

# Introduction to 1 Corinthians

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## Where is it in the Bible?

First Corinthians is the seventh book in the New Testament and is found between Romans and 2 Corinthians.

## Who wrote it?

According to 1 Corinthians 1:1, the letter was sent by Paul and Sosthenes, who may be the person mentioned in Acts 18:17. If so, the reason that he is mentioned here is that he was someone who would have been known to the community in Corinth; he is not mentioned elsewhere in the letter. Most of the letter is written in the first person singular, and Paul is considered to be the author.

## When was it written?

This epistle was written to believers in Corinth while Paul was in Ephesus (16:8), probably sometime between 53 and 55.

## What is it about?

The church in Corinth has been described as “Paul's problem child” because “they managed to misunderstand just about everything Paul said and did, to their own detriment and Paul's utter astonishment.”<sup>1</sup> Paul is writing in response to news he has received from “Chloe's people” (1:11) and to a letter he has received from some in the community (7:1). The church is divided over a number of issues, and Paul is writing to address this situation.

## How is it structured?

- I. Introduction (1:1-9)
  - a. Greeting (1:1-3)
  - b. Thanksgiving (1:4-9)
- II. Appeal for Unity in the Church (1:10-4:21)
  - a. Report of Divisions in the Community (1:10-17)
  - b. Proclaiming Christ Crucified (1:18-2:5)
  - c. The Wisdom of God (2:6-16)
  - d. Concerning Divisions in the Church (3:1-23)
  - e. The Apostles' Ministry (4:1-13)
  - f. Admonition to End Divisions (4:14-21)
- III. The Church and Individual Accountability (5:1-6:20)
  - a. Sexual Immorality (5:1-13)
  - b. Lawsuits (6:1-11)
  - c. Immoral Living (6:12-20)
- IV. Answers to Questions from the Corinthians (7:1-11:1)
  - a. Concerning Marriage (7:1-39)
  - b. Individual Freedom and Concern for Others (8:1-11:1)

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<sup>1</sup>Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, p.227.

- V. Public Worship (11:2-14:40)
  - a. Propriety in Worship (11:2-16)
  - b. The Lord's Supper (11:17-34)
  - c. Spiritual Gifts (12:1-31)
  - d. The Gift of Love (13:1-13)
  - e. Prophecy and Tongues (14:1-25)
  - f. Orderly Worship (14:26-40)
- VI. On Resurrection (15:1-58)
- VII. Conclusion (16:1-24)

### **What are some things to look for?**

- **Christian Community:** In the face of the many ways the Corinthians found to distinguish themselves from each other and to place themselves in a higher status, Paul urges them to resist this temptation and live in unity. He describes the Church as the body of Christ; as in a human body, the parts are different from each other, but all have important and necessary functions.
- **Love:** Paul asserts that love is more important than any of the other gifts or values the Corinthians have and is something they should strive for. The Greek word that is used for “love” in chapter 13 is *agapē*. This love is demonstrated by unselfish behavior which puts other people and their interests ahead of one's own.
- **Orderly Worship:** Paul is afraid that the public worship services in Corinth have become disorderly. This is seen particularly in practices concerning the Lord's Supper and speaking in tongues.
- **Resurrection:** In chapter 15, Paul testifies to the resurrection of Christ. He goes on to say that Christ is the “first fruits” of a bodily resurrection which will ultimately include all who follow him.
- **Spiritual Gifts:** Three chapters of the book discuss spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues and prophesying. Paul warns the Corinthians that these things should be used for the benefit of the community and not to demonstrate superiority over other members.