

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS, CALLED  
**FIRST CORINTHIANS**

[1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [7](#) [8](#) [9](#) [10](#) [11](#) [12](#) [13](#) [14](#) [15](#) [16](#)

## O U T L I N E

- Introduction	1 Corinthians 1:1-9
<b>- Unity in the Assembly</b>	<b>1 Corinthians 1:10 - 4:21</b>
- The <i>Character</i> of Division: Tendency to Form Schools of Thought	1 Corinthians 1:10-16
- The <i>Cause</i> of Division: the Intrusion of Man's Wisdom	1 Corinthians 1:17 - 3:17
- The <i>Cure</i> for Division: Get God's Perspective on Things	1 Corinthians 3:18 - 4:21
<b>- Judging Moral Evil in the Assembly</b>	<b>1 Corinthians 5</b>
- Failure to Judge Moral Evil	1 Corinthians 5:1-5
- The Principles of Defilement and Purgation	1 Corinthians 5:6-8
- Exhortations on Separating from and Judging Moral Evil	1 Corinthians 5:9-13
<b>- Resolving Personal Disputes</b>	<b>1 Corinthians 6:1-11</b>
- The Problem: Believers Prosecuting One Another in Secular Courts	1 Corinthians 6:1
- Reasons not to Bring Personal Disputes before Secular Courts	1 Corinthians 6:2-8
- Reasons not to Act Unrighteously Toward our Brother	1 Corinthians 6:9-11
<b>- Christian Liberty and its Corresponding Responsibility</b>	<b>1 Corinthians 6:12 - 11:1</b>
- Liberty & Responsibility with Regard to <i>Moral Purity</i>	1 Corinthians 6:12-20
- Liberty & Responsibility with Regard to <i>Marriage &amp; Singleness</i>	1 Corinthians 7
- Liberty & Responsibility with Regard to <i>the Consciences of Others</i>	1 Corinthians 8
- Liberty & Responsibility with Regard to <i>Christian Service</i>	1 Corinthians 9
- Liberty & Responsibility with Regard to <i>Spiritual Associations</i>	1 Corinthians 10
<b>- The Principle and Sign of Headship</b>	<b>1 Corinthians 11:2-16</b>
- The Principle of Headship	1 Corinthians 11:2-3
- The Sign of Headship	1 Corinthians 11:4-10
- A Balancing Principle: Mutual Dependence of the Man and Woman	1 Corinthians 11:11-12
- A Closing Word for the Conscience on the Subject of Headship	1 Corinthians 11:13-16
<b>- The Responsibility of Taking the Lord's Supper</b>	<b>1 Corinthians 11:17-34</b>
- How the Corinthians were Dishonoring the Lord's Supper	1 Corinthians 11:17-22
- The Proper Order of the Lord's Supper: A Revelation to Paul	1 Corinthians 11:23-26
- Eating and Drinking Unworthily & Governmental Results	1 Corinthians 11:27-32
- Consideration for Others with Regard to the Lord's Supper	1 Corinthians 11:33-34
<b>- The Nature and Use of Gifts in the Assembly</b>	<b>1 Corinthians 12 - 14</b>
- Manifestations of the Spirit & the Body of Christ	1 Corinthians 12

- Divine Love: the Motive for the Exercise of Gift	1 Corinthians 13
- The Exercise of Gift in the Assembly	1 Corinthians 14
<b>- The Resurrection and Its Importance in Christianity</b>	<b>1 Corinthians 15</b>
- The Immutability of the Gospel	1 Corinthians 15:1-2
- The Four Integral Facts of the Gospel: Including Resurrection	1 Corinthians 15:3-11
- Seven Logical Consequences of Denying the Resurrection	1 Corinthians 15:12-19
- Parenthesis: The Final Results of Resurrection	1 Corinthians 15:20-28
- Practical Effects of the Resurrection	1 Corinthians 15:29-34
- The Glorious and Heavenly Order of Resurrection	1 Corinthians 15:35-50
- The Event of Resurrection and Notes of Victory	1 Corinthians 15:51-58
<b>- Concluding Remarks</b>	<b>1 Corinthians 16</b>
- The Collection for the Saints	1 Corinthians 16:1-4
- Paul's Travel Plans: His Initial Visit to Corinth Postponed	1 Corinthians 16:5-9
- Practical Exhortations Concerning Service	1 Corinthians 16:10-12
- Salutations	1 Corinthians 16:19-24

**First Corinthians.** This is the epistle that gives us the proper ordering and functioning of the local assembly. The Spirit of God uses an assembly (Corinth) that had a great deal of disorder and dysfunction, and gives us a corrective epistle that provides the solutions to the problems at that particular assembly, but also for us to benefit from. At the same time, while developing the solutions to each disorder, the Spirit expands on the broad principles related to those issues. The epistle can be generally divided into two parts.

- Those who profess the name of Christ, the *House of God*..... 1 Corinthians 1:1 - 10:14
- Those who are real believers, the *Body of Christ*..... 1 Corinthians 10:15 - 16:24

**Eight failures or disorders in Corinth** that the epistle addresses:

1. Failure to maintain unity in the assembly (ch.1:10 - 4:21)
2. Failure to judge moral evil (ch.5)
3. Failure to resolve personal disputes (ch.6:1-12)
4. Failure to understand Christian liberty and its responsibility (ch.6:13- ch.11:1)
5. Failure to understand the principle and sign of headship (ch.11:2-16)
6. Failure to understand the responsibility of taking the Lord's supper (ch.11:17-34)
7. Failure to understand the nature and use of gifts in the assembly (ch.12-14)
8. Failure to maintain sound doctrine concerning the resurrection (ch.15)

The information about these disorders came to Paul from a number of directions:

- In 1 Cor. 1 - 4 he addresses things told him by *the House of Chloe*
- In 1 Cor. 5 - 6 he addresses things “*commonly reported*” to him
- In 1 Cor. 7 - 16 he addresses things *the Corinthians* had written to him about

In the first six chapters, Paul addresses the more urgent matters of their state before he addresses the questions they had asked. We can learn a valuable lesson from this. When someone asks a question it is good to be aware that the question might not really be what is troubling them. The question is but the manifestation of deeper issues.

