

## STUDY GUIDE FOR LOGOS 2020

### THE FIRST LETTER OF SAINT PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS

#### Author and Date

Two times the Apostle Paul identifies himself as the author of this letter (1:1;16:21). Testimony from the Church Fathers as early as St. Clement of Rome (A.D. 95) supports the claim, and modern scholarship has never seriously contested the tradition. Indeed, 1 Corinthians is full of valuable information about Paul that both corroborates and enhances our knowledge of his ministry from the Book of Acts.

According to 16:8, Paul wrote the epistle while staying in Ephesus in Asia Minor (located in what modern Turkey.) This stay most likely corresponds to the apostle's third missionary journey from A.D. 53 to 58, when he spent more than two years instructing the young Church in that city (Acts 19:1-10). Because Paul was writing in anticipation of coming to Corinth after his in Ephesus (1 Cor 11:34), we can date its composition during the second part of his third mission, probably in the spring of A.D. 56.

#### Destination

The city of Corinth was a flourishing commercial center of the Mediterranean world. It was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia (southern Greece), and its location between two seaports made the city an ideal trade link between Italy in the west and Asia in the east. History tells us that Corinth attracted droves of entrepreneurs and tourists who wished to benefit from its economic prosperity and enjoy its numerous pagan shrines, its gladiatorial contests, and the popular Isthmian Games held there every two years. Like many cosmopolitan centers, however, Corinth had a reputation for shameless immorality and a ruthless spirit of competition. The Book of Acts informs us that Paul himself planted the young Church there about A.D. 51, but he stayed only long enough to get things up and running (Acts 18:1-18). The social make-up of this budding community emerges from the letter itself: some were wealthy (11:22), others poor (1:26), and others slaves (7:21). Ethnically, the Corinthian Church was mixed, having a strong presence of both Gentile (8:7; 12:2) and Jewish believers (7:18-20).

#### Purpose

Nearly five years had elapsed between Paul's founding of the Church in Corinth and the arrival of this letter. During his absence the community of this letter. during his absence the community had fallen prey to a vices that were beginning to fracture its unity and drag members away from the faith. Although Paul planned *to visit Corinth to disentangle these problems in person* (see 11:34 b), he sent the letter we know as 1 Corinthians to hold things together until his arrival. His instructions were tailored to address the information he had received about their struggles.

Paul was first informed that a crisis was brewing in Corinth through delegates of a woman named Chloe (1:11; 11:18). Their disturbing report included news of internal division (1:12-15), a case of incest (5:1-5), sexual immorality (6:12-20), multiplying lawsuits (6:1-8), and outspoken denials of the Resurrection (15:12). Liturgically, the Corinthians were becoming careless in their celebration of the Eucharist (11:17-34), and some were exercising charismatic gifts in a manner more

disruptive than edifying (14:1-40). Paul confronted these problems by censuring the Corinthians' immorality and calling them back to the basics of Christian doctrine.

Paul also gave personal responses to select questions asked by the Corinthians. In a letter unknown to us, the young Church had written to Paul asking for spiritual direction on various matters, such as marriage, celibacy, and food offered to idols (7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1). Much of 1 Corinthians consists of Paul's addressing these issues one by one. In the end, Paul was deeply concerned for this troubled Church. His pastoral guidance is that of a spiritual father aiming to restore peace and unity among children by fortifying their commitment to Jesus Christ (4:14-15).

### **Themes and Characteristics**

First Corinthians reveals more about the struggles and conditions of a young, apostolic Church than any other NT letter. It gives a clear picture of the wide range of pressures that the earliest Christians had to face, pressures both from within their communities and from their surrounding pagan environment. Paul shows himself sensitive to these challenges throughout the letter and offers spiritual directions that is some times bold and confrontational but always full of charity and fatherly wisdom. Because the problems in ancient Corinth are problems that plague the Church in every age, this letter was the most widely cited of Paul's epistles in early Christianity and continues to speak to our situation today.

