

CLASS NOTES: 1 CORINTHIANS

INTRODUCTION

Authorship

Pauline authorship of First Corinthians is generally acknowledged.¹ Internally, Pauline authorship is affirmed at the beginning (1:1) and the end of the letter (16:21). Furthermore, the author claims to be an apostle (1:1; 4:9; 9:1; 15:9) and an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ (9:1; 15:8). Although the reference is subtle, the author seems to imply that he had founded the church in Corinth (3:10; cf. Acts 18). All of these internal clues are consistent with what is known about Paul. External evidence also supports Pauline authorship. The book is quoted or alluded to by Clement of Rome (c. 95–97), Polycarp of Smyrna (c. A.D. 155), Justin Martyr (c. 150–155), Irenaeus (c. A.D. 200), Clement of Alexandria (c. A.D. 215), Origen (c. 185–254), and Tertullian (c. A.D. 225). The book is also included in the Marcionite (A.D. 140) and Muratorian (A.D. 180) Canons.

Date and Place of Writing

The dating of 1–2 Corinthians is determined by correlating the records of Paul’s travel in Acts with certain internal clues from both 1 and 2 Corinthians.² Our reconstruction of this data suggests that Paul visited Corinth three times and wrote four letters, two of which have been preserved. In this reconstruction, Paul writes 1 Corinthians around five years after his initial visit and founding of the church in Corinth. This means that 1 Corinthians was written around the spring of A.D. 56 from Ephesus. Second Corinthians was written sometime after his “painful visit” (2 Cor 2:1) and a “severe” letter (2 Cor 2:3–4) which has not been preserved, before his final visit to Corinth (see the table below). Most likely this means that 2 Corinthians was written in Macedonia around the fall of A.D. 56.

DATES	DESCRIPTION	TEXT(S)
Spring of 51	Paul arrives in Corinth and stays there one and a half years	Acts 18:11
Fall of 53	Paul sails for Ephesus with Priscilla and Aquila. But Priscilla and Aquila are left in Ephesus while Paul returns to Antioch	Acts 18:18–22
	Aquila and Priscilla meet and teach Apollos in Ephesus. Apollos goes to Corinth to minister	Acts 18:24–19:1
	Paul returns to Ephesus (after passing through the Phrygian-Galatian region) on his third missionary journey, and ministered there three years	Acts 20:31
	Early in his ministry in Ephesus, Paul writes for the first time to the Corinthians—a letter which is now lost	Implied in 1 Cor 5:9

¹ 1 Corinthians is one of the seven epistles that critical scholarship generally regards as indisputably Pauline (the others are Romans, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon).

² Paul’s initial visit to Corinth can be established fairly precisely because Luke mentions Gallio’s proconsul in Corinth (Acts 18:12–18) which can be dated using the Delphi inscription to around July 1 A.D. 51.

Spring of 56	The problematic report from Chloe and Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus prompts Paul to write what came to be called 1 Corinthians.	1 Cor 1:11; 16:17
	Paul visited Corinth as he had indicated he would but he was not able to spend the winter with them. This is probably Paul's "painful visit."	1 Cor 16:6, 2 Cor 2:1
	Paul returned to Ephesus and wrote a "severe letter" which was apparently carried by Titus	2 Cor 2:3-4, 9; 7:5-8, 12
	Paul left Ephesus for Macedonia, stopping at Troas. He intended to meet Titus on his way back from Corinth. But when he could not find Titus he sailed for Macedonia without him, hoping to meet him there.	Acts 20:1; 2 Cor 2:12-13
Fall of 56	Paul meets Titus in Macedonia, who brings an encouraging report from Corinth but notes that some issues remain. Paul writes 2 Corinthians.	2 Cor 7:6-16
Winter of 56/57	Paul revisits Corinth. While in Corinth Paul writes Romans	Acts 20:3; cf. 2 Cor 12:14

Original Recipients

First Corinthians 1:2 identifies the recipients as "the church of God which is at Corinth."³ There is little controversy concerning the recipients. The church at Corinth was apparently composed of both Jews and Greeks (Acts 18:4), but it was probably predominantly Gentile (see Acts 18:6; cf. 13:46).

Historical Setting

The city that Paul visited was rebuilt in 44 B.C. It was the seat of a proconsul and the capital of the senatorial province of Achaia. It was an important commercial and trade center and a well-known port city. It appears to have been a relatively large city with an ethnically diverse population. Although, Corinth's immorality is often noted, it must be kept in mind that most of the references to the city's immorality predate the rebuilt city. On the other hand, port cities were often known for their immorality and Corinth as a typical Greco-Roman city probably had its share of moral shortcomings.

