

Bible Study on the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians

Introduction: This letter was written by Paul from Ephesus (**16:8**) during his third missionary journey in about **54** to **56AD**. His second letter followed about **12** to **15** months later when he was in Philippi a city of Macedonia in about **55** to **57AD**.

The Greek city of Corinth was a thriving centre of trade and industry particularly in ceramics. It was situated on the Isthmus that joins Peloponnesus (South Greece) to the rest of Greece between the Aegean and the Adriatic Seas. The city had its own port, Lechaem for the Adriatic Sea. It was two miles from Corinth. Cenchreae was the port for the Aegean Sea being 7.5 miles from Corinth. The short distance between the two ports enabled merchants to avoid the dangerous southern route between the southern coast of Greece and Crete. The cargo was carried from the ships over the Isthmus to be put on another ship to continue the journey. Smaller vessels were pulled on rollers overland and then relaunched to continue the next stage of the journey.

Corinth was dominated by the Acrocorinth, a steep flat topped rock about **1860** feet high (**566** meters) just outside Corinth on the south side of the city. An Acropolis was built on the top containing the temple of Aphrodite, goddess of love. The Acropolis of Athens can be seen from the top of Acrocorinth 45 miles away. The temple was notorious for its immorality where there were at least a thousand temple prostitutes. The city of Corinth had a reputation for excess and sexual licence even having a word for it "to corinthianise."

The Isthmian games were celebrated every two years in Corinth in the Posidonium the sanctuary for the god Neptune. All the city states of Greece took part. At these games the sea god Poseidon was specially honoured.

In **146BC** Corinth was completely destroyed by the Romans. All its citizens were taken into slavery and the city was left desolate for **100** years. However it was rebuilt as a Roman colony by Julius Caesar the Roman Emperor in about **46BC**. The city recovered its prosperity. Its citizens were Romans with freedmen from Italy but the population also had a racial and social mixture being cosmopolitan where there were Greeks, Latins, Syrians, Asiatics and Egyptians along with a sizeable Jewish community having their own synagogue. The establishment of the Church there in this city would enable the gospel to be spread quickly east and west, far and wide. The city was the capital of the new Roman province of Achaia (South Greece) being separated from Macedonia (Central to Northern Greece) having its own proconsular governor. It retained its own colonial administration, but became the seat of government of this Roman province of Achaia from **27BC**.

The Church of Jesus Christ was founded in Corinth whilst Paul was on his second missionary journey in about **50** or **51AD** (**Acts 18:1-17**). Paul stayed for **18** months being given assurance from the Lord that he will not be harmed during that time (**Acts 18:9-11**). A flourishing church was built up with the great majority being Gentile believers from a pagan background (**12:2**) but some Jewish believers as well because Paul started preaching for a short time in the synagogue in Corinth. Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue and his family became believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul moved on to use the house of Justus to continue his teaching when it was no longer possible in the synagogue. Paul laboured with a Jewish believing couple, Aquila and Priscilla, expelled from Rome. Later, Timothy and Silas came from Macedonia to join Paul in Corinth.

The Church had started well but in a few years the problems of worldly influences began to infiltrate it. Corinth was a city well known for much worldly pleasure, immorality and idolatry. It took pride in being a philosophical city with many itinerant teachers promoting human wisdom. Whilst the church had received much sound teaching sadly the worldly influences had led many believers in Jesus Christ to commit much sin. Some believers from the house of Chloe had

given Paul a report either by letter or by personal visit to see him in Ephesus. They had raised serious problems in the church. There may have been other brethren who brought further questions. Paul has addressed the problems and questions in this letter. The following issues below have been addressed:

- 1) Emerging divisions in the Church, **1:11-12**.
- 2) Incest where a Christian man had committed adultery in having sexual relations with his stepmother, **6:1**.
- 3) Lawsuits between believers in the Church in Corinth before heathen judges, **6:1-6**.
- 4) The abuse of Christian "freedom", **8:1-13**.
- 5) Unacceptable behaviour in church meetings especially in the abuse of the Lord's Supper, **11: 17-22**.

