

# 1 CORINTHIANS

## STUDY GUIDE

### AUTHOR & DATE

Little doubt surrounds **Paul** as the author. He names himself as the author (1 Cor. 1:1, 16:21) and the content of the book further points to Paul as its author.

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians while he was in Ephesus on his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey, so most likely around **AD 56**.

### CULTURAL BACKGROUND & ORIGINAL AUDIENCE

Corinth was one of the most important commercial cities of the time. Perfectly positioned between east & west, this bustling city held about 700,000 people and controlled two harbors with a paved roadway, the *diolkos*, to transport cargo between the two ports. Though a Greek city, the governance and cultural structure was largely Roman. One key example is the expectation that married women cover their heads in public (1 Cor. 11). A married Roman woman who didn't was communicating promiscuity and a lack of respectability. Similarly, Roman socioeconomic structures which afforded some persons higher esteem seemed to be having a negative effect on Christian gatherings, most especially the celebration of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11). Corinthian society clamored for status, therefore Paul's call for servanthood was an affront. "Corinth was a city where public boasting and self-promotion had become an art form. The Corinthian people thus lived with an honor-shame cultural orientation, where public recognition was often more important than facts...In such a culture a person's sense of worth is based on recognition by others of one's accomplishments." (Ben Witherington III, *Conflict & Community in Corinth*)

That said, Corinthians also held strongly to their worship of the Greek goddess Aphrodite, the goddess of licentious love (Roman version is Venus) and the sea. The temple dedicated to her worship included the employ of 1,000+ male and female temple prostitutes and sacrifices to various idols. So prevalent was sexual immorality and prostitution that the phrase "Corinthianizing" came about, meaning to practice prostitution.

When Paul writes to the Corinthians, he's writing to a church he established during his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey (Acts 18:1-18) with the help of the Jewish-Christian couple, Aquila & Priscilla. Following 18 months in Corinth, the church consisted mostly of former pagans (1 Cor. 12:2), many from lower social classes, (1 Cor. 1:26 ff), slaves (1 Cor. 7:21), and a few wealthier people (1 Cor. 11:22-32).

During Paul's 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey, Paul receives word about sexual immorality within the young congregation and wrote a letter to address that issue. However, that letter has since been lost & apparently failed to achieve its purpose (1 Cor. 5:9). Paul learns later that original problem continued, along with several other issues (1 Cor. 1:11; 16:17), and writes a second letter, 1 Corinthians. As we'll see, this letter also failed to correct all the Corinthian problems, and visits Corinth where he was

rebuffed (2 Cor. 2:1). Perhaps the irony of the Corinthian church is not that there were problems, but that there weren't more than what is exposed in Paul's letters!

### LITERARY GENRE & STRUCTURE

Paul writes his letter in the standard format for letters of that time: an introduction including greetings & thanksgivings, the main body or purpose for writing, and a conclusion including closing remarks and final greetings.

Introduction (1:1-9)

Body (1:10-15:58)

Problem of Divisions (1:10-4:21)

Problem of Sexual Immorality (5:1-6:20)

Answers from Previous Letter's Questions (7:1-16:4)

Marriage (7:1-40)

Things Offered to Idols (8:1-11:1)

Public Worship (11:2-14:40)

Resurrection (15:1-58)

Collection for Jerusalem (16:1-4)

Conclusion (16:5-24)

### OBSERVATION WORDS

- **Jesus**-- Don't just notice the references, but what do you learn about Him through those references? Names, functions, His emotional responses, how others address Him, etc.
- **Holy Spirit** – When He's named directly, what He does, note miracles, etc.
- **God** -- Different ways He's referenced & what you learn about Him, how Jesus speaks of Him, etc.
- **Wisdom** – Wisdom of the world vs. wisdom of God; what do you learn about wisdom?
- **World** – Characteristics, effect, influences, etc.
- **Sin** – What do you learn about it, effects, source, etc.
- **Spiritual gift(s)** – What are they, their purpose, kinds, how to be used, etc.
- **Love** – What do you learn about it?
- **Resurrection** – Importance of it, power, example, when it happens, etc.
- **Old Testament References** – make note of them & how Paul uses them

## SUMMARY QUESTIONS

- What did the Lord teach you through this book? How will you apply that lesson to your daily living?
  
- What did you learn about God through this book?
  
- What did you learn about Jesus through this book?
  
- What did you learn about the Holy Spirit through this book?
  
- What are the key issues in the Corinthian church & what instruction does Paul give for those different things?
  
- How are the world's ways and God's ways different – especially regarding wisdom?
  
- Why is church discipline important? Why is treatment of church people different from the world? Is this appropriate still for today?
  
- What do you learn about God's design for singleness, marriage, and sex?
  
- To what degree should Christian workers be financially supported? What is the basis of Paul's argument (see also Lev. 6:16, 26; Num. 18:8, 18, 20-21; Matt. 10:10; Gal. 6:6)?

- How are you to use Christian liberty/freedom in relation to others? What does this mean for different cultures we encounter? Where do personal rights/freedoms and preferences fit?
  
- What do you learn about the relationship between man, woman, & Christ? What principle is Paul describing and how is it applicable today?
  
- What are proper and improper ways of taking the Lord's Supper (keep in mind that reference to the Lord's Supper at that time likely included a full meal, not just a wafer and sip of juice)? What would constitute an improper way of participating the Lord's Supper today?
  
- What do you learn about spiritual gifts? What is their purpose, how are they to be used, what is their source, etc.? How are Christians to function with these gifts?
  
- Why is resurrection so important? Describe the resurrected body. How is it the same and still different than the earthly body?

**Key Word** – How do you summarize the whole book in one word or short phrase?

**Key Verse** – What verse stands out to you as the summary of the whole book, or a verse that the Lord used to teach you something important. Why did you choose the verse you did?

**Key Chapter** – What chapter summarizes the book, is a turning point, or just stands out to you? Why did you choose this chapter?

**NOTE:** There is an assignment due for next time, so make sure you read the next page!

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## ASSIGNMENT

Complete the spiritual gifts test and score your test per the directions. **DO NOT ANSWER BASED ON WHAT YOU WANT TO BE, BUT WHO YOU ARE RIGHT NOW.**

We will discuss in much greater detail your results and how all the spiritual gifts work when we discuss 1 Corinthians.

- Identify your top 3 gifts.
- If you've taken a test like this before, are your results the same? Different? How so?
- How do you see the results ringing true in your life?
- What surprised you?