Paul appears to have had a problematic relationship with the church at Corinth. Although Acts is relatively silent about the problems, both 1 and 2 Corinthians hints strongly at the difficulties.

In any case, the immediate occasion for the writing of 1 Corinthians appears to be twofold. First, Paul had received oral reports from "Chloe's people" (1 Cor 1:11). Second, it appears that Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus brought correspondence with questions to which Paul responds (7:1; 16:17).

³ Second Corinthians 1:1 adds "with all the saints who are throughout Achaia." The inclusion of the saints in Achaia is a bit surprising. There are at least three possible explanations. First, Paul may have included this broader group since they may have participated in the famine relief collection for Jerusalem (cf. 2 Cor 8-9). Second, the problems that concerned Paul had spread beyond Corinth. Or third, Paul was concerned that the problems associated with Corinth would spread.

Purpose

Paul appears to have three main purposes in writing 1 Corinthians. First, Paul wants to address pressing problems in the church (factionalism, immorality, lawsuits, etc.).⁴ Second, Paul sought to address specific questions raised by the Corinthians (e.g., “now concerning” 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1; 16:12). Third, Paul wanted to announce his plans for a forthcoming visit (16:5–9).

Literary Features and Structure

At its core, 1 Corinthians is an epistle, beginning with a salutation (1:1–3), followed by the body of the epistle (1:4–16:12), and a conclusion (16:13–24). In the body of the epistle, Paul deals with two basic issues: (1) oral reports that he has received (1:11; 5:1; 11:2[?], 18; 15:12, 35[?]; 16:17) and (2) written inquiries, usually designated by “now concerning” *περὶ δὲ* (7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12). That being said, there are several additional literary matters related to both epistles to discuss.

Concerning 1 Corinthians, critical scholars continue to attempt to dissect the epistle into as many as four separate letters which have since been combined. While it is likely that Paul wrote at least four letters to the Corinthians (see the table above), it is unlikely that 1 Corinthians is a composite letter for the following reasons. (1) There is absolutely no manuscript evidence for anything other than a unified 1 Corinthians. (2) The lack of consensus among proponents of exactly where the seams are and how many letters there are suggests that such seams may be more in the eye of the interpreter than in the actual text. (3) Creative splicing of letters might be readily done in a cut-and-paste word processor, but would be considerably more difficult if working from scrolls and writing by hand. (4) There is the question of why someone would feel the need to combine the letters. The existence of short letters such as Philemon, 1–3 John, suggest that the early church was not adverse to preserving shorter letters. Overall, it seems preferable to view 1 Corinthians, as it has been through most of church history, as a unified composition. A second issue which merits consideration is the role of rhetoric in the epistle. It was fashionable in the twentieth century to view Paul’s epistles through the lens of Greco-Roman rhetoric. However, there is a growing tendency to view the epistles less as rhetorical in form and more as containing certain rhetorical features.

Message:

The message of 1 Corinthians is, “The sanctification of the church is to be characterized by unity, morality, and correct doctrine.” At the heart of the book is sanctification, both individual and corporate. Paul is keenly aware that a sanctified church requires sanctified members. To this end, although Paul addresses a multiplicity of issues in 1 Corinthians, most if not all fall under the categories of sanctification (unity, morality, and correct doctrine).

⁴ It appears that Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus brought correspondence with questions to which Paul responds (7:1; 16:17).

Basic Outline

- I. Paul addresses the Corinthians with a wish-prayer for sanctification (1:1–9).
- II. Paul responds to oral reports concerning problems related to sanctification (1:10–6:20).
- III. Paul responds to questions concerning issues related to sanctification (7:1–16:12).
- IV. Paul concludes with final exhortations and a benediction (16:13–24).

EXPOSITION**I. Paul addresses the Corinthians with a wish-prayer for sanctification (1:1–9).**

- A. Paul expresses personal greetings to the Christians at Corinth (1:1–3).
- B. Paul expresses personal gratitude to God for the Corinthians (1:4–9).

II. Paul responds to oral reports concerning problems related to sanctification (1:10–6:20).

Paul responds to oral reports:	
• 1:11	• 15:12
• 5:1	• 15:35[?]
• 11:2?	• 16:17
• 11:18	

- A. Divisions in the church undermine sanctification (1:10–4:21).