In the same letter Paul answers questions from Corinthian believers some of which have been listed below:

- 1) Marriage, divorce and celibacy (remaining unmarried), **7:1-40**.
- 2) The problem of food offered to idols and social occasions taking place in the idol temples, **8:1-13**.
- 3) The role of women in church meetings and whether their heads should be veiled, **11:4-15, 14:26-40**.
- 4) The Gifts of the Spirit that can operate in the church meetings, **12:1-14:40**.
- 5) Much stress made on the teaching of the resurrection of the dead, **15:1-58**.

There is much teaching in this letter showing how the Church of Jesus Christ should be functioning today.

QUESTIONS

Chapter 1

- Q.1)** How did Paul start this letter in **1:1-3**? Compare with the other New Testament letters.
- Q.2)** What was known of the progress of the Church in Corinth? Read **1:4-9**.
- Q.3)** What were the main causes of the divisions in the Church at Corinth in **1:10-16**?
See also **3:3-4**.
- Q.4)** Consider what might be known of Chloe in **1:11**.
- Q.5)** Read carefully **1:17-31** and show what is the wisdom of God.
- Q.6)** Read carefully **1:18-24**. Can you show the three different attitudes Paul has pointed out towards the cross.
- Q.7)** Look carefully at **1:26** and consider who is more likely to respond to the gospel? See also **1:27-28**.
- Q.8)** Show the things of the world which God has chosen. See **1:26-29**.

Chapter 2

- Q.1)** How did Paul desire to preach? See **2:1-10**.
- Q.2)** Read **2:1-16**. What is known of the wisdom of God? Read also **1:17-31; James 3:17-18**.
- Q.3)** What do we know of the gospel message in this chapter? There are at least three fundamentals of the gospel message shown in **2:1-16**. See also **15:1-4 & Romans: 8:17**.
- Q.4)** What is understood by **A)** The natural man and **B)** The spiritual man? Read again **2:9-16**.
- Q.5)** Show what is known of the Holy Spirit in **2:9-16**. See also **6:19-20; John 14:16,26; 16:13; Romans 8:9-11; 2Corinthians 3:17; 2Timothy 1:7**.
- Q.6)** What did Paul teach regarding **A)** human wisdom and **B)** hidden wisdom of God. How is the wisdom of God received and who will receive it? Read **2:15-16 & Proverbs 2:1-9**.

Chapter 3

- Q.1)** What is meant by being carnal? Read **3:1-4** (see KJV or NKJV).
- Q.2)** How did Paul continue to deal with the spiritual immaturity amongst many of the believers in Corinth? See **3: 1-8**.
- Q.3)** What can we expect to receive from God when we work faithfully with him? See **3:9-15**. It is helpful to read **Matthew 16:27; 25:14-30; Luke 14:13-14; Romans 14:10-11; 1Corinthians 5:5; 9:25; 2Corinthians 5:10; Ephesians 2:10; 2Timothy 4:8, 14; 1Peter 5:4; 2John 8**.
- Q.4)** Why is it so essential to treat your body with care? See **3:16-17 & 6:19-20**.
- Q.5)** Show the folly of the wisdom of this world in **3:18-23**. See also **James 3:13-16**.
- Q.6)** What is the responsibility of Christian workers in their relationship: **A)** to God; **B)** to each other and **C)** to those among whom they serve? Read again **3:1-23 & 4:1-2**.
- Q.7)** Read yet again **3:1-23** and consider how we can grow spiritually to effectively serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 4

- Q.1)** What does **4:1-6** teach us about stewardship?
- Q.2)** Show the evidence of pride amongst many of the Corinthian believers in **4:7-10, 18-19**.
- Q.3)** How were Paul and the other apostles being treated by ungodly men? See **4:11-13**.
- Q.4)** Show the ways Paul was giving pastoral care to his converts in Corinth. See **4:14-21** and read also **Hebrews 12:3-11**.
- Q.5)** Consider carefully what is meant in saying "*For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power*" in **4:20**. It is helpful if you have a concordance and dictionary to look up the word "power" which is translated from the Greek word "dunamis" (1411 in Strong's concordance in the Greek dictionary).
- Q.6)** Read again **4:1-21**. What do we learn of the ministry of a faithful servant of the Lord such as Paul? How did Paul and other faithful ministers respond to suffering?

