

**Notes & Outlines**

# **1 CORINTHIANS**

J. Vernon McGee

# 1 CORINTHIANS

**WRITER:** Paul

**DATE:** A.D. 55-57 (more likely 57)

**PLACE:** Ephesus

**SUBJECT:** The Lordship of Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:2, 3, 7-10)

## **BACKGROUND:**

Carnal Corinth was the sin center of the Roman Empire in Paul's day. It was labeled "Vanity Fair." Its location was about 40 miles west of Athens on a narrow isthmus between Peloponnesus and the mainland. It was the great commercial center of the Roman Empire with 3 harbors, of which two were important — Lechaem, about 1 1/2 miles to the west, and Cenchreae, about 8 1/2 miles to the east.

196 B.C. Rome declared it a free city.

146 B.C. It rebelled and was totally destroyed by Mummius, the consul.

46 B.C. Julius Caesar rebuilt the city in great elegance, restoring it to its former prominence.

However, even its ruins were lost to history for many years, and a fishing village was built over them. In 1928, an earthquake uncovered them, and now much of the city has been excavated.

The temple of Aphrodite, built on the Acrocorinthus, was attended by 1,000 priestesses of vice, actually nothing more than prostitutes.

The city was given over to licentiousness and pleasure. The Isthmian games were conducted here.

Against this corrupt background, Paul preached the gospel in Corinth, founded the church, and wrote two epistles to the church at Corinth: 1 and 2 Corinthians.

Read Acts 18:1-18 for the account of Paul's visit to Corinth.

## **OUTLINE:**

- I. Salutation and thanksgiving, Chapter 1:1-9**
- II. Concerning conditions in the Corinthian church, Chapters 1:10 — 16:9**
  - A. Concerning DIVISIONS and party spirit, Chapters 1:10 — 4:21**
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    - 2. Clarity** of Holy Spirit  
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a. Christ, the firstfruits

b. Those who are Christ's (the church)

c. Old Testament saints, Tribulation saints

d. Kingdom set up, Christ reigning

e. Death destroyed

f. Christ returns to His place in the Trinity

**4. Program** and pattern of resurrection, vv. 29-50

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#### **I. Concerning COLLECTIONS, Chapter 16:1-9**

### **III. Closing exhortations and benediction, Chapter 16:10-24**

#### **COMMENT:**

First Corinthians is obviously Paul's answer to a previous letter that he had written to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 5:9). They sent a delegation with a letter (1 Corinthians 7:1; 16:17) and 1 Corinthians is Paul's reply concerning the conditions in the Corinthian church. It is a letter of correction of errors and confirmation of truth.

#### **I. Salutation and thanksgiving, Chapter 1:1-9**

In these first 9 verses of the introduction, the Lord Jesus Christ is mentioned 6 times. This is a Christ-centered epistle of which v. 9 is the very heart:

“God is faithful” — although men, including believers, are not.

“Ye were called” is the “high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14).

“Fellowship” (*koinonian*) is one of the most important and versatile words of Christian faith. It means anything that believers share together concerning the things of Christ.

*Koinonia* is { fellowship — Acts 2:42-44  
contribution — Romans 15:26  
communion (Lord’s Supper) — 1 Corinthians 10:16  
partnership — 1 Corinthians 1:9

“His Son” — He is God the Son; here it is His relationship to the Father.

“Jesus” — His human name.

“Christ” — His title (Messiah, Anointed).

“Our Lord” — He is our Lord; this is our relationship to Him.

“Fellowship” — “Fellowship” (*koinonia*) can also mean “partnership,” which is how I believe it is used here. There is partnership in business, in love, and in marriage. This is a combination of:

- 1) Mutual concern — Christ is interested in us; we are interested in Him.
- 2) Mutual commitment — His resources are ours. We are committed to Him; He to us.
- 3) Mutual compassion — He accommodates Himself to our weakness. His power is ours. (This is reflected in Isaiah 63:9, a verse that I believe has been mistranslated. It should be: “In all their affliction He was *not* afflicted.”)

When I am weak and weary, He waits.

When I stumble and fall, He picks me up.

In view of this, all the rest of 1 Corinthians is a parenthesis until we come to 15:58:

***Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmov-***

*able, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*

## **II. Concerning conditions in the Corinthian church, Chapters 1:10 — 16:9**

### **A. Concerning DIVISIONS and party spirit, Chapters 1:10 — 4:21**

#### **1. Centrality of Christ crucified corrects divisions, 1:10-31**

Divisions were being caused by believers following different leaders of the church. They formed cliques around certain men:

Paul — Proud pupils

Cephas — Chummy cult

Apollos — Adoring admirers

They were exalting the wisdom of the world, which is contrary to the wisdom of God. The gospel of the cross is the wisdom of God. (See author's booklet, "The Cross Divides Men.")