Four Major Elements in 1 Corinthians 1–4⁵

1. Quarrels and rivalry exist. Various teachers (and allegiance to them) apparently served as rallying points for these factions (1:10-12; 3:3-4; 3:21-22; 3:5-9 [indirect statement]; 4:1–2 [indirect statement])
2. This quarreling was in some way being carried on in the name of wisdom (Note the repeated use of the term *sophia σοφία* and related concepts [e.g., wise, foolish])
3. This quarreling seems to have taken the form of boasting in mere men, apparently in the name of wisdom (e.g., 1:29–31; 3:21; 4:6–10, 18–19)

⁵ Modified slightly from Jay Smith's class notes for NT335 Exegesis for 1 Corinthians, Dallas theological Seminary, Fall 2002.

4. Paul's authority and message are being challenged.

1:12, 17; 2:1-3:4, 10 (an apologetic tone seems to be evident, see Fee 158 and note esp. 2:1-5; 6; 15; 3:1-4)

4:1-21, esp. v. 3 (Paul is being judged by them)

4:6, 18-19 (arrogance is directed against Paul)

1. Paul identifies the existence of divisions in the body (1:10-17).

Conclusions Concerning the Rivalries or Factions⁶

- The rivalries do not revolve around theological issues
- None of the persons named appear to support the factions that have developed around themselves
- The quarreling over the leaders may not be just to champion a favorite but to denigrate Paul
- The divisions may be rooted in social/economic issues

2. Paul identifies the causes of divisions in the body (1:18-4:13).

a. Divisions are caused by an incorrect view of the Christian message (1:18-3:4).

(1) The Christian message is not worldly wisdom (1:18-2:5).

(2) The Christian message is heavenly wisdom (2:6-3:4).

b. Divisions are caused by an incorrect view of Christian ministry (3:5-4:5).

Parallel Statements in 3:5-8⁷

3:5	Apollos and Paul are servants.	God assigned them the task.
3:6	Paul planted, Apollos watered.	God was giving the growth.
3:7	The planter and the irrigator are nothing.	But God who gives the growth [is everything].
3:8	The planter and irrigator are equal.	[God] will give them their individual reward for their toil.

⁶ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 50-1.

⁷ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 111. The table is derived by Garland from D. W. Kuck, *Judgment and Community Conflict: Paul's Use of Apocalyptic Judgment Language in 1 Corinthians 3:5-4:5*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 66 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 164.

- c. Divisions are caused by an incorrect view of Christian models (4:6–13).
3. Paul identifies the cure for divisions in the body (4:14–21).
 - a. Paul admonishes the Corinthians to imitate his example (4:14–17).
 - b. Paul warns the Corinthians not to be arrogant lest he come and discipline them (4:18–21).
- B. Disorders in the church undermine sanctification (5:1–6:20).

Similarities Between the Three Topics: Incest (5:1–13), Lawsuits (6:1–11), and Prostitution (6:12–20)⁸

- Each passage contains an eschatological affirmation: a hope that the incestuous man's spirit might be saved on the day of the Lord (5:5); an assertion that the saints will judge the world and angels (6:2); a reminder that the body will be raised (6:14).
- Each passage contains an allusion to the opinions of outsiders and implies that the Corinthian Christians are making bad impressions on their unbelieving neighbors with their bad behavior.
- A sharp command appears in each passage: "kick out" (5:13), "set up" (6:4), "flee" (6:18).
- Passages found in Deuteronomy anchor Paul's response to the misconduct. Incest is specifically condemned in Deut. 22:30; 27:20. The command to purge any evil from the midst of God's people is found in Deut. 13:5 [6]; 17:7; 19:19–20a; 21:21; 24:7. Appointing judges to render just decisions when disputes arise among the people is found in Deut. 16:18–20. A connection to prostitution is declared to be abhorrent to God in Deut. 23:17–18.
- The first two passages contain a similar catalog of vices (5:9–11; 6:9–10), and both have to do with matters that may be classified as legal: expelling a church member, suing a fellow Christian.

1. Paul addresses the failure of the Corinthians to address immorality in the church (5:1–13).
 - a. Paul rebukes the church for failing to discipline an incestuous member (5:1–8).

⁸ With slight modification from Garland, *I Corinthians*, 150.

- b. Paul reminds the church of a previous letter which made the distinction between associating with sinners in the world and sinners in the church (5:9–13).