**Canonical Context.** It is significant that this epistle follows the book of Romans. Romans establishes us in the foundational truths of salvation, but 1 Corinthians gives us a view of the internal functioning of the assembly, our collective testimony before this world, and the practical conduct of the believer. We must have the doctrine of salvation first before we can have the truth of the assembly.

**Historical Context.** In Acts 18 we read of Paul’s visit to Corinth on his second missionary journey. He remained there eighteen months (Acts 18:11), residing initially in the house of [Aquila and Priscilla](#). Through Paul’s labors, a very large assembly was formed in Corinth. The Lord had said to Paul, “*I have much people in this city*”. Corinth was a wealthy trade-city, and their material wealth was coupled with moral disorder. Paul gave a powerful testimony to the Jews in Corinth, but they utterly rejected the gospel, upon which Paul declared that he would go to the Gentiles. Paul then resided with a man named Justus who lived adjacent to the synagogue. The Jews violently attacked Paul, and a believing Jew named Sosthenes, who was the ruler of the synagogue, was publicly beaten. Then Paul left for Ephesus with Aquila and Priscilla, and apparently Sosthenes as well. Leaving them in Ephesus, he completed his second missionary journey and then returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey. In Acts 19 we find that Paul reached Ephesus and stayed for two years, disputing daily in the school of Tyrannus; a great and effectual “open door”. He was in Ephesus when the news arrived about the sad state of the assembly in Corinth. He had planned to travel to them, but the sad news caused him to postpone his trip because he wanted to spare them and give them an opportunity to get right (2 Cor. 1:23; 2:1). In the first epistle, Paul corrects numerous disorders among the Corinthians, including the toleration of moral and doctrinal evil (1 Cor. 5 & 15). He specifically says that he was in Ephesus at the time of his writing the epistle (1 Cor. 16:8). There were many adversaries opposing him, both from the Jews and Gentiles, but Paul remained because the “door” was still open. Evidently, Paul dispatched Titus and another brother (2 Cor. 12:18) to Corinth with the first epistle. Around this same time, Paul also dispatched Timothy and Erastus from Ephesus to the general region of Macedonia with thoughts also of visiting Corinth (Acts

19:22; 1 Cor. 4:17), and in the first epistle, he exhorted the Corinthians about Timothy's visit (1 Cor. 16:10). Shortly thereafter, a riot broke out in Ephesus over the effect Paul's preaching had on idol-makers. As a result of this tumult, the door was closed in Ephesus [2], and Paul departed for Macedonia (Acts 20:1). But when one door closes, another door opens (2 Cor. 2:12). [Continue reading...](#)

**A corrective epistle.** This epistle, as well as Galatians, is a *corrective* epistle - in contradistinction to *instructive* epistles like Ephesians. In both Corinth and Galatia evil had come in; but the evil was of two different types. In 1 Corinthians we have the correction of *moral evil* as opposed to Galatians which gives us the correction of *doctrinal evil*. Paul was more severe with the Galatians because he knew the danger of doctrinal error. If a person falls into moral sin, it can be corrected by being brought into the light. However, if the truth itself is corrupted, then the instrument by which God is pleased to work has been destroyed. Furthermore, evil doctrine leads to evil actions.

**A rejected epistle.** There is no epistle, and no book in the Bible, that is more rejected or mistreated by Christians than 1 Corinthians. Just as unbelievers have attacked the first eleven chapters of Genesis, so Christians have attacked the last six chapters of 1 Corinthians. Why? A number of reasons. First, because it is so practical. The tendency is for the church to follow the philosophical and cultural trends in the world. For example, in the women's liberation movement in the 1950's and 60's, the Church followed many of those ideas in the 1970's and 80's. The Church has changed with the culture, and many of those changes are incompatible with 1 Corinthians. One of the most common techniques that is used to side-step the plain teaching of this epistle is to say that "it was only for the 1st century Corinthian church". Ironically, the Spirit of God labors in this epistle more than in any other to show that the doctrines contained herein are for the whole Church, at all times; see 1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Cor. 7:17; 1 Cor. 11:16; 1 Cor. 14:36-37; 1 Cor. 16:1.

**The House of God.** First Corinthians gives us the internal functioning of the assembly as the House of God (assembly order, etc.) but First Timothy gives us the functioning of the House of God in its public testimony - the pattern for day-to-day living as believers. We could say 1 Corinthians covers corporate behavior when we are meeting "in assembly", but 1 Timothy covers our behavior at all times, because we are always in the House! Paul had spent a year and a half with the Corinthians, but after he left things fell into disorder. We can easily understand this in the natural realm. If a house is messy and disorderly it is hard to enjoy the things in the home. The same is true of the local assembly as the house of God. A sense of God's order is something that comes with spiritual maturity, and through studying the pattern of the House of God as laid out in scripture. [Read more...](#)

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