"Them who are called" (v. 24) are those Jews who do not find the cross a stumbling block and those Gentiles who do not find it foolishness but see in it the power and wisdom of God. They are "the called" for they hear and respond to the gospel.

Christ is the wisdom of the believer as well as his righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (v. 30).

1) Positional sanctification (in Christ), vv. 2, 30  
(the Corinthians were sanctified)

2) Practical sanctification (by the Holy Spirit), 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; Romans 15:16

3) Permanent (eternal) sanctification, 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 10:10, 14

#### **2. Clarity of Holy Spirit corrects human wisdom, 2**

**vv. 1-5** — Paul's approach to sophisticated and sinful Corinth is not by the wisdom of the world, but is the unvarnished declaration of Jesus Christ (His person) and Him crucified (His work). See 1 Cor-

inthians 15:1-4. Paul personally is weak and afraid (v. 3). The faith of the Corinthian Christians stands in the power of God (v. 5).

**vv. 6-8** — Paul's message is the wisdom of God, not the wisdom of the world.

**v. 9** — Wisdom of the world comes through the eye gate, the ear gate, and through human reasoning (see Isaiah 64:4).

**v. 10** — The wisdom of God comes through the revelation of the Holy Spirit.

**v. 11** — No man can understand the things of God until the Holy Spirit teaches him.

**v. 12** — The believer has the Holy Spirit of God to teach him.

**vv. 13, 14** — The unbeliever is unprepared to receive the things of God, for he does not have the Holy Spirit to teach him. Therefore, his conclusion is that the wisdom of God is foolishness.

**v. 15** — The spiritual man is in contrast to the natural man. He understands divine truth but is misunderstood by the natural man.

### **3. Correct conception of God clarifies Christian service, 3**

**vv. 1-10** — Carnality of the Corinthian Christians is evident by the divisions among them. Proof of their carnality is “envying, strife and divisions.”

Paul designates the human family thus:

- 1) Natural man
  - a) Jew
  - b) Gentile
- 2) Believer (“called one”; Christian)
  - a) Carnal
  - b) Spiritual

Paul and Apollos were not divided.

**vv. 11-23** — Conditions on which rewards are given.

**v. 11** — Salvation is the foundation that is already put down. Therefore, no man can work for salvation.

**v. 12** — The believer can work for a reward. There are 6 materials with which he can build on the foundation.

**v. 13** — Fire tests every man's work. Gold, silver, and precious stones are purified by fire. Wood, hay, and stubble are consumed by fire.

**v. 14** — When works survive the fire, rewards are given.

**v. 15** — When works are consumed by fire, the believer is saved, but he receives no reward.

**vv. 16-20** — The believer's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

**vv. 21-23** — All things and all believers are the possession of every other believer. We rob ourselves when we limit ourselves to one individual or a narrow circle.

#### **4. Conditions of Christ's servants constrain Christian conduct, 4**

**vv. 1-5** — Faithfulness is the supreme virtue of a servant. All believers are judged in 3 courts:

- 1) Others (lower court) — my paraphrase of v. 3 is: "But, as a matter of fact, it matters very little to me what you, or any man, thinks of me."
- 2) One's conscience (higher court) — Paul did not even judge himself, but that did not justify him before God.
- 3) One and only Master (supreme court) — see 2 Corinthians 5:10 and Romans 14:12. Believers, as stewards, are judged for faithfulness. Christ will find something to praise in each believer.

**vv. 6-21** — Suffering of apostles is a spectacle to the world and angels, also an incentive to other believers.

Note (v. 17) the personal esteem Paul had for Timothy.

#### **B. Concerning SCANDALS in the Corinthian church, Chapters 5, 6**

## 1. Impurity, 5

**v. 1** — “Commonly” means “actually; factually” and not a matter of gossip. It was a sordid story of a man who took his father’s wife, his stepmother. The church in Corinth had ignored it and were “puffed up” (v. 2).

Paul commands them to do two things:

- 1) Deliver the guilty party unto Satan (v. 5). (Job and Peter were delivered over to Satan for different reasons. See also 1 Timothy 1:20.)
- 2) Refuse fellowship with the guilty (vv. 11, 13). For the result, see 2 Corinthians 2:4-11; 7:12.