Behavior which calls for church discipline: ⁹
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overt and persistent sin (1 Cor 5:10–11; cf 2 Tim 3:1–5) • Heresy actively propagated (Rom 16:17; 1 Tim 1:20; 2 John 7–11) • Repeated trouble making — divisiveness (Titus 3:10–11; Rom 16:17–18; cf. 1 Cor 3:17) • The Refusal to work (2 Thess 3:6, 14–15; 1 Tim 5:8) • Unresolved personal offenses (Matt 18:15–17; cf. Phil 4:1–3) • Any sin that might corrupt the entire congregation (1 Cor 5:6–7) |
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Two Principles: ¹⁰

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Paul considers the purity of the congregation to be a serious matter, as it affects the congregation's relationship to God and its witness to the unbelieving world. 2. Infamous sin cannot be swept under the rug. |
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2. Paul addresses the failure of the Corinthians to resolve personal disputes in the church (6:1–11).

- a. Lawsuits among Christians are self-defeating (6:1–8).

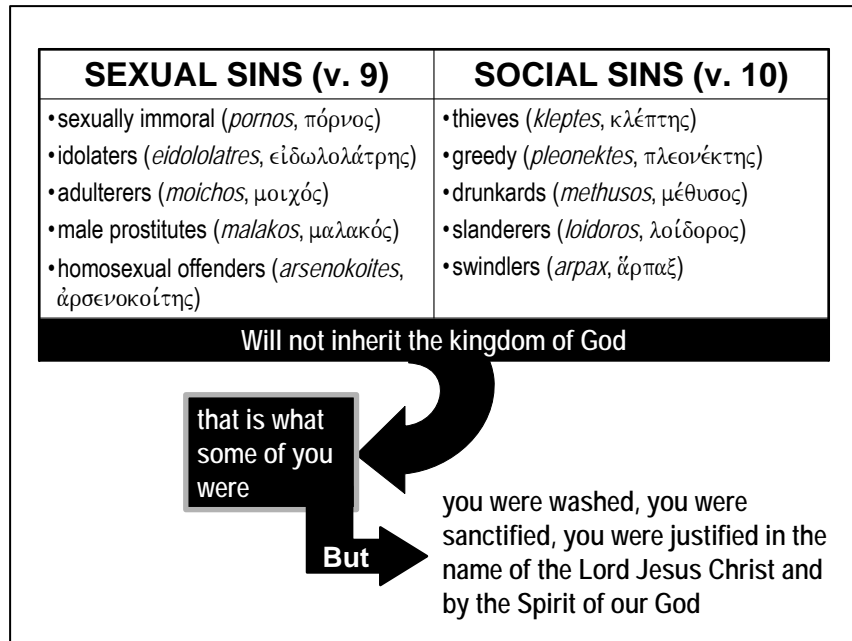
Four Options for Resolving Disputes:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secular court (6:1, 4, 6) • Church arbitration (6:1–2, 5) • Accept being wronged or cheated (6:7) • Cheat or wrong a brother (6:8) |
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- b. Unrighteousness is a characteristic of the lost not a characteristic of the sanctified (6:9–11).

⁹ Smith, NT335Class Notes.

¹⁰ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 180.



- Paul addresses the failure of the Corinthians to exercise sexual purity in the church (6:12–20).

III. Paul responds to questions concerning issues related to sanctification (7:1–16:12).

Overview of 1 Corinthians 7 ¹¹			
Text	Audience	Corinthian Ascetics	Paul's Advice
1–7	Married	Be celibate	Stay married with full conjugal rights
8–9	Widowers and widows	Don't remarry	It is good to remain unmarried
10–11	Married with believing spouse, i.e. Christian marriage	Divorce if not celibate	Remain married
12–16	Married with unbelieving spouse, i.e. mixed marriage	Divorce if not celibate	Remain married
17–24	All the Corinthians	Become Ascetic	Remain as you are
25–38	"Virgins" = never before-married	Marriage is sin (vv. 28, 36)	It is good to remain unmarried
39–40	Married women & widows	Divorce if not celibate & don't remarry	Remain married & it is good to remain as you are

¹¹ Smith, NT335Class Notes.