Chapter 5

- Q.1)** Show the attitude towards sexual immorality amongst the Corinthian believers in **5:1-2**.
- Q.2)** How did Paul respond to the report of a Christian man committing sexual immorality? See **5:1-5,13**.
- Q.3)** What was known of the woman mentioned in **5:1** who was involved in incest?
- Q.4)** Why did Paul refer to the Feast of Passover in **5:5-8**?
- Q.5)** Look again at **5:1-8, 13** and show why church discipline is essential.
- Q.6)** Read **5:9-13**. How should we associate with: **A)** The sexually immoral of this world who are not believers, **5:9-10** and **B)** with believers who are sexually immoral, covetous, idolaters, drunkards or extortioners.

Chapter 6

- Q.1)** Show the way the Church in Corinth was a poor testimony to Jesus Christ. Read **6:1-8**.
- Q.2)** How should believers settle disputes amongst brethren? See **6:4-8**.
- Q.3)** How had many believers in Corinth lived before they became Christians? Show the change that had been made on their lives. Read **6:9-11**.
- Q.4)** What did Paul teach on purity especially in the way we treat our bodies? Read **6:12-20**
- Q.5)** List some of the truths Paul stressed to the Corinthian believers in this chapter. See **6:2-3,9,15-16,19**.
- Q.6)** Why did God forbid sexual relationships outside marriage? See **6:13-20**. Consider the consequences that can happen to men and women who continually have sex outside marriage. See also the warning in **Proverbs 6:32**.
- Q.7)** Look carefully at **6:13-20** and show why your body is so important to the Lord. There are at least six reasons given in this passage.

Chapter 7

- Q.1)** What did Paul teach regarding marriage in **7:1-16**? See also **7:27, 39-40**.
- Q.2)** Show what is known of God's calling on men in **7:17-24**.
- Q.3)** Show any problems Paul brought up about married life. See **7:25-35**.
- Q.4)** What are the advantages of celibacy if a person believes he or she is called to it? See **7:1, 7-8, 32, 34, 40 & Matthew 19:10-12**. Why did Paul choose to remain unmarried?
- Q.5)** Read **7:10-11, 15, 39**. Do these scriptures justify separation, divorce and remarriage? See also **Matthew 5:32; 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-10; Luke 16:18**.
- Q.6)** Read carefully again **7:1-40** and where possible in small groups discuss the following questions: **A)** Show what is continually needed for a marriage to work in **7:1-6**? **B)** Is it right for the unmarried to marry in view of what Paul is saying in **7:7-9**? **C)** Is it allowed for a Christian to divorce? Read **7:10-11** and see also **Matthew 5:32; 19:9**. **D)** When one partner in a marriage becomes a Christian, should he or she continue the relationship with an unconverted/unbelieving spouse? Read **7:12-16**. **E)** Does the present world situation influence a person's decision whether to marry or not? See **7:25-28**. It is helpful to read **Jeremiah 16:1-13**. **F)** Is it right for a Christian widow to remarry? Read **7:39-40**.

Chapter 8

- Q.1)** What is Paul teaching on food offered to idols? Can a Christian eat food offered to idols? Read carefully **8:1-4; 7-13** and see also **10:25-28; Acts 15:29; 21:25**.
- Q.2)** Consider the problems that some Corinthian believers had brought about in the Church with regard to knowledge. See **8:1-6, 10-11** and also **4:6, 18-19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4**.
- Q.3)** What does **8:3-6** reveal about an idol and compare that with what is known of God. See also **Psalms 115:3-8 & 1 Corinthians 13:2**.
- Q.4)** Show where there is abuse of Christian liberty and its result. See **8:9-13**.
- Q.5)** Show the problems of weak and immature Christians in regard to eating food offered to idols. See **8:7-13**.
- Q.6)** When is it right to abstain from eating food offered to idols? Read again **8:7-13**.

