

Introducing 1 Corinthians: a lively church in a mess

Background:

Corinth in southern Greece, a Roman colony, commercial centre, religious centre (temple of Aphrodite etc.), Isthmian games, population = 100,000???

Church founded by Paul as described in Acts 18 in approx. AD 50/51 (20 years after Jesus' death & resurrection). 1 Corinthians was written in approx. AD55, in response to reports of problems (1:11).

- A young church in an urbanized pagan world
- Spiritually lively
- Greek culture: wisdom, rhetoric, the spirit not the body
- Rich and poor: rich patrons & benefactors, and poor people

Contents – a few notes:

Chapter 1:1-9 Introduction of letter - note the spiritual church

Chapters 2:10-4:23 Divisions over leadership – ‘celebrity’ attitude, valuing of wisdom and eloquence... contrary to God’s foolish gospel of the cross and his working; leaders are servants

Chapters 5-7 Issues to do with sex: man marrying father’s wife (chapter 5), men going to prostitutes (6:12-20), some advocating celibacy as spiritual (chapter 7) (also 6:1-8 Christians taking each other to law) - issues of spirituality, freedom (‘we are free’), Greek devaluing body; Paul: singleness God’s gift to some; marriage and sex desirable, created and good for others

Chapters 8-10 Food offered to idols and temple worship -can we eat the food in idol temples? Yes: freedom, but respect others’ feelings, sacrificial giving up of my rights for others; avoid idolatry as demonic.

Chapter 11 Unveiled women in worship & neglect of the poor at the Lord’s supper – Paul: men and women equal, but different; you are proclaiming the Lord’s death and so respect the body of Christ.

Chapters 12-14 Spiritual gifts, tongues, and chaotic worship: Paul: all Christians have the Spirit, but different gifts; priority = love and building up and orderly worship.

Chapter 15 Questions about resurrection – Christ was really raised, the firstfruits....

Chapter 16 Conclusion & closing greetings

Some reading

A. C. Thiselton, *1 Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006. (He also has a massive and excellent commentary!)

Other good commentaries include C. Blomberg, *NIV Application* (Zondervan, 1994), G. Fee (Eerdmans, 1987), C. K. Barrett (Black, 1971), & B. Witherington (*Conflict and Community in Corinth* Eerdmans, 1995) & A. F. Johnson (Apollos, 2004)

Other books include J. D. G. Dunn, *1 Corinthians* (Sheffield, 1995) for a general introduction. D. Wenham, *Paul and Jesus the true story* (SPCK, 2002) has chapters on 1 Corinthians.

E. Adams and D. G. Horrell, *Christianity at Corinth: The quest for the Pauline Church* (Louisville: Westminster/Knox, 2004) - a very useful collection of notable essays

Matthew Arnold, *The World of 1 Corinthians* (Paternoster 2007) - an illustrated guide through 1 Corinthians

B. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth* (Eerdmans, 2001) – scholarly ideas

B. Witherington, *A Week in the Life of Corinth* (IVP, 2012) – lively semi-fictional account

M. J. Gorman, *Cruciformity* (Eerdmans, 2001) – excellent scholarly book on Paul's spirituality
