of the most practical letters of Paul, especially for Christians who find themselves surrounded by gross immorality.

Paul's dominant concern: Paul wants this church, divided because of the arrogance of its more powerful members, to work together for the advancement of the gospel. He wants them to drop their divisive one-upmanship, build up the faith of those who are weak, and witness effectively to unbelievers.

Key Word (Nelson's): Correction of Carnal Living - The cross of Christ is a message that is designed to transform the lives of believers and make them different as people and as a corporate body from the surrounding world. However, the Corinthians are destroying their Christian testimony because of immorality and disunity.

Key Verses (Nelson's):

"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." (1 Corinthians 6:19,20)

"Therefore let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." (1 Corinthians 10:12,13)

Key Chapter (Nelson's): 13 - This chapter has won the hearts of people across the world as the best definition of "love" ever penned. Paul valued the gift of prophecy highly, and the Corinthians placed a premium on spectacular gifts such as speaking in tongues, as well as on the gifts of understanding spiritual mysteries and faith to do dramatic miracles. Yet even these spiritual gifts do no good in God's sight unless we live in love.

Outline:

- I. Introduction 1:1-9
- II. Concerning Divisions in the Church 1:10-4:21
 - A. The Fact of the Divisions 1:10-17
 - B. The Cause of the Divisions 1:18-4:13
 - 1. A wrong conception of the Christian message 1:18-3:4
 - 2. A wrong conception of the Christian ministry and ministers 3:5-4:5
 - 3. A wrong conception of the Christian 4:6-13
 - C. The Exhortation to End the Divisions 4:14-21
- III. Concerning Moral and Ethical Disorders in the Church 5:1-11:1
 - A. Laxity in Church Discipline 5
 - B. Lawsuits Before Non-Christian Judges 6:1-11
 - C. Licentiousness or Sexual Immorality 6:12-20

- D. Instruction on Marriage 7
- E. Instruction on Questionable Practices 8:1-11:1

IV. Concerning Public Worship 11:2-14:40

- A. Propriety in Worship 11:2-16
- B. The Lord's Supper 11:17-34
- C. Spiritual Gifts 12:1-14:40

V. Concerning the Resurrection 15

VI. Conclusion - Practical and Personal Matters 16

RECIPIENTS

Topography:

Corinth lies 56 miles west of Athens on a narrow strip of land (isthmus) between the Peloponnesus and Greek mainland. Because the city was situated on a narrow strip of the Greek peninsula it had two parts (East and West). This made for extensive commerce. Ever since the Golden Age of Greece, Athens had been the leading cultural center. Old Corinth was conquered and destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C. It was rebuilt a century later as a Roman colony and populated in part by former Roman slaves. Under Roman rule, Corinth had developed into a large cosmopolitan city with Romans, Greeks, Jews, and other ethnic groups from all over the Mediterranean. Corinth became the capital of the Roman province of Achaia (Southern Greece).

Physical Features:

With extensive commerce, sumptuous public buildings developed. The city became remarkable in its wealth and luxury. Corinth hosted the prestigious Isthmian games. Held every two years these games placed Corinth at the center of Greek life. (The Olympic games were held every four years at Olympia - some 100 miles west of Corinth). By the second century A.D. Corinth had a population of 300,000 free citizens and 460,000 slaves. The theater, in Paul's day, seated 14,000 spectators.

Moral Condition:

Adapted from Mitchell:

The name, Corinth, means "ornament," and like its name this affluent city with all of its outward glitter became phony and cheap inwardly. In ancient Greece the name of the city became synonymous with the deepest immorality. "To live like a Corinthian" (κορινθιαζομαι "korinthiazomia") meant to live a life of sexual immorality and drunkenness. It gained the reputation of being the most corrupt and effeminate city in Greece. Its name has passed into history as the epithet covering the whole gamut of immorality (i.e. San Francisco?). It is not surprising that some of these problems made their way into the young church (5:1-13; 6:12-20). Several reasons have been given for its moral condition:

1. A larger floating population of sailors, athletes, business men, etc.
2. The preponderance of slaves (3 slaves to each free man)
3. But mainly the city's religion. On the top of a hill outside the city was located a temple complex dedicated to the goddess Aphrodite, the goddess of love (lust). This temple was served by more than 1,000 religious prostitutes. The religious rites were associated with prostitution, drunkenness, all in the name of religious zeal.

4. Finally the presence of a cynical philosophy greatly contributed to the moral climate. The city boasted of its schools and its scholarship amid pure moral filth.

The code of Corinth was learning, luxury, and licentiousness!

CONTRIBUTION TO CANON

This is a very practical book that deals with the local church and its problems as well as the witness (or hindrances of) the church in the world. The cause of the Corinthian's trouble was the carnality of the church members. Carnal = Self Pleasing. Spiritual = Spirit Pleasing. The success of a church is determined by the spirituality of its members and their openness to the Holy Spirit's control.

Adapted from Mitchell:

Though the circumstances are local the meaning goes beyond the historical situation. It abides as a relevant message for all the church in every period of history. While the emphasis is on a local church and its problems the issues of morality, social degradation, economic exploitation and excess, and the general problems of life are timeless. In short: The most trivial details of life and service can be settled by great and solemn principles taught in Scripture.

NASB - Introduction to 1 Corinthians:

This letter is timely for the church today, both to instruct and to inspire. Most of the question and problems that confronted the church at Corinth are still very much with us—problems like immaturity, instability, divisions, jealousy and envy, lawsuits, marital difficulties, sexual immorality, and misuse of spiritual gifts. Yet in spite of this concentration on problems, the book contains some of the most familiar and beloved chapters in the Bible.

Significant areas of discussion:

- 1 Corinthians 11 concerning The Lord's Supper
- 1 Corinthians 12 concerning Spiritual Gifts
- 1 Corinthians 13 concerning love
- 1 Corinthians 15 concerning our hope in the resurrected Jesus Christ

RESOURCES

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Halley, Henry H. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan Publishing House

Horton, David, General Editor. *The Portable Seminary*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Bethany House Publishers, 2006

Nelson's Quick Reference - Bible Maps And Charts, Nashville, Tennessee; Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1994

The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Frank E. Gaebelin, General Editor, Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1984

As general resources I've relied on my class notes from various professors at Biola University (especially those of Dr. Curtis Mitchell & Dr. Ed Murphy), Western Conservative Baptist Seminary (WCBS), and Talbot Seminary as well as notes shared with me by Annie Kartoizian.

Additional reference material has come from the study Bibles of the English Standard Version, New American Standard Version, and The New Living Translation.

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