Chapter 9

- Q.1)** Show how Paul proved his apostleship to be genuine in view of some Corinthian believers disputing his ministry. See **9:1-3**.
- Q.2)** Look at the support Christian workers could be entitled to receive in **9:4-14**. It is helpful to consider: **A)** Three essential rights, **9:4-6**; **B)** The use of human analogy and divine law, **9:7-11**; **C)** Temple service and living by the gospel, **9:12-14**.
- Q.3)** Why has Paul chosen not to receive any support referred to in **9:4-14**? Read **9:15-23**.
- Q.4)** Read carefully **9:19-23**. Show how Paul reached out to people to reveal to them the gospel. Do these verses help us in how we should bring the gospel to those people who do not know Jesus Christ? It is helpful to look at how Paul preached the gospel in the Book of Acts especially in his testimony in **Acts 22 & 26** and **Acts 13:16-42; 17:22-31**.
- Q.5)** What lessons can we learn in the illustration Paul has given of running the race. Read **9:23-27**. See also **2 Timothy 4:7 & Hebrews 12:1-2**.

Chapter 10:1-11:1

- Q.1)** Show the lessons Paul has given to us to avoid the danger of falling because of pride. See **10:1-12** and consider **A)** the blessings of the children of Israel in **10:1-4** and **B)** the sins of the children of Israel in **10:5-10**. Consider also **Exodus 17:6 & Numbers 20:1-13**.
- Q.2)** Show how we can overcome temptation especially in regard to idolatry? Read **10:13-22**.
- Q.3)** Knowing the Lord has set us free, how are we to conduct ourselves in the presence of others especially over the issue of food offered to idols? See **10:23-30**. Notice the word "conscience" mentioned several times in **10:25, 27, 28, 29** (twice). See also **6:12**.

Chapter 10:1-11:1 continued

Q.4) Consider carefully the statements made by Paul in **10:31-33 & 11:1** which show how believers should live. Can you state at least five basic rules for life together in Jesus Christ.

Chapter 11:2-34

Q.1) Read **11:2**. What ways did Paul give praise to the Corinthian brethren? Compare with **2Thessalonians 2:15**.

Q.2) Read carefully **11:3-16**. What is taught regarding head covering? Does it apply to women to cover their heads today in public worship?

Q.3) Show the abuse of the Lord's Supper revealed by Paul in **11:17-22**.

Q.4) Show the purpose of the Lord's Supper in **11:23-34**.

Q.5) Show the warnings Paul gave to those who had treated the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. See **11:27-32**.

Chapter 12

Q.1) What can be understood by the things of the Spirit in **12:1-6**?

Q.2) Make a list of the manifestations of the Spirit. Read carefully **12:7-11**. Is it true to say that all believers can partake in the manifestations of the Holy Spirit?

Q.3) What is taught by Paul on the Body of Christ in **12:12-31**? It is helpful to make a list of what is known of the Body of Christ in this text.

Q.4) What lessons can you learn from Paul's illustration of the human body in showing the unity and diversity of the Body of Christ? Read again **12:14-31**.

Q.5) What is meant by baptism into the Body of Christ in **12:13**?

Q.6) What responsibility does the possession of a particular gift put upon a person who has it? Read carefully again **12:1-31**.

Chapter 13

Q.1) List all the things we could do without love in **13:1-3**. Why do we not profit even though we may have made great sacrifices?

Q.2) What do we understand by love in **13:4-8, 13**? Is this seen in Jesus Christ? Give an example where possible. See also **1John 4:7-21**. Where does such love come from?

Q.3) What can we know in part at this time? How will things change when we see God face to face? Read **13:9-13** and also **15:50-54**.

Chapter 14

Q.1) What should be our attitude towards spiritual gifts? See **12:31; 14:1, 12, 39**.

Q.2) Read carefully **14:2-25, 39**. Show the difference between speaking in tongues and prophecy. Consider: **A)** The limitations in speaking in tongues, **14:2-11, 13-19; B)** Why Paul saw prophecy of greater benefit than tongues. See **14:2-5, 12**.

