

## The First Letter to the Corinthians

### Setting:

The setting of this letter is the city of Corinth. Corinth having been earlier destroyed by the Romans was rebuilt by Julius Caesar in 44 BCE. It was critical to the Empire because it was situated on an isthmus over which boats could be hauled in order to avoid a long and dangerous journey around the southern tip of Greece. This location ultimately made Corinth one of, if not the, wealthiest city in the Roman Empire. This wealth allowed it to be home to the second largest athletic contest in the Empire, the Isthmian games. Corinth was also a port city where sailors came seeking wine, women and song, meaning legal prostitution was a fact of life. Thus the city was one of decadence both economically and physically. To be called a “Corinthian” meant that one was base and decadent. To be called a “Corinthian Girl” was to imply that one was sexually promiscuous. The city also housed numerous Greek Temples including one on the city summit dedicated to Aphrodite, the goddess of love.

### The Church:

Paul organized the church during his second missionary journey in either 51 or 52 CE. He earned a living as a tent-maker and stayed for almost a year and a half. During that time he tried to convert the Jews in the local synagogue, but with little luck. Paul then moved on to work with the pagan Gentile population. Over the course of his time many people, most probably in the middle class (but also including rich and poor), became followers of Jesus. While in Corinth he was accused of proclaiming a religion which was counter to that of Roman law but was declared innocent on the charge. The church as we will discover was rent with problems. They were divided over leadership, ethical standards, styles of worship, the role of women in the church and a host of other matters. The church, in many ways, was a mess.

### The Purpose:

The purpose of this letter was to bring order out of chaos. Paul believed that the church ought to live in an orderly fashion. This meant order in terms of ethics, worship and organization. Paul gives directions as to how the church can become more orderly so that it gives glory to God and does not tear itself apart. Paul also answers questions which had come to him in a previous letter.

### Outline: (from Craig Blomberg – The NIV Application Commentary Series: I Corinthians)

1. Introduction, Greeting and Thanksgiving (1:1-9)
2. Letter Body (1:10-16:4)
  - a. Paul responds to Oral Reports about the Church
    - i. Divisions within the church (1:10-4:21)
      1. Rival Factions (1:10-17)
      2. The Cross at the center (1:18-2:5)
      3. Christian Wisdom is needed (2:6-3:23)
      4. The Right Attitude Toward the Disciples (4:1-21)
    - ii. A Case of Incest (5:1-13)
    - iii. Lawsuits between believers (6:1-11)
    - iv. The seriousness of sexual immorality (6:12-20)
  - b. Paul responds to a Letter from the Corinthians (7:1-16:4)
    - i. Concerning Marriage (7:1-40)

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1. To those currently or previously married (7:1-16)
  2. Analogies with Circumcision and Slavery (7:17-24)
  3. To those Never Married or thinking about marriage (7:25-40)
  - ii. Concerning food sacrificed to idols (8:1-11:1)
    1. Introduction and Solution (8:1-13)
    2. Money for Ministry (9:1-18)
    3. The underlying motive: saving people (9:19-27)
    4. Examples of the dangers of Idolatry (10:1-22)
    5. Summary: balancing freedom and restraint (10:23-11:1)
  - iii. Concerning Worship (11:2-14:40)
    1. Head coverings (11:2-16)
    2. The Lord's Supper (11:17-34)
    3. Spiritual Gifts (12:1-14:40)
      - a. Diversity within unity (12:1-31a)
      - b. Love trumps all (12:31b-13:13)
      - c. Be Intelligible (14:1-25)
      - d. Order over chaos (14:26-40)
  - iv. Concerning the Resurrection (15:1-58)
    1. The certainty of the resurrection (15:1-34)
    2. The nature of the resurrection (15:35-58)
  - v. Concerning the collection in Jerusalem ( 16:1-4)
3. Conclusion
- a. Travel Plans of Paul and his friends (16:5-12)
  - b. The formal closing (16:13-24)