The leading themes of the letter follow the doctrinal and moral issues that Paul was forced to address, especially those related to immorality, arrogance, liturgical abuse, and erroneous opinions about death and resurrection. These problems *shook the local Church in Corinth down to her foundation and made the community look more at times like a pagan society than a spiritual family*. To reverse this trend, Paul takes aim throughout the letter at two vices that underline the Corinthians' multiple struggles: pride and selfishness.

**(1)** Pride manifested among the Corinthians in the form of intellectual arrogance that paid more respect to human knowledge and eloquence than to the humble message of the gospel (1:18-25; 3:18-21; 8:1-3). Paul takes occasion to reprimand their attitude of superiority by appealing to the warnings in Scripture (1:19, 31; 3:19-20) and reminding them that true "wisdom" is imparted through the gospel of the Cross (1:18; 2:6-10). In the apostle's mind, there is no room among believers for arrogance or boasting, because every good thing they possess is a gift from God (4:6-7).

**(2)** *Selfishness* manifested itself in various ways among the Corinthians. Lawsuits among believers were growing problem (6:1-8); certain believers asserted their freedom in a reckless way (8:1-13); some were guilty of discrimination toward the poor (11:21-22); and some exercised spiritual gifts as a way of attracting attention to themselves (14:1-40). Paul's prescription for each of these ailments is a return to Christian charity (14:1; 16:14,22). Only God's love within us "builds up" (8:1) the Church in a way that glorifies Christ. Chapter 13 is the most beautiful in the letter, portraying loves as patient, caring, and oriented toward others. this is the supreme law of the New Covenant (Rom 13:8-10) and the crown jewel of the Christian virtues (1 Cor 13:13). For Paul, only the divine love that we receive from Christ can deliver us from the chains of self-centered living and carry us into eternity with God (13:8-12).

## OUTLINE OF I CORINTHIANS

- 1. Address and Prologue (1:1-9)**
  - A. Greeting (1:1-3)
  - B. Prayer of Thanksgiving (1:4-9)
- 2. Corrections to Corinthian Problems (1:10-6:20)**
  - A. Need for Unity and maturity (1:10-4:21)
  - B. Scandal of Incest (5:1-13)
  - C. Lawsuits among Christians (6:1-11)
  - D. Sexual Immorality and the Body (6:12-20)
- 3. Answers to Corinthian Questions (7:1-14:40)**
  - A. Marriage and Celibacy (7:1-40)
  - B. Idol Food and Christian Liberty (8:1-13:33)
  - C. Problems with Liturgy and Assembly (11:1-34)
  - D. The Body of Christ and the Gifts of His Members (12:1-14:40)
- 4. Resurrection of the Dead (15:1-58)**
  - A. Christ's Resurrection (15:1-11)
  - B. Resurrection of the Church (15:12-58)
  - C.
- 5. Epilogue (16:1-24)**
  - A. Collection for Jerusalem and Paul's Future Visit (16:1-12)
  - B. Final Exhortations (16:13-24)

## STUDY NOTES

**1:1 called by the will of God:** Paul's evangelical mission was established on God's Initiative, not his own (Acts 9:1-16; Gal 1:12). He asserts his apostolic authority from the outset of the letter because some of the Corinthians either doubted or denied (9:1-2; 2 Cor 10-12). **Sosthenes:** Possibly the ruler of the Corinthian synagogue named in Acts 18:17. If so, he must have embraced the gospel during Paul's initial stay in the city.

**1:2 To the Church of God:** Refers to the local congregation in Corinth that is part of the universal Church Paul's earliest preaching in the city took place in the local synagogue, where both Jews and Greeks accepted his message (Acts 18:4). those sanctified: i.e., those made "holy" and "set apart" to serve God. Christians are sanctified by the merits of Christ's sacrifice (Heb 10:10), which first come to us in Baptism (6:11; Eph 5:26). **call on the name:** An act of prayer and worship (Gen 4:26; Ps 116:17). Calling on Christ's name is closely linked with the sacramental liturgy of the Church, as in Baptism (6:11; Mt 28:19; Acts 2:38)

**1:3 Grace to you and peace:** Paul's customary greeting to local Churches (Rom 1:7; 2 Co 1:2; Gal 1:3).

**1:5 all speech and all knowledge:** Gifts of the Holy Spirit (12:8). Before addressing problems Paul celebrates God's gifts to the Corinthians and expresses confidence that the Lord will continue to bless them until the end (1:8).