- A. Paul responds to the question of marriage (7:1–40).
1. Paul discusses conjugal rights and celibacy (7:1–9).
 2. Paul discusses divorce (7:10–24).
 - a. Paul gives instruction involving believing spouses (7:10–11).
 - b. Paul gives instruction involving an unbelieving spouse (7:12–16).
 - c. Paul gives the overriding principle: contentment (7:17–24).
 3. Paul discusses the option of marriage for the unmarried (7:25–40).
- B. Paul responds to the question of food sacrificed to idols (8:1–11:1).
1. Paul introduces the issue of knowledge, love, and food sacrificed to idols (8:1–6).
 2. Paul notes that knowledge alone is not a sufficient means to addressing the problems associated with food sacrificed to idols (8:7–13).
 3. Paul points to his own personal example (9:1–27).
 - a. Paul defends his rights as an apostle (9:1–14).
 - b. Paul defers his rights and explains (9:15–27).
 4. Paul highlights Israel’s failure in the wilderness (10:1–13).
 - a. Israel’s failure resulted in death (10:1–10).
 - b. Israel’s failure is instructive (10:11–13).

Then	Now
Forefathers (Israel)	Us (the Church)
Cloud (v. 2; cf. Exod 13:21)	Baptism (v. 2)
Sea (v. 2; cf. Exod 13:21)	
Spiritual food (manna v. 3, cf. Exod 16:4)	Communion Bread (vv. 16)
Water from the Rock (Exod 17:6; Num 20:7–13)	Communion Cup (vv. 16, 21)
Spiritual Rock (v. 4; cf. Exod 17:6)	Christ (v. 4)
Idolatry (vv. 7–10; cf. Exod 32:1–6)	Worship feasts at pagan temples (vv. 20–21)

5. Paul applies Israel's failure to the Lord's Supper (10:14–22).
 - a. The exhortation: flee from idolatry (10:14).
 - b. The explanation: participation in rituals is participation in reality (10:15–20).
 - c. The conclusion: for Christians idolatry is incompatible and inadvisable (10:21–22).
6. Paul addresses the issue of idol food in non-cultic settings (10:23–11:1).
- C. Paul responds to questions concerning worship (11:2–14:40).
 1. Paul addresses the issue of head coverings in public worship (11:2–16).

Major interpretive issues:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The meaning of head (kephalē): source or authority • The meaning and significance of the covering: veil or hair • The context and significance of the woman praying and prophesying (cf. 1 Cor 14:34–36) • The meaning of uncovered/cut/shaved relate to in vv. 5–6: punishment for adultery, pagan prophetess, prostitution, androgeny, etc. • The meaning of “because of the angels” in v. 10 |
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2. Paul addresses the issue of the Lord's supper (11:17–34).
3. Paul addresses the issue of spiritual gifts, especially tongues (12:1–14:40).
 - a. Paul discusses the parameters of spiritual gifts (12:1–31a).
 - b. Paul discusses the priority of love over the gifts (12:31b–13:13).
 - c. Paul discusses the priority of prophecy over tongues (14:1–40).
- D. Paul responds to questions concerning the resurrection (15:1–58).
 1. Paul establishes the fact of the resurrection (15:1–34).
 - a. Paul establishes the resurrection historically (15:1–11).
 - b. Paul establishes the resurrection theologically (15:12–28).
 - c. Paul establishes the resurrection practically (15:29–34).

If Christ was not raised . . .	If Christ was raised . . .
“Our preaching is in vain” (v. 14)	He is the firstfruits of the resurrection (vv. 20–21)
“Your preaching is in vain” (vv. 14, 17)	“all will be made alive” (v. 22)
“We are even found to be false witnesses of God” (v. 15)	“Then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power” (v. 24)
“You are still in your sins” (v. 17)	“The last enemy that will be abolished is death” (v. 26)
“Those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (v. 18)	“When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all” (v. 28)
“We are of all men most to be pitied” (v. 19)	

2. Paul expounds on the nature of the resurrection (15:35–49).

Our Present Body is	Our resurrection body will be
“sown perishable” (v. 42)	“raised imperishable” (v. 42)
“sown in dishonor” (v. 43)	“raised in glory” (v. 43)
“sown in weakness” (v. 43)	“raised in power” (v. 43)
“sown a physical body” (v. 44)	“raised a spiritual body” (v. 44)
“image of the earthly” (v. 49)	“image of the heavenly” (v. 49)

3. Paul exclaims the certainty of the resurrection (15:50–58).

- E. Paul responds to the issue of the famine relief collection (16:1–12).

1. Paul gives instructions concerning the collection (16:1–4).

2. Paul gives information concerning travel plans (16:5–12).

IV. Paul concludes with final exhortations and a benediction (16:13–24).

- A. Paul gives some final exhortations (16:13–18).

- B. Paul offers final greetings (16:19–24).