

1 CORINTHIANS

Introduction

Author. Paul's authorship of this letter is virtually unchallenged. It enjoys earlier external attestation than any other New Testament book; in about A. D. 95, Clement of Rome wrote to the church at Corinth and exhorted them to obey the letter which they had received from Paul.

Date. Paul wrote the letter toward the end of his three year stay in Ephesus (16:5-9). This would suggest a date around 55 A. D.

Occasion. Time and space do not allow a full recounting of the relationship between Paul and the church at Corinth. It is sufficient to note that this is at least the second letter written by Paul to Corinth (1 Corinthians 5:9). Paul had received reports from the family of Chloe concerning several serious problems in the Church (1:11). In addition to this, three individuals, Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, had come to Paul in Ephesus to make some contribution to his ministry (16:17). Some of those who had come brought with them disturbing news about certain moral irregularities in the church (5:9-10). Other Corinthian visitors had brought a letter from the church that requested counsel on several subjects (marriage, 7:1; the relationship to pagan religions, 8:1; matters of public worship, 12:1; and the collection for the Jerusalem saints, 16:1). Thus, Paul writes to rebuke and restore the church in areas of defiant disobedience and to instruct in areas of legitimate confusion.

Message Statement. *The disobedience and confusion of the Corinthians are met with rebuke and instruction.*

Argument

- 1A INTRODUCTION 1:1-9
In Paul's salutation to the church he mentions that the recipients are called to holiness, a major thrust of his letter (1:2). He also thanks God for the grace (1:4) given to these believers. Without the power of God, change on the part of these people would be hopeless. Although the church was undoubtedly spiritually gifted they were in serious need of purification.
- 1B PROBLEMS 1:10--6:20
This first section of the book differs in focus and tone from the second (7-15). Paul responds here to reports of deliberate disobedience on the part of the Corinthians; matters in which the church knew what was right and had decided not to obey the apostle. Thus, the apostle's tone is harsh as he chastises rebellious children.
- 1B #1--Divisions 1:10--4:21
Paul wastes no time in identifying his first concern, *I appeal to you brothers . . . that there be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought* (1:10). This kind of strife was the result of a terrible misunderstanding of the gospel and the ministry; thus, Paul explains those areas as he addresses the problem.

- 1C The fact of divisions 1:10-17
The report had come from Chloe's household about the selfish divisions which some were causing (1:11). Some were claiming allegiance to Paul and others to different apostles.
- 2C The causes of divisions 1:18--4:5
Paul explains the causes of divisions as a misunderstanding of both the message of salvation and of the ministry. First the message of the cross cuts to the heart of self-centeredness which was the cause of divisions. To be saved was to renounce self rather than promote it. Their basis of operating, an unsanctified common sense which had self preservation as its ultimate goal, was out of harmony with the gospel which they professed.
- Paul tried to correct their misunderstanding of the ministry by teaching that God alone was the source of blessing (3:5-9). Indeed, ministers are only servants accountable to God who ought to cultivate praise, not from men (3:18-23), but praise from God (4:1-5).
- 3C The solution to divisions 4:6-21
The root of the problem was of course, pride. Thus the solution to it was to recognize that the Christian life demanded humility now and exaltation later after Christ comes. Paul's advice is to imitate him now as they look forward to the coming of Christ (4:14-21).
- 2B #2--Immorality Tolerated in the Church 5:1-13
The failure in this incident was really twofold: the immorality of the man and the toleration by the church. Paul's advice is clear: exercise church discipline in order to shame the man and restore him.
- 3B #3--Personal Disputes Tolerated in the Church 6:1-8
Again, the error here seems twofold: the church was presenting a poor testimony to the world (6:1-6) and cheating their brothers (6:7-8). If the verses of 6:9-11 belong to this section Paul may be chiding the people for behaving as the unsaved.
- 4B #4--General Carelessness About Matters of Morality 6:12-20
Evidently a certain laxness of morality was being tolerated on the part of the church. Paul first explains the error of immorality particularly in reference to their alleged credos "Everything is permissible for me" (6:12). He then exhorts them plainly to flee from this sin (6:18-20).
- 1C QUESTIONS 7:1--16:9
This, the second major section of the epistle, has a different tone. Paul is responding to legitimate questions on the part of the congregation here rather than addressing willfully deficient behavior as in the first seven chapters. Thus Paul patiently and carefully answers these questions as the tone of censure and rebuke is almost entirely absent in this section.
- 1B Concerning Marriage and Celibacy 7:1-40
This section appears to open with Paul's quotation of their question, *Now for the matters you wrote about: 'It is good for a man not to marry'* (7:1). Paul then discusses several areas of marriage and celibacy as they relate to the present situation in Corinth and in the first century.
- 1C Marriage and celibacy 7:1-9
Paul establishes that both celibacy and marriage are honorable states. Paul admits that for the purposes of the ministry he would that all were celibate, but that this was only possible with divine enablement (7:7).
- 2C Marriage and divorce 7:10-24
Paul next deals with the issue of divorce covering the situations of Christian marriages (7:10-11) and mixed marriages (7:12-16). His basic point, however, seems to be that salvation should not necessarily effect any change in a persons non-moral station in life, i.e., his marital status, or vocation. In general, unless there are specific moral mandates, a man *should remain in the situation God called him to* (7:24).
- 3C Marriage and ministry 7:25-38
In view of several factors including the present distress, brevity of life and concerns of the ministry, Paul encourages celibacy in order to promote devotion to the Lord. This is all dependent, however, upon divine enablement.