**1:6 the testimony to Christ:** Paul bore witness to the gospel by preaching to the Corinthians (2:1-5), writing letters to them (5:9), and modeling virtues for their imitation (11:1).

**1:7 spiritual gift:** Anticipates the lengthy discussion in chaps.12-14 about the appropriate use of charismatic gifts. such manifestations of the Spirit come from God and are meant to build up the Church in Love (12:7-11; 14:3-5).

**1:8 the day of our Lord:** Paul reminds readers of the day of judgment, when every thought, word, and deed will be weighed in the balance by the Christ (Rom 2:5-10; 2 Cor 5:10).

**1:10-4:21** Paul confronts immature believers whose allegiance to various missionaries was dividing the local Church. Factions had already formed around the missionary mentors named in 1:12 (Paul, Apollos, Cephas). Paul rebukes this partisan behavior of rallying behind one minister of the gospel over against others with the reminder that all of these men are servants of the same Jesus Christ, who alone grants salvation (1:13; 3:3-9, 21-23). This background explains why the first four chapters stress the crucial importance of unity among believers and the supreme allegiance we owe to Christ over every minister of the gospel.

**1:11 Chloe's people:** Nothing is known about this woman or her delegates beyond this verse.

**1:12 Apollos:** A Christian leader from Alexandria (northern Egypt) who ministered in Corinth after Paul's initial stay in the city (3:5, 22; Acts 18:24-19:1). **Cephas:** The Aramaic name for Peter that is used throughout this letter (3:22; 9:5; 15:5). This is the only mention of the Apostle Peter's association with the Corinthians in the NT. See word study: Peter at Mt 16. **I belong to Christ:** This slogan suggests that one of the factions distinguished itself from others by its allegiance to Christ rather than to a particular missionary.

**1:14 Crispus:** The ruler of the Corinthian synagogue who converted to Christianity when Paul first arrived in the city (Acts 18:8). **Gaius:** possibly the individual named in Acts 19:29 and /or Rom 16:23, but this is uncertain since "Gaius" was a popular name in the Hellenistic world.

**1:16 baptize . . .the household:** The Baptism of entire families, including domestic servants and children, was a familiar practice in the early Church (Acts 16:15,33). See note on Lk 18:16.

**1:17 to preach the gospel:** Paul is not minimizing the importance of Baptism so much as stressing his primary obligation to evangelize (9:16; Rom 1:14-15). His words are aimed at certain Corinthians who exaggerated the role of the minister of Baptism (1 Cor 1:13-15) And lost sight of the Sacrament's purpose, which is to unite us with Christ (12:13; Gal 3:27). **not with eloquent wisdom:** The power of the gospel to move an audience derives from the message itself, not from the messengers who delivers it (1:18; Rom 1:16). Paul's mission, therefore, is not to please the ear with the eloquent speaking ability so admired by the Corinthians, but to move the heart by speaking of Christ crucified in clear and simple terms.

**1:18 the word of the cross:** The gospel divides the destiny of men, leading those who embrace it to salvation and dragging those who reject it to perdition (Lk 2:34). Paul's Greek depicts this as an unfolding process and implies that the final verdict of God's Judgment is still open, I.E., there is still hope for **those who are perishing** and still dangers ahead for those **being saved**.

**1:19 I will destroy:** A reference to Is 29:14. Isaiah predicts the destruction of every form of human wisdom that asserts itself against the wisdom of God. Originally this was a warning for the leaders of Israel, whose overconfidence in human understanding was manifest when they paid more attention to politicians than to prophets. The same warning is now posted for the Corinthians, who prize the rational wisdom of men over the revealed wisdom of the gospel.

**1:20 Where is . . .?:** Paul taunts the intellectual elite of the ancient world. He is convinced that the Greek philosophers (wise man), the Jewish experts in the Torah (Scribe), and the acclaimed public speakers of the day (debater) are nothing compared to the power and persuasiveness of the gospel.

