

I CORINTHIANS

When the Apostle Paul traveled from place to place bringing the good news about Jesus, he usually stayed a short while. Sometimes it was only a few days. Sometimes it was a year or more. The believers in each place became a new church with local leadership.

Paul continued to stay involved through letters, messengers, and personal visits. He wrote encouragement and appreciation. He addressed problems. He corrected and sometimes scolded. He preached Jesus' death and resurrection. He explained what Jesus' death and resurrection means and how believers should therefore act and think. Each letter is intended for specific people with specific strengths and problems in their congregation, yet the problems and teaching have proven valuable for Christians everywhere.

Paul's letters and the letters of other apostles were read over and over. They were shared among the various churches. Gradually, 21 letters (also called epistles) were collected. These letters, the four gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and the Revelation to John became the New Testament.

Corinth was a bustling seaport in Greece with 700,000 residents. Only Rome was larger. It was the capital of a large province on a busy trade route. Money flowed freely. People came from everywhere from Roman dignitaries to rough sailors and slaves. Here you found the very rich, the very poor, high status and low status. Nearly every known religion and idol was represented in Corinth, but the most popular was Venus, the goddess of love. A temple built in her honor employed more than 1,000 prostitutes. Corinth was known as "an anything goes" city. The Greek verb "to Corinthize" specifically meant, "to fornicate" and generally "to live shamelessly and immorally."

The church in Corinth was lively with a diverse congregation. It was strong, yet troubled over issues of status within the congregation and disagreements about what you can and cannot do as a forgiven Christian. Paul had spent 18 months there during his second missionary journey. (Acts 18:1-21) That was around A.D. 50. This letter was written A.D. 54 or 55 while Paul was in Ephesus on his third missionary journey.

Here is some background information and summary statements about issues and sections in I Corinthians:

Divisions: Chapters 1-4

Which is better: to belong to Paul or Apollos or Cephas or Christ? Claiming superiority was wrong and not prompted by any of those named. Who were they?

1. Paul – the apostle himself
2. Apollos – an eloquent preacher (see Acts 18:24-28)
3. Cephas – the apostle Peter, who personally preferred to follow Jewish laws, but Gentiles did not have to
4. Christ – Jesus himself

Morality and Freedom in Christ: Chapters 5-10

There are several issues: sexual immorality, lawsuits among believers, marriage vs. staying single, and eating food offered to idols. In each case, Paul works through two crucial realities. What dishonors God? What is harmful to me or others? "*All things are lawful to me, but not all things are beneficial.*" 6:12

Food offered to idols may be the most distant from our reality, and yet the issue of Christian use of money or goods that comes from immoral or unjust activity is very real to us. It was common practice for the temples to receive animal offerings that were later butchered and sold in the market. The Corinthian housewife or house slave buying meat for the household or church covered dish supper often found this meat for sale. Perhaps it was not clear where the meat came from. If it was not your offering, but a purchase for dinner, was eating it a sin against God? What if someone feels that eating it is an act of worship to some god which is not Jesus?

Recognizing the Body of Christ: Chapters 11-14

Whether the concern is Holy Communion practices or whose gifts are more holy or valuable, do we recognize that each person is part of the body of Christ?

First Things First: Chapter 15

Looking for evidence of the resurrection? See 15:3-8 for the Bible's longest list of eyewitnesses.

Nothing else matters if Jesus' death and resurrection is not the foundation nor the most important reality of your life. If you do not read any other chapter, read chapter 15.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable and resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. 13:4-6