- 4C Re-marriage and widows 7:39-40
Paul's mandate for widows is that if they do marry that they do so within the faith. His opinion is that if possible the widow will be happier in her present state.
- 2B Concerning the Eating of Meat Which Had Been Offered to Idols and Participating in Pagan Festivals 8:1--11:1
This section covers the whole spectrum of the Corinthian Christian's responsible relation to the pagan world around him. The subject of chapters 8 and 9 seems to be the issue of meat while, for a time, in chapter 10 the focus switches to actual pagan festivals. The issues in both situations are more than meet the eye.
- 1C The application of brotherly love to the issue of eating meat 8:1-13
Paul quickly acknowledges that there are two points of view in this issue: knowledge and love. Although we "know" that meat offered to an idol has no power over a Christian, not all Christians and people "know" this. Thus, if they were to follow the example of one who has knowledge without such understanding they would violate their own conscience. Paul stresses that the proper response to such a situation is to voluntarily restrict one's personal freedoms in love in order not to cause another brother to violate his conscience (8:13).
- 2C Paul's illustration of brotherly love and personal denial 9:1--10:13
Paul simply illustrates his point made in the previous section (1C) by his own example of restricting his personal freedoms for the sake of others. He first reviews all of his "rights," i.e., reasons why he should be able to engage in certain legitimate activities such as having a wife or receiving money from his disciples (9:1-14). He then lists his voluntary restrictions which he has imposed so as to benefit others (9:15-27).
- 3C Paul's exhortations concerning idolatrous feasts 10:1-22
Because of the change of tone and subject it appears that Paul now discusses the associated theme of pagan festivals. He uses the example of Israel which participated in the pagan festivals at Baal-Peor and were severely judged (10:1-13). The point simply is that while meat offered to an idol can not hurt a Christian, that participation in a pagan festival can lead to the immorality associated with them and perhaps more importantly is an act of fellowship with the deity (10:14-22).
- 4C Summary and Application 10:23--11:1
Paul applies the truths already taught here. His summary principle is "Do not cause anyone to stumble . . ." (10:32) and "Follow my example" (11:1).
- 3B Concerning Public Worship 11:2--14:40
Several questions from the church are answered under this one topic. Evidently the church was sincerely confused or deliberately negligent about many aspects of the public worship service.
- 1C Veiling of women in public worship 11:2-16
It seems that certain women had taken liberties to themselves which the gospel had not warranted. Although their station may have improved because of the Christian message it did not allow them to be unrestrained. Paul calls for women to recognize and demonstrate proper respect for their God ordained roles. He first gives directions (11:2-6) and then explains his directions (11:7-16).
- 2C Proper decorum at the observance of the Lord's Supper 11:17-34
At this point in church history the Lord's supper was the second part of a two part celebration. The people first came together in a meal called the love feast. It was at this meal particularly that the Corinthians were meeting for the sake of food and evidencing selfish practices. This led to an irreverent and unworthy approach to the Lord's supper for which Paul rebukes them.
- 3C The exercise of spiritual gifts in public worship 12:1--14:40
Because of the tone of this portion it seems that Paul is slightly perturbed at the practice of spiritual gifts in the assembly. He first explains the nature and purpose of gifts in chapter twelve, then stresses the importance of love in their exercise and finally outlines regulations for their use in chapter fourteen.
- 1D The nature and purpose of gifts 12:1-30
Paul's explanation of gifts stresses both their unity and diversity. The gifts are given by one Lord for one service (12:4-11). Nevertheless, the gifts are also diverse (12:12-31a). Paul's point, however, is that as every part of the body is necessary so also every gift is necessary

and no one should despise another.

- 2D The necessity of exercising the gifts in love 12:31b--13:13
 The church members had evidently forgotten the point of the gifts so Paul emphasizes the place of love in the exercise of gifts. Paul first expounds on the importance of love and then describes it. His final point is that long after the gifts are gone, the qualities of love, faith and hope will still be necessary with love being the most excellent.
- 3D The regulation of the exercise of the gifts 14:1-40
 Paul first explains the superiority of the gift of prophecy to that of tongues (14:1-25). The reason is fairly simple: prophecy builds up believers while tongues can only do so secondarily as an interpreter is present. For this reason prophecy is to be much preferred over tongues. The primary purpose of tongues was to act as an initial sign for unbelievers. Paul's point, however, is that if tongues are all the unbeliever sees he will soon lose interest and declare the congregation to be mad (14:23). Thus, prophecy is the more useful gift. Paul then outlines how to regulate the church service particularly with reference to the gifts (14:26-40).
- 4B Concerning the Reality and Importance of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ 15:1-58
 Paul addresses two concerns here: the importance and certainty of the resurrection (15:1-34) and answers to certain questions (15:35-58). He discusses the fact and importance of the resurrection from history (15:1-11), logic (15:12-19), theology (15:20-28) and experience (15:29-34). He then answers two questions about the resurrection of deceased believers (15:35-49) and about the rapture of the living (15:50-58).
- 5B Concerning the Collection for the Saints at Jerusalem and Personal Matters 16:1-9
 Paul directs that weekly contributions be set aside for the Jerusalem saints. He then indicates his change in plans to visit the Corinthians. Lastly he gives personal notes about a number of Christian friends of interest to the readership.
- 1D CONCLUSION 16:19-24
 Paul's conclusion is bittersweet. He expresses his love to all (16:24) but also includes an anathema on those who do not love the Lord, evidently intended for certain false teachers whose seditious influence was already present in the church (16:22).