**1:21: did not know God:** Not ignorance of God's existence per se, but ignorance of his ways, especially of his divine plan to save through a crucified Messiah (2:8; Acts 17:30; Rom 10:3). Faith perceivers what reason alone cannot, namely, the higher wisdom of God (Is 55:9).

**1:22 Jews:** Israel expected outstanding miracles (signs) from the Messiah to authenticate his mission (Mt 16:1; Jn 6:30).

**1:23 we preach Christ crucified:** Roman crucifixion was normally a sign of disgrace and defeat for its victims. The crucifixion of Christ, however, was a deathblow to the devil and the means of our salvation stumbling block to Jews: For Jews, such as those who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls, crucifixion was connected with the curse of God in Deut 21:22-23. Paul deals with this apparent difficulty in Gal 3:13, where he insists that Christ endured the curse of death so that Israel and the Gentiles could be blessed with new life.

**1:30 the source of your life:** Every spiritual blessing comes to us from the Father (Eph 1:3; Jas 1:17;). We must acknowledge this to avoid senseless boasting (1 Cor 1:29) and the delusion of self sufficiency (4:7).

**1:31 Let him who boasts:** A paraphrase of the Greek version of Jer 9:24. Jeremiah challenged the wise, mighty, and rich of Israel to stop boasting about their worldly advantages and to start giving the glory to Yahweh (Jer 9:23). Paul has this passage in mind when he makes the same appeal to the Corinthians. Although few of them were “wise”, “powerful”, and “noble” in the world’s eyes (1 Cor 1:26), they were boasting of their spiritual gifts without giving due credit to the Lord (4:7).

**2:1 When I came to you:** I.e., when Paul first evangelized Corinth (Acts 18:1-17).

**2:3 fear and trembling:** A biblical expression for one’s reaction to the power and presence of Almighty God (Ex 20:18; Ps 2-11; Ezek 12:18; Phil 2:12).

**2:4 in demonstration of the Spirit:** Even the most dynamic proclamations of the gospel remain ineffective unless the Spirit moves the minds and hearts of the listeners to accept it (Phil 1:29). Paul implies that his own modest speaking ability was a weakness that enabled God’s power to work more perfectly through him (2 Cor 12:9). The idea running throughout this passage is that God saves the world through what is foolish and weak so that he alone can be praised for the result (1 Cor 1:21-29).

**2:6 the mature:** Or, “the perfect”. Paul differentiates between Christians who have reached spiritual adulthood and those who are merely “Infants” (3:1). Ironically, the immature Corinthians are the ones who consider themselves the most wise and spiritually advanced.

**2:7 a secret and hidden wisdom:** The divine plan to save the world through crucified Messiah was once concealed from the Gentiles and only dimly reflected in the OT.

**2:8 rulers of this age:** The Jewish and Roman Authorities who collaborated to execute Jesus were culpable for their crimes and yet ignorant of God’s plan to redeem the world through his death yet ignorant of God’s plan to redeem the world through his death (Acts 3:17; 4:27-28; CCC 591,597).

**2:9 What no eyes has seen:** A paraphrase of Is 64:4. Isaiah marvels that no one has ever seen or heard a God like Yahweh, who is always faithful to deliver **those who hope in him**. The final words of this quotation are not from Isaiah but seemingly from Sir 1:10, where, God’s unsearchable wisdom is a gift promised to those who love him. Paul draws Isaiah and Sirach together to stress that what God has long prepared in secret he has now made known to the world through the Spirit .

**2:10 the Spirit searches everything:** The Spirit is uniquely qualified to probe the mind of God and make known his wise plans (Dan 4:9). As interior guide for believers, the Spirit enlightens us about the spiritual gifts and truths that God has given in Christ (1 Cor 2:12-13).

**2:14 unspiritual man:** The unredeemed man who lacks both the spirit and spiritual discernment.

**2:15 spiritual man:** The mature Christian who has both the Spirit and spiritual wisdom (2:6).

**2:16 For who has known:** A reference to Is 40:13. Isaiah’s rhetorical question anticipates a negative answer, i.e., no mortal man has access to the mind of God or is capable of informing him

of truths he does not already know Paul concludes from this that divine wisdom is beyond the reach of human understanding and can be known by men only if it is revealed by God himself (Wis 9:13-18).

