

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF

1 Corinthians

Seventh New Testament book, following Romans, 1 Corinthians was written shortly after A.D. 50 by the apostle Paul to a church in Corinth, about 50 miles from Athens, Greece. Paul had planted this congregation during an 18-month stay in that city (1:14-16; 4:15; see Acts 18:1-18).

On a busy trade route, Corinth was well located for Paul's missionary strategy but a tough challenge for the gospel because of its rank idolatry and immorality. Here is an example of Christ making a major difference in people as He interfaced with the world at its worst. Though the changes in these converts was dramatic (6:9-11), it was not yet complete (3:1, 2). This epistle urges immature believers to more progress in Christ.

The letter has 16 chapters, the best known of which are on love (13) and resurrection (15). A sub-theme is Paul's attempt to establish the order of his apostleship (ch. 4) in a church that lacked discipline. At the end, he urges the Corinthians to assist him in a Jerusalem relief project (16:1-6).

Corinth was the "problem church" among early Christians. This first epistle catalogs the struggles and issues there and offers Paul's plain counsel for each. The direct address "you" (plural) occurs 140 times.

- problem of factions, rivalry (1:11, 12)
Paul's counsel: Follow Christ crucified and preach Him (1:13—2:2); grow up and see the big picture (3:1-11); don't destroy the church, God's temple (3:12-17).
- problems of sexual immorality, etc. (5:1, 2; 6:9, 10)
Paul's counsel: Be forgiven by Jesus and changed by the Spirit (6:11); flee sin against our bodies, God's temple (6:12-20); judge righteous judgment (6:1-8); discipline severe cases (5:3-13).
- questions about marriage and celibacy (ch. 7)
Paul's counsel: Because of the gospel's urgency, singleness may be preferable (vv. 1, 6-8, 18-34); because of our per-

sonal urgency, marriage is permitted, and conjugal relations are blest (vv. 2-5, 9-17, 35-40).

- question of eating meat offered to idols (ch. 8)
Paul's counsel: For those strong in faith, eating or not eating means little; for those with less understanding, the strong should abstain (8:1-13); flee idolatry, give no offense, do all to God's glory (10:14-33).
- question of financial support for gospel preachers (chs. 9)
Paul's counsel: Those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel, but Paul declines to accept this favor from the church in Corinth (9:1-27).
- problem of careless and carnal Christians (ch. 10)
Paul's counsel: Remember the history of ancient Israel, and don't fall, as they did, under present temptations; God helps us stand (10:1-13).

- problem of abuse of church traditions (ch. 11)
Paul's counsel: It is fitting for women in Corinth to prophesy and pray with head covered (11:1-17); it is vital that the Lord's supper in every church be received with mutual respect and self-examination (11:17-34).
- problem of misuse of spiritual gifts (chs. 12-14)
Paul's counsel: God's Spirit gives various offices and abilities to the church. Edification of the entire body must be of primary concern as we exercise our spiritual gifts (12:1-31). Prophecy, presenting plain, revealed truth, is more important than speaking in tongues (14:1-40), and love is the greatest of all (13:1-13).
- questions about the resurrection (ch. 15)
Paul's counsel: The death and resurrection of Jesus form the very heart of the Christian gospel. Christ's resurrection is thoroughly attested by the apostles and 500+ others. If it is not true, we have no valid faith or hope. But since He rose, so shall we rise — when He returns to restore the earth under God's reign. We know little about our resurrection body, but it will be immortal as befits that new age of heavenly power and spirit, like that of the Lord Jesus. Christians alive at Christ's coming will be instantly immortalized without dying when the righteous dead are resurrected. Thus, death will be forever defeated by God through Christ — our greatest victory and praise!

1 Corinthians in a sentence: Facing problems within the church and without, believers in a large, worldly city receive much correction and instruction regarding church harmony, spiritual ministry, orderly worship, love for others, faith in Christ's death for our sins, and hope in His resurrection and return.