

Intro to I CORINTHIANS

Author: This is the second of 13 NT books written by the Apostle Paul, and the first of two letters sent to the church at Corinth.

The Church at Corinth and the purpose for the letter: Corinth was a Greek city, situated about 50 miles west of Athens. Paul had established the church at Corinth during his second missionary journey, but things turned bad at the church after his departure. There were many problems at the church, which Paul sought to address with this first letter. They were challenging his apostleship, abusing the Lord's Supper, taking each other to court, condoning immorality, and denying the resurrection. As Paul deals with these and other issues, he provides us some important teachings concerning some of the fundamentals of our faith.

Chapter by Chapter Synopsis:

Chapter 1 / Intro / On Divisions Within the Church

Paul begins giving thanks for the church, but wastes no time diving into the problems, the first of which, is division in the church. People began following personalities instead of Christ, and dividing over the differences. Paul takes the opportunity to firmly reestablish the truth that the Gospel is found in the cross of Christ, alone. He continues that discussion in **Chapter 2** with a teaching on the wisdom that comes from the Spirit of God. The cross of Christ is the center of the power of God, but is foolishness to the Gentiles and a stumbling block to the Jews. However, Paul says that to the believer, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Chapters 3 and 4 / Division and the Work of the Kingdom

In these chapters, Paul continues his discussion on division and appeals to the Corinthians that what they are doing are following mortal men, who are only servants of the Living God. In chapter 4, he puts apostleship and servanthood into its proper context and proclaims himself as a "fool for Christ." It's also here that Paul introduces us to the idea that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit—an idea he reiterates later in the book.

Chapter 5 / Immorality in the Church

Paul turns his attention to a serious morality problem in the church. A man is found having relations with his father's wife, and the church showing approval of the act. Paul instructs the church to expel the immoral brother so that his soul may be saved.

Chapter 6 / Lawsuits / More on Immorality

Paul addresses the subject of believers taking other believers to court, and encourages them to work things out amongst themselves. He then addresses sexual immorality again, in the context of what is permissible and what is profitable. He makes the appeal that the human body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and should be regarded as such.

Chapter 7/ Marriage

Having never been married, Paul makes the case that it is better for one not to be. However, if they choose to be married, he encourages believing couples to marry and not separate. He also addresses those situations where one partner is a believer and the other isn't. A further addressing of this is found in his second letter to the church, where he instructs them to not be unequally yoked with a non-believer.

Chapter 8 / Food Sacrificed to Idols

Here, Paul discusses the issue of food that has been sacrificed to idols and the question of discernment as it applies to disputable matters. It echoes the teaching of Romans 14 and is discussed at further length in the latter part of the 10th chapter of I Corinthians.

Chapter 9 / The Rights of Apostles

Paul addresses what he believes to be the rights entitled to those who preach and minister the Gospel. He also points out that, although entitled to them, he has refused them, in order for them to know his true heart.

Chapter 10/ Examples and Warnings

He enters a discourse on how easy it is to get entangled in evil, and he begins by citing some examples from OT history. He then issues a warning to take heed when we think we have it all together, lest we fall. Just because we have the freedom of choice to do whatever we want to doesn't necessarily mean that we should.

Chapter 11 / Guidelines for Worship

Paul gives the Corinthian church some practical guidelines for how worship should be executed. In that context, he gives instruction to women that they should pray with their heads covered and that men should not. Furthermore, the men should not wear their hair long in disgrace. But the real point of the first part of the passage seems to be the advocacy of a patriarchal system in the church and the family, whereby, the male is the ultimate head. The latter part of the chapter is devoted to the celebration of the Lord's Supper and the correct guidelines for its observance.

Chapter 12 / Spiritual Gifts

The principle of the church being one body made up of many important parts is the main focus of Chapter 12. In that context, Paul gives a list of the gifts that God has given to us through his Holy Spirit, each one unique and important to the body of Christ.

Chapter 13 / Love

In one of the most eloquent passages in all of scripture, Paul puts everything in the context of agape love, and that without it, it's all meaningless. He equates love with the highest virtues known to us, and when it's all said and done, the greatest thing that we can possess, according to Paul, is selfless, sacrificial agape love.

Chapter 14 / Orderly Worship (the gifts of prophecy and tongues)

Because there was so much confusion concerning the gift of tongues, Paul addresses the problem and encourages the church to not become divided over the gift of tongues, but to pursue the greater gifts.

Chapter 15 / The Resurrection of Christ

To address the teaching that had infiltrated the church claiming that there was no resurrection from the dead, Paul attacks it head on. If there is no resurrection, the Christ is not risen, and if Christ is not risen, then our faith is in vain. Paul then takes the opportunity to deepen the teaching by describing the resurrected body and gives a prophetic teaching by describing some of the events of the second coming of Jesus Christ. The practical teaching he leaves them with is to "stand firm and be immovable, knowing that their labor for the Lord is not in vain."

Chapter 16 / On Offerings and Tithes

Paul gives the Corinthians specific instruction on how offerings are to be given. He encourages them to set aside a sum of money, on the first day of each week, in keeping with their income. Paul closes out the chapter with some final remarks and greetings.

Life Lessons from I Corinthians

- Church Unity

Paul's teaching in I Corinthians is primarily focused on division in the church based on personalities and people's personal preferences. His appeal to them is to allow Christ to be head, and for them to see that they are uniquely gifted as part of His body.

- Personal Responsibility

In light of the freedom that we have in Christ, our freedom must be constrained by the wisdom of God and the love of Christ. "Everything is permissible, but not everything is beneficial," according to Paul, and that rule should permeate every part of our being.

- Correct Theology

Especially as it applies to spiritual gifts and the resurrection of the dead, Paul stresses the importance of having the proper theological beliefs. As believers, it is also important for us to fine tune our theology to prevent error and the influence of false teaching.