**3:1 men of the flesh:** Immature Christians who possess the Spirit but are enslaved to worldly ways of thinking. The “jealousy and strife” (3:3) exhibited in Corinth was proof that many of them were spiritual infants. Real Christian maturity produces the fruits of love and unity (Gal 5:22-23; Col 3:12-15).

**3:5-23** Paul stresses that success in ministry is primarily the work of God. Teachers of the flock must recognize that (1) God alone gives life and growth to the Church and that (2) God will test the work of every laborer on the Day of judgment. Consequently, the faithful must not overestimate the importance of their teachers but see them as “(s)ervants” (3:5) and “fellow workers” (3:9) of the Lord. Paul illustrates this with two analogies, one agricultural (3:5-9) and one architectural (3:10-17).

**3:6 I planed, Apollos watered:** Paul first established the Church at Corinth (Acts 18:1-17), while Apollos came afterward to foster the spiritual growth of the community (Acts 18:24-19:1).

**3:10 skilled master builder:** Or “wise architect”. Paul laid the foundation of the Church in numerous cities by evangelization, leaving it to subsequent leaders to build up the congregations in faith and love (Rom 15:19-20). For him, the only stable **foundation** to build upon is the gospel of Christ

**3:12 Now if any one builds:** Spiritual leaders are like artisans commissioned to build believers into the Temple of God (3:16-17). The quality of their workmanship is portrayed by a list of building materials ranging from the most valuable to the least—the first three (**gold, silver, stones**) are expensive and durable, while the second three (**wood, hay, straw**) are cheap and flammable. The fiery Day of judgment will reveal whether they have labored diligently or carelessly, since all substandard work will be consumed in the flames of divine scrutiny (3:15). Although Paul is speaking directly to ministers of the gospel, his words apply to all Christians inasmuch as all are called to “build up” the Church in love (14:4; Eph 4:11-16; 1 Thess 5:11).

**3:14 reward:** The same Greek term is translated “wages” in 3:8. It refers to spiritual compensation for apostolic work.

**3:15: as through fire:** Some Christian workers, whose efforts are shabby and imperfect, will pass through God’s fiery judgment like a man who barely escapes a burning building with his life. This prelude to salvation will involve painful spiritual consequences, which, through severe, will spare them eternal damnation.

**3:16 you are God’s temple:** The Temple in Jerusalem was still standing when this verse was written (A.D. 56). In Paul’s mind the stone sanctuary of the Old Covenant had been replaced by the living body of Christ in the New. He viewed this mystery in three dimensions: the body of every individual Christian is a temple (3:17); and the body of the universal Church is a temple (Eph 2:19-22).

**3:17 If any one destroys:** The final scenario outlined in Paul’s building metaphor: careful builders will receive a heavenly reward (3:14); careless builders will pass through purging fires on their way to salvation (3:15); and destructive workers will themselves be destroyed (3:17).

**3:19-20** Paul quotes Job 5:13 and Ps 94:11 to caution those who think they are wise.

**4:1 stewards:** House managers in charge of their master’s estate. It refers in this context to spiritual ministers who manage the affairs of God’s household, the Church (Lk 12:42-48; 1 Tim 3:15). **the mysteries of God:** The revealed truths of the New Covenant, which were hidden in ages past but are now manifest through the gospel. To an extent they remain mysteries because the human mind can understand the divine work of God only in a limited way.

**4:4 I am not thereby acquitted:** Or, “I am not justified by this”. Paul’s conscience is clear in the face of criticism, though not necessarily correct. The final verdict pronounced on his ministry must await the judgment, when God lays bare the secrets of the “heart” (4:5; cf. Rom

2:16). Before then, pronouncing a definitive judgment on the work of others - and even ourselves- can be hazardous and quite inaccurate.

