

OVERVIEW OF 1 CORINTHIANS

1. Introduction

- Paul's first letter to the Corinthians was written around AD 55 to a spiritually troubled church.
- The church was actually comprised of various house churches, but Paul refers to them collectively as the church.
- Corinth was a major port city, with many temples devoted to Greek and Roman gods, and an affluent economic centre.
- It is no wonder that Paul picked that city as the focus of his evangelistic efforts during his second missionary journey.
- Paul knew this church quite well, as he not only planted the church but he remained on for 1.5 years to pastor the church (cf. Acts 18).
- After he moved on to Ephesus for a period of time, he started getting reports that the church was wracked by divisions over a variety of issues.
- The letter covers a number of topics. The key theme of division emerges from those discussions.
- Paul wants this church, divided because of the arrogance of its more powerful members, to work together for the advancement of the gospel.
- The letter is highly relevant today, as it deals with such issues as the relationship between Christians and their surrounding secular culture, divisions within the church, the ordering of church practices such as the Lord's Supper, and the use of spiritual gifts.
- The letter also deals with matters of personal morality, such as sex, marriage, celibacy, and the bodily resurrection of Christ.
- The letter reads like a collection of short stories, but there is a distinct unifying theme.
- In each major section, Paul starts by identifying the problem, and then he responds with some aspect of the gospel as a solution to address that problem.
- He shows the Corinthians that they are not living out what they say they believe.
- The letter is about examining every area of one's life through the lens of the gospel, including relationships, family, community, and work.

2. Divisions (1-4)

- According to 1:10-11, a report stemming from Chloe's household tip off Paul of quarrels among the Corinthians.
- There were teachers who came after Paul left, including Apollos and possibly Peter.
- People formed groups according to their leaders and started to talk badly about others.
- Four distinct camps were formed, including those who belonged to Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and Christ (1:12).
- So, Paul responded by arguing that the gospel is not about a popularity contest, but a community of people centred around Jesus Christ (1:17).
- Leaders and teachers are simply servants of Jesus Christ.
- We must not divide, because Jesus is the head of the Christian community.
- We must find our sufficiency or identity in Jesus.

3. Sexual Misconduct (5-7)

- There were many people in the church sleeping around. One man even slept with his stepmother.
- Others visited temple prostitutes.
- Then there were people in the church saying all this was fine. We are free in Christ and God's grace is abounding.

- To the other extreme, some in the church even advocated celibacy.
- With the gospel in mind, Paul says, no, it's not fine and show why this is so destructive.
- One, Jesus died for our sins, including the ruins of broken relationships due to sexual misconduct.
- Just as Jesus was raised from the dead, so our bodies will be raised as well.
- If your body is being redeemed by Jesus, now and in the future, what we do with our bodies matters.
- We simply cannot do whatever we want with our bodies.

4. Eating Foods (8-10)

- This issue was not about food preferences. The Corinthians were divided over eating meat offered to gods.
- There was a split between Jewish Christians and non-Jewish Christians on how to respond to this issue.
- Paul appeals to same core ideas of the gospel in addressing this issue.
- He says our allegiance is first and foremost to Jesus, not other gods.
- So, if other people see you eat meat offered to idols and conclude that you can worship Jesus and other gods too, Paul says don't eat the meat.
- You should love those people more than yourself and not mislead them.
- But Paul qualifies this and says we believe as Christians that God is the creator of all things including all meats.
- And idols are just that—pieces of wood. So, if no one is around who is going to misunderstand your action, you are free to eat. You can follow your conscience.
- The principle in deciding this matter is love. Christians need to look out for the well-being of other people.
- Love is why Jesus died for us. So, we must do the same for other people.

5. Worship Gatherings (11-14)

- There were some people in the church who were having powerful worship experiences.
- They prayed out loud in unknown languages.
- Others shared some prophetic teachings from God.
- So, the church was becoming quite chaotic.
- In these chapters, Paul helps them to see the proper behaviour for worship gatherings.
- He says the worship gatherings are when God's Spirit works through everybody and happens in a unified way.
- Paul develops this metaphor of the church as a body of Christ.
- The body is one but has many parts, and each serves a unique purpose and function.
- Paul names all the things the Spirit does to build up the body of Christ.
- Central to the gospel is God's love.
- Love should compel all people in the community to use their gifts and roles to serve and seek the well-being of others.
- Paul approves the speaking of tongues, but if tongues distract others, they should stop it.
- The worship gathering should be orderly.

6. Bodily Resurrection (15)

- The last issue is the resurrection of Christ and the future hope of his followers.
- There were those in the church who thought the idea of bodily resurrection was not necessary.
- Paul reacts to this with a series of arguments.
- He begins by saying that the resurrection is an indispensable part of the gospel (15:1-11).

- The resurrection true because of the hundreds of eyewitnesses, who saw Jesus alive after he was executed by the Romans.
- Paul talks about the consequences of denying the resurrection of Christ (vv. 12-19; cf. 29-34).
- If Jesus didn't rise, we would all be lost and life has no meaning.
- In vv. 20-28, Paul talks about the importance of Christ's resurrection for Christians.
- Jesus' resurrection over death and guilt is his victory.
- In vv. 35-50, Paul anticipates and addresses a related question, "how is the body raised?"
- Paul concludes and rejoices in vv. 51-57, regarding the reality of resurrection life.
- The resurrection is a source of life and power for us in the present, and a source of hope for the future.

7. Conclusion

- According to most NT scholars, the church in Corinth was infiltrated with a form of Gnosticism, which was responsible for many of their problems.
 - Paul referred to this as worldly "wisdom" (*sophia*) or standard, a term used at least eight times throughout the letter.
 - Instead, Paul argues that Christians should centre their lives, faith, and practice on the Cross of Jesus Christ.
- It is because of Christ's resurrection that Christians have a reason to be unified around him, maintain sexual integrity, and have a source of power to love others more than ourselves.
- The resurrection is our hope for victory over death.
 - The gospel is not just moral advice, but an announcement about Jesus that opens up a new reality.
 - This letter is about the Christian's need to view every part of life through the lens of the gospel.