

Reading Paul's 1st Letter to the Corinthians

Key Historical Background

- Corinth was a major Greek-Roman port city, and Paul lived there as a missionary for 1.5 yrs (Acts 18) in the early 50s A.D. Many people became followers of Jesus and when Paul left a community of Christians remained.
- Paul left and stayed in Ephesus for 3 yrs (Acts 20:31) and began to hear reports about the Corinthians: his co-worker Apollos has come there as a teacher (Acts 18:24-19:1), he also heard reports from some Corinthians about horrible divisions, moral failure, and hypocrisy among the Corinthians in the church.
- Paul wrote this letter to respond to each of those issues and help the Corinthians apply the Gospel to all areas of life. It reads like a collection of topical essays that are all united by the theme of the Gospel.

Flow of Thought in 1 Corinthians

1:1-9: Paul greets the Corinthians and affirms their faith in Christ and God's grace toward them

1:10-4:21: Paul addresses the problem of division because of different Christian preachers

1:10-17: Paul describes the report he received about the problem

1:18-2:16: God's wisdom revealed by Christian teachers is different from the wisdom of Corinthian culture which causes division and pride.

3:1-4:2: The Gospel about Jesus is the foundation, and different teachers simply build on that one foundation. There is no excuse for division and pride in the church.

5:1-6:20: Paul addresses the problem of sexual immorality and abuse in the church

5:1-13: Paul confronts a case of incest and immorality that is being ignored in the church

6:1-11: He condemns the division among the Corinthians and how they are taking each other to court in lawsuits

6:12-20: Our bodies are sacred and sex is a sacred gift; sexual immorality abuses and cheapens the beautiful reality of human sexuality.

7:1-11:1: Paul addresses three issues the Corinthians have written to him about

7:1-24: Questions about marriage, divorce, engagement, and whether it's better for Christians to be single or get married

7:25-40: Questions about people who are engaged and about widows

8:1-11:1: Questions about eating meat sacrificed to idols

8:1-13: There is only one true God revealed in Jesus, meat sacrificed to idols is harmless. However, not all Christians believe this, so don't eat the meat around them.

9:1-27: Christians are often called to give up their freedom for the sake of others; it's part of constantly adapting and growing so that we don't get in the way of the Gospel.

10:1-22: Meat sacrificed to idols is harmless, but going to eat the meat in the temples of others gods is off limits, it opens you up to influences that are evil.

10:23-11:1: The principle is freedom for Christians, unless you will put yourself in a place of compromise or will mislead another Christian, in which case you should abstain.

11:2-14:40: Paul addresses divisions in the church about the worship gathering

11:2-16: Cultural clothing styles and the protection of gender differences

11:17-34: Social snobbery and exclusion in the practice of the Lord's Supper

12:1-14:40: The practice of spiritual gifts in the worship gathering

12:1-31: The one Spirit has given all of us different gifts and abilities, all for building each other up to grow stronger in Christ

13:1-13: Love should be the highest priority when Christians gather, seeking the well-being of others above ones' self

14:1-40: Prophecy and speaking in tongues are legitimate, Spirit-empowered experiences in worship, but they should only be practiced in a way that builds others up in their faith

15:1-58: Paul addresses questions about the Resurrection from the dead

15:1-11: Resurrection is at the core of the Gospel and was verified by eyewitnesses

15:12-34: Jesus' resurrection opens up the new creation for believers

15:35-58: The nature of our future resurrection bodies

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16:1-12: Paul's collection for the poor Jerusalem Christians and his travel plans
16:13-24: Closing challenge and greetings