## 2. Lawsuits among members, 6

**v. 1** — Differences between believers should be settled by other believers. The basis for this is 3-fold:

- 1) Saints will judge the world (v. 2);
- 2) Saints will judge angels (v. 3);
- 3) Unrighteousness is not in the kingdom (v. 9).

**vv. 19, 20** — The human body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

### C. Concerning MARRIAGE, Chapter 7

**v. 1** — They had written to Paul concerning this problem.

**vv. 2-6** — Paul is not commending the single above the married state. In the Roman world, a wife was a chattel, a workhorse. Generally, a man had several wives — one had charge of the kitchen, another of the living area, and perhaps another was in charge of the clothing. The man went to the temple of Aphrodite for sex. Paul says that a man must have one wife whom he loves. Paul lifts the slave state of womanhood to that of a partner with man in love.

**v. 7** — We assume Paul was unmarried.

**v. 8** — However, Paul was not a bachelor; he was a widower. We know that he had been a member of the Sanhedrin (Acts 26:10) and that all members were required to be married.

F. W. Farrar writes in his *Life and Work of St. Paul*:

“The other question which arises is, Was Saul married? Had he the support of some loving heart during the fiery struggles of his youth? Amid the to-and-fro contentions of spirit which resulted from an imperfect and unsatisfying creed, was there in the troubled sea of his life one little island home where he could find refuge from incessant thoughts?

“Little as we know of his domestic relations, little as he cared to mingle mere private interests with the great spiritual truths which occupy his soul, it seems to me that we must answer this question in the affirmative.”

“A Jew, who has no wife is not a man” (Genesis 5:2, *Yebhamoth*, f. 63,1).

**vv. 8, 9** — There is no reason why the unmarried and widowers should not marry. Paul was a widower who had not married again.

**vv. 10-40** — Paul discusses husband-wife relationships. If a husband has an unbelieving wife, or vice versa, and the unbeliever departs, the believer is not bound. Some interpret this as grounds for divorce. It at least is the grounds for a legal separation (v. 15). The ideal and practical is for them to continue living together as man and wife.

**vv. 20-24** — A person is to begin a new life with God the day he is born again. The mistakes and sins of the past are forgiven. If he is divorced, he is the same as an unmarried person. It is best to remain single if the person can be happy in that state.

#### **D. Concerning CHRISTIAN LIBERTY, Chapters 8:1 — 11:1**

The Bible condemns certain practices as wrong — Proverbs 6:16-19; Galatians 5:19-21. The Bible commends certain practices as right — prayer, teaching, doing good, etc. There is a thin grey line concerning doubtful and questionable practices about which the Bible has nothing to say either way.

**Chapter 8** — The eating of meat was a questionable practice.

**v. 1** — Knowledge — blows up  
Love — builds up

**v. 4** — Meat offered to idols was repugnant and wrong to a Jew. Meat offered to idols was later placed for sale in heathen temples. In fact, the best meat could be bought there. The Gentile was not offended in eating this meat; the Jew was. Should the Gentile believer serve meat offered to idols to his Jewish guest? The answer is no (v. 13), although there is nothing wrong with meat (vv. 4, 8). The reason: a Christian is motivated by love (vv. 9, 11, 12).

### **1. Liberty of the minister, 9**

**vv. 1-6** — Liberty in personal matters.

**vv. 7-18** — Liberty in public ministry. (Live by the gospel, v. 14.)

**vv. 19-22** — Liberty to become a servant of all. (Relationship to others for the gospel's sake, vv. 20-23.)

**vv. 23-27** — Liberty to strive for a reward. (Running and boxing to receive a crown.)

### **2. Liberty is not license, 10:1 — 11:1**

**vv. 1-15** — A warning: Israel delivered from bondage (vv. 1-5); Israel abused their liberty (vv. 6-10); Israel is an example for us (vv. 11-15); Israel was redeemed by power at the Red Sea and preserved in the wilderness by miracle, yet they sinned and were destroyed. "Baptized unto Moses" (v. 2) means *identified with* Moses.

**vv. 16-22** — A lesson: The Lord's table requires strict separation.

**vv. 23-33** — An example: A believer is to be guided in his conduct by the effect it has upon others (cp. 6:12). He is to be guided by 3 considerations:

- 1) His actions should glorify God (v. 31);
- 2) His actions should not offend others (v. 32);
- 3) His actions should follow Christ (11:1).

### **E. Concerning WOMAN'S DRESS, Chapter 11:2-16**

**v. 2** — Notice the new approach of Paul — he has had no praise for the Corinthians until this verse, but here it is: "I praise you."