Q.3) Show the apparent contradictions in **14:21-25**. How can you resolve this problem? See also **Isaiah 28:11-12**. Consider how an unbeliever may respond if all believers present in an assembly start speaking in tongues and how an unbeliever may respond when prophecy is given. Read carefully **14:23-25**.

Q.4) What should be allowed to happen when brethren meet together according to **14:26-40**? You may wish to discuss how many brethren should assemble together. Consider **A)** Speaking in tongues in public meetings, **14:27-28; B)** The ministry of the prophets, **14:29-30; C)** Prophecy in the public meetings, **14:31-32**.

Q.5) What are the women being told to do in the church assembly in view of what Paul has written in **14:34-35**? See also **11:5 & 2Timothy 2:11-12**.

Q.6) Read carefully again **14:1-40**. Can you see why Paul had to correct the way some Corinthian believers were behaving in the public meetings?

Chapter 15

- Q.1)** What should be proclaimed in the content of the gospel as seen in **15:1-4**?
- Q.2)** How do you know that the past resurrection of Jesus Christ is true in **15:1-8**? See also **Matthew 28:1-20; Mark 16:1-20; Luke 24:1-53; John 20:1-21:25**.
- Q.3)** Show the evidence of Paul's ministry being fruitful in **15:9-11**.
- Q.4)** Show how pointless the gospel would be if there was no resurrection. List the consequences. Read **15:12-19, 29-34** and see also **2Timothy 2:18**.
- Q.5)** What do we know of the absolute certainty of the resurrected Christ and of its consequences in **15:20-28**?
- Q.6)** What is meant by being "baptised for the dead" in **15:29**? You will find various views if you consult several commentaries.
- Q.7)** Show the kind of resurrection body believers will receive in the future and show how different these bodies will be to the natural body we have at the present time. Why does Paul use the analogy of the seed in relation to our present natural body and our spiritual body to come? Read **15:35-50**.
- Q.8)** When we receive our resurrection bodies show the change we will see in **15:51-57**. Read also **1Thessalonians 4:13-18**.
- Q.9)** What should we be doing in our mortal bodies at the present time? Read **15:58, Ephesians 2:10; 1John 3:1-3**.

Chapter 16

- Q.1)** What does this chapter reveal of the church life in Corinth? Read **16:1-20**. You may wish to make a list, for example: Support for poorer brethren, ministry of Christian workers...
- Q.2)** How should we live as believers in view of what has been written in **16:13-14**? Look again at the whole chapter and consider how relevant it is for today's Church.
- Q.3)** What can we learn from Paul's parting words in **16:21-24**?

Miscellaneous Questions on 1Corinthians

- Q.1)** What did Paul reveal of who Jesus Christ is from this letter. Read carefully through the entire letter especially **Chapters 1, 2 & 15**.
- Q.2)** What does this letter teach about the Holy Spirit? It is helpful to read **2:4, 10-12, 14; 3:16; 6:11, 19; 12:3-13; 14:14-23**.
- Q.3)** Make a list of the problems in the Church in Corinth. Do any of these problems happen in the Church today? You need to read carefully through the entire letter.
- Q.4)** Show the evidence of any prophetic verses still to be fulfilled in this letter. See **1:7-9, 18-19; 3:11-15; 4:1-5; 6:3, 9-10; 15:20-58**.
- Q.5)** Consider the problems believers had in Corinth to be able to live a godly life. See **4:6, 18-19; 5:2; 8:1-13; 13:2, 4**.
- Q.6)** Consider carefully the body of Christ and how we should meet together in our assemblies. It is helpful to read through **12:1-14:40**. Do we really meet according to the biblical pattern especially seen in **14:26**? Is it true to say that many Christian assemblies fail to meet according to **14:26-40**? Why do so many assemblies fail to meet as shown by the biblical pattern and do not see the importance of functioning as the body of Christ?

Please note there may be more scriptures in this letter to find for **questions 2, 4, 5 and 6**.

Bibliography

The list of resources available will help in finding out more about Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. The author does not necessarily agree with all the views of the writers.

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