

Parson to Person

1 Corinthians 1 (Introduction)

The book of 1 Corinthians is both troubling and encouraging. Within the pages we discover the worst group of Christians in the Bible, but also learn that as born again believers they were never told they were lost—or threatened with the loss of their God-given salvation. These believers were destined for heaven, in spite of their bad behavior, but needed correction and repentance.

Within this letter we discover that Paul addressed the Corinthians with the salutation, *“To the church of God which is at Corinth”* and referred to them as *“those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus”* (1 Corinthians 1:2 abridged). This indicated their salvific condition. However, we know that they were carnal and needed to stop “living” as the unredeemed. Like many today, the Corinthians needed to adjust to a lifestyle that testified to the salvation provided them—rather than to the former conduct one would expect of the unredeemed. Therefore, Paul pointedly wrote, *“are you not carnal?”* (1 Corinthians 3:3 excerpt), and *“you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned,” “your glorying is not good”* (1 Corinthians 5:2 and 6 excerpts). He also asked them, *“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God”* (1 Corinthians 6:9–11). Yes, they were *“in Christ”* and *“righteous”* (1 Corinthians 1:30 excerpt). They were

“washed” and *“sanctified”* (1 Corinthians 6:11 excerpt). But still, they needed to *“do all to the glory of God”* (1 Corinthians 10:31 excerpt)—and stop behaving like those who are the *“unrighteous”* (1 Corinthians 6:9 excerpt).

The letter was written by Paul the Apostle—from Ephesus while on his third missionary journey (see 1 Corinthians 16:5–9). Paul had visited Corinth several years earlier (around 51 A.D.) and there met Aquila and Priscilla (see Acts 18:1–2).

Corinth was a major trade route city on the coast of Greece. It was heavily trafficked by travelers but also home to some 250,000 residents. The city was wealthy, given to materialism, and the worship of many gods: Aphrodite, the goddess of love—whose worshippers practiced religious prostitution; Asclepius, the god of healing; and Apollo, the god of archery, music, dance, “truth,” “prophecy,” healing, diseases, the sun, light, poetry, and more (seems they couldn’t figure him out). Poseidon is the patron god of Corinth as the result of its location by the sea. The Corinthian culture was given to immorality of all kinds—including acts of fornication: both heterosexual and homosexual, the sex trades, and more. They were noted as philosophers and historians—but also as intensely wicked. In fact, the city was so corrupt that many referred to others who acted in immorality with the noun “Corinthian” and with the verb “Corinthianize” when describing those being influenced by the mannerisms of the city. A corresponding modern noun “Sodomite,” or verb “Sodomy” is used to describe the homosexual, transvestite, et al. or the acts of those practicing the said lifestyle.

This letter was taken to Corinth by Timothy (see 4:17, 16:10) and was written to address the manifold problems in the Church. Yes, in the Church! This city had so affected the Church at Corinth that they were not being salt and light—reflecting the love of God—but were polluted by some of the same issues found in the Corinthian culture.

A defining characteristic of the letter is Paul's love for the Corinthian believers—and his willingness to correct them when wrong. It is a beautiful picture of the love God has for all of us. Please, may I remind you again, these were believers—born again, filled with the Spirit—but in great need of repentance. This is a needed lesson today and should be examined with a humble and teachable disposition. We will all greatly benefit from the material herein.

The following outline may help with focus:

Chapter 1–4: Salutations, commendations, condemnation of sectarianism.

Chapter 5: Immorality in the church and the need for church discipline.

Chapter 6: Infighting, lawsuits and a call to “others-centered ministry.”

Chapter 7: Instruction regarding singleness, marriage, divorce, and re-marriage.

Chapter 8: Liberty and responsibility.

Chapter 9: A Defense of Paul's authority and mission.

Chapter 10: Warnings against idolatry, compromises with idolaters, and the Christian responsibility.

Chapter 11: Church management, distinct roles of men and women, behavior at the Lord's Table.

Chapter 12: Spiritual gifts and their purpose.

Chapter 13: The "Love Chapter"—the high water mark of the Church.

Chapter 14: Rules for the local assembly: the proper use of tongues and prophecy, more on the distinct roles of men and women, discipline and order when gifts are exercised.

Chapter 15: The importance of the literal physical resurrection of Jesus—as key to the Gospel and hope of the believer.

Chapter 16: Giving, care for the poor, and a series of personal notes, final exhortations and comments.

The Corinthian letter will answer many questions. Some will include:

- 1) Can one be a carnal Christian?
- 2) Can "lukewarmness" be attributed to a Christian?
- 3) What is the difference between positional and progressive sanctification?
- 4) Do churches have problems?
- 5) Are there hypocrites in the Church?
- 6) Does God endorse the praise and exaltation of "superman" Christian leaders?
- 7) It is possible to be saved and live in disobedience?
- 8) Is disobedience endorsed in the Scriptures?
- 9) Does the Bible endorse "church discipline" among professing believers?
- 10) Does the Bible endorse eldership and elder-driven leadership?

- 11) Are we called to judge the unsaved?
- 12) It is lawful to file a lawsuit against a fellow believer?
- 13) When divorce occurs, is it always the fault of both parties?
- 14) Is divorce the unpardonable sin?
- 15) How do we handle living in a pagan/idolatrous culture?
- 16) How are we called to live toward “others” in the Christian community?
- 17) Have Holy Spirit inspired supernatural gifts ceased?
- 18) Is there a high watermark rule for those living in Christ?
- 19) Can Christians abuse and/or misuse the gifts of the Holy Spirit?
- 20) Did Jesus physically rise from the dead?
- 21) Will we as believers experience a physical resurrection?
- 22) Is there really going to be a literal rapture (removal) of the Church at the end of the Church Age?
- 23) Are Christians called to financially support the ministries of the Church?
- 24) Is it Biblical to plan ahead when looking into the future?
- 25) Are believers called to indiscriminately accept all people and all systems of faith/belief?

As we study together, we will learn and grow. As we grow, we will be challenged. As we are challenged, there is a call to obey. As we obey, we will find blessing!

I trust you will enjoy the ride.

I love you all,
Pastor Paul