**v. 3** — Principle stated: Authority for the sake of order. To eliminate confusion there are 3 headships:

- 1) Head of every man is Christ — normal. Until a man is mastered by Christ, he is not a man.
- 2) Head of woman is man. It is normal for woman to respond to man. A woman should not marry a man unless she can look up to him.
- 3) Head of Christ is God. Jesus said, “I and the Father are one” — yet in His work of redemption He took a lower place (see Philippians 2:5-8).

**vv. 4-6** — Application of the principle to Corinth. An unveiled woman in Corinth was a prostitute. Your town may be different from Corinth.

**vv. 7-16** — Interpretation of the principle concerning woman’s dress for public ministry. She should never use sex appeal in approaching God (v. 13). Note that it mentions not only woman’s wear, but men’s hair (vv. 7, 14).

## **F. Concerning the LORD’S TABLE, Chapter 11:17-34**

The Lord’s Supper is the highest expression and holiest exercise of Christian worship. All four Gospels record in detail the institution of the Lord’s Supper.

**vv. 17-22** — The early church enjoyed a meal together before celebrating the Lord’s Supper. The meal was called an *agape*, a love feast. Disorders had arisen and now Paul commands that the *agape* be discontinued.

**vv. 23-26** — Paul, not present in the Upper Room, was given these instructions directly. Here is the simplicity, sublimity, and sanity of the Lord’s Supper.

**vv. 27-34** — A believer can judge himself in respect to his sins. Failure to do so brings judgment and chastening from the Lord.

## **G. Concerning SPIRITUAL GIFTS, Chapters 12 — 14**

Problem in Corinth — divisions.

Solution — the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:3).

## **1. Endowment of gifts, 12**

### **a. Gifts are given to maintain unity in diversity,**

vv. 1-11

**v. 1** — “Spiritual gifts” is *pneumatikos*, spirituals. The word occurs 26 times in the New Testament; translated “gifts” 3 times (Romans 1:11; 1 Corinthians 14:1). He turns from carnalities in the first section to spiritualities. Gifts are one of the spiritualities.

**v. 3** — The lordship of Jesus is the central truth of the Christian life (sovereignty of Jesus Christ — Acts 2:36).

**vv. 4-6** — “Diversities” (*diairesis*) is difference in unity. “Gifts” is a capacity for service; function.

Holy Spirit bestows gifts;

Jesus Christ administers gifts (directs);

God the Father supplies power (energizes).

**v. 8** — “Wisdom” is insight into truth. “Knowledge” is investigation of truth.

**v. 9** — “Faith” is the “substance of things hoped for” (Hebrews 11:1). “Healing,” not by laying on of hands — none of this “if you have faith” business.

**v. 10** — “Working of miracles” is to do supernatural things. “Prophecy” is declaring the will of Christ. “Discerning of spirits” is distinguishing between false and true. “Tongues” is not unknown tongues (see chapter 14; also author’s booklet, “Talking in Tongues”).

### **b. Members of human body compared to gifts of Holy Spirit, vv. 12-31**

All function in one body.

**v. 12** — The church is the body of Christ.

**v. 13** — The baptism of the Holy Spirit places each believer into the body of Christ to function in a particular fashion.

**vv. 14-31** — There is one body but many members. Members of the body of Christ function in the body of Christ.

## 2. Energy of gifts — Love, 13

**vv. 1-3** — Preeminence of love — value. All gifts are a string of zeros. Love placed before them is a figure that gives value.

Eloquence	-0	} 1,000,000
Prophecy	-0	
Knowledge	-0	
Faith	-0	
Sacrifice	-0	
Martyrdom	-0	
Love	-1	

**vv. 4-7** — Prerogative of love — virtue. “Love” is an abstract noun. It must be translated into life and action. Love expresses itself in patience, kindness, absence of envy or boastfulness, etc.

**vv. 8-13** — Permanence of love — victory.

“Love never faileth” (v. 8), negative;

“Love abideth” (v. 13), positive.

“Prophecies” will be fulfilled; “tongues” will end; “knowledge” progresses (the science of 10 years ago is outmoded). “Faith, hope, and love” are the high words of the Christian vocabulary. Love is dominant. Love is superior to all gifts, and all gifts are valueless without love.

This chapter is a biography of Christ.

## 3. Exercise of gifts, 14

**a. Gift of prophecy is superior to gift of tongues,**  
vv. 1-22

**v. 1** — All gifts are to be exercised in love. The believer should desire spiritual gifts, but especially the gift of prophecy (v. 39; 12:31).

**v. 2** — Notice that “unknown” is italicized in many Bibles, which means it was not in the original text. There is no such thing as an *unknown* tongue. “Tongues” are existing languages, but unknown to

the speaker. The ability to speak in another tongue not previously learned was a phenomenon of the apostolic church.

“This whole passage is very obscure; but the obscurity arises from our ignorance of the facts described, which, though familiar to those to whom the apostle wrote, have ceased to occur.”

— Chrysostom

“Tongues seem to have ceased first of all gifts.”

— Robertson

Jesus never spoke in tongues; the apostles after Pentecost did not speak in tongues. There is no record of Paul speaking in tongues publicly, although he had the gift of tongues (v. 18). Paul, caught up to the third heaven, “heard unspeakable words.”

Only 3 gifts are mentioned in this chapter:

- 1) prophecy,
- 2) tongues, and
- 3) interpretation of tongues.

Compare 1 Corinthians 12:8-10.

Besides chapters 12 — 14, there are only 4 other references to tongues in the Scriptures: Mark 16:17; Acts 2; Acts 10; Acts 19.

**v. 5** — Paul is attempting to get the Corinthians off “the kick” of speaking in tongues (v. 9). Obviously, he is discouraging the use of tongues. (See author’s booklet, “Talking in Tongues.”)

**b. Order in local church for exercise of any gift,**  
vv. 23-40

Note vv. 26, 33, 40. Women are forbidden to speak in tongues in the local church (v. 34).

## **H. Concerning the GOSPEL, Chapter 15**

### **1. Prominence of resurrection in the gospel, vv. 1-4**

It is part of the *gospel* — in fact, there is no gospel without the resurrection (v. 4). The gospel is not the Sermon on the Mount or the Ten

Commandments.

Machen said, “Christianity does not rest on a set of ideas or creeds, but on facts.”

“Ye are saved” (v. 2) — the church is the evidence of the resurrection.

“According to the scriptures” (v. 4) — the resurrection fulfilled Scripture; it was the expectation of the Old Testament.

## 2. Proofs of resurrection, vv. 5-19

There are witnesses (vv. 5-11): Cephas, the twelve, over 500, James, all the apostles, Paul.

If Christ were not raised from the dead, certain things would be true which are not true.

## 3. Parade of resurrection, vv. 20-28

- a. Christ, the firstfruits
- b. Those who are Christ’s (the church)
- c. Old Testament saints, Tribulation saints
- d. Kingdom set up, Christ reigning
- e. Death destroyed
- f. Christ returns to His place in the Trinity (v. 28)

## 4. Program and pattern of resurrection, vv. 29-50

“Baptized” (v. 29) means *identified*. Paul took the place of a dead man in relationship to the world (see Galatians 6:14).

Resurrection refers only to the body (v. 44). In Greek, it is *anastasis nekron*, standing up of the body. The soul cannot stand up.

**“It is sown a natural (*psuchikon*) body (*soma*); it is raised a spiritual (*pneumatikon*) body (*soma*).”**

It is the body that is carried over in resurrection.

The first heresy in the church was the denial of bodily resurrection. In Paul’s day, there were three philosophies:

Stoicism — soul merged into Deity at death;  
destruction of personality.

Epicureanism — no existence beyond death;  
materialistic.

Platonism — immortality of the soul;  
denied bodily resurrection.

### **5. Power of resurrection, vv. 51-58**

**v. 51** — Not all believers will die.

**v. 52** — All believers will be changed in less than a moment of time at the Rapture of the church.

**vv. 53, 54** — Believers will receive a new body, not subject to corruption.

**v. 55** — Death and the grave will no longer triumph over man. Man is the victor, not the victim.

**v. 57** — Victory comes through Christ.

**v. 58** — See 1 Corinthians 1:9.

### **I. Concerning COLLECTIONS, Chapter 16:1-9**

**v. 2** — Collections are to be taken on the first day of the week — “Every first day.” How much? “As God hath prospered him.”

**vv. 6, 7** — Personal.

**vv. 8, 9** — A great door is open in Ephesus, but there are great adversaries — opportunities and opposition.

### **III. Closing exhortations and benediction, Chapter 16:10-24**

Sundry matters regarding personalities:

**vv. 10, 11** — Receive Timothy.

**v. 12** — Apollos will come later.

**v. 13** — Watch and pray.

**v. 14** — Christian action motivated by love.

**vv. 21-24** — Benediction. “Anathema” is *accursed*. “Maranatha” is *our Lord cometh*.

## RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- Boyer, James L. *For a World Like Ours: Studies in I Corinthians*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1971.
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