**4:6 learn by us:** An appeal to the shepherds of the Church and live according to their example (4:16; 11:1). not to go **beyond what is written:** Paul cautions believers to stay within the limits of personal humility defined by the Scriptures. He is referring specifically to the string of OT warnings about boasting quoted earlier in the letter (1:19, 31; 3:19-20). Paul's purpose here is to halt the damaging effects of arrogance in Corinth, as indicated by the clarification that follows. Interpretation of this verse that suggest Paul is restricting the basis for Christian doctrine and morals to what is explicitly set forth in the books of the Bible (*sola Scriptura*) are misleading and untenable. Nothing in the context points to such a broad concern, and in any case Paul insists elsewhere that even the inspired preaching of the apostles is on a par with the written word of God (1 Thess 2:13; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6).

**4:7 why do you boast:** Men are always looking for some good in their wills that is truly their rather a gift received from God. It is unimaginable how any such thing could be discovered.

**4:8-13** Paul reprimands self-righteous Christians for their egotism and unfair criticisms. although he describes them as wise and prosperous, his rhetorical irony implies the opposite, i.e., they are ignorant and impoverished. Their refusal to embrace the foolishness of Christ exposes their pride and reveals how petty their problems look compared to the humiliation of the apostles.

**4:9 spectacle:** Paul compares the apostles to condemned criminals who are publicly disgraced and executed in a crowded outdoor theater.

**4:15 I became your father:** Paul's relation to the Corinthians is paternal, having brought them new life through the gospel (2 Cor 12:14). His spiritual fatherhood extends to others as well, such as Titus (Tit 1:4), Onesimus (Philem 10), and Timothy (1 Cor 4:17; Phil 2:22; 1 Tim 1:2, 18).

**4:21 With a rod:** A stern pastoral warning for the trouble makers in Corinth. Ideally, Paul hopes to avoid an unpleasant confrontation when arrives (16:5-7).

**5:1-6:20** Paul addresses specific problems in the Corinthian Church. These include a case of maternal incest (5:1-13), a surge in Christian lawsuits (6:1-11), and an indifference toward sexual promiscuity (6:12-20). He warns throughout these two chapters that the holiness of the Corinthian community is jeopardized by the sins and vices sprouting up among them.

**5:1 immorality:** The Greek *porneia* refers to sexual misconduct, here specified as an incestuous relationship between a believer and his stepmother. This kind of behavior was censured by Roman society and condemned by the Mosaic Law (Lev 18:8; Deut 22:30). The early Church followed suit. prohibiting incestuous unchastity in the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:29)..

**5:2 And you are arrogant!:** Paul is outraged that the Corinthians allowed the incestuous man to continue in their community. Their tolerance toward this was a sign of their own spiritual Immaturity. **be removed:** I.e., the offender must be expelled from the local Church and barred from participation in their fellowship and liturgy (5:13).

**5:3 pronounced judgment:** Paul exercises his apostolic authority from a distance by invoking a solemn curse upon the sinner in the name of Christ (16:22).

**5:5 deliver this man to Satan:** A call to action for the Corinthians, who must execute Paul's ritual curse upon the offender by driving him out of the Church and into the province of Satan. The anticipated destruction of the sinner's body is an extreme form of remedial punishment that Paul expects will benefit his spirit (1 Tim 1:20). The hidden assumption is that earthly and physical life is a blessing from God cut short by the curse of biological death (Gen 3:19). Similar chastisements befell other Corinthians who failed to discern Christ's presence in the Eucharist (1 Cor 11:29-32).

**5:6 leaven:** Yeast is a proverbial symbol of evil and corruptive influence (Mt 16:11; Lk 12:1; Gal 5:9). Here it symbolizes the incestuous man, who must be removed from the Church lest his sins have a damaging impact upon the whole batch of believers.

**5:7-8** Paul a spiritual lesson from the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Just as every Jewish family cleansed its home of leaven before feast (Ex 12:14-20), so Paul challenges the Corinthians to rid their Church of sin and even flagrant sinners before their celebration of the liturgy (1 Cor 5:13). He mentions the paschal sacrifice of Christ because the day of preparation for the Passover, when the lambs were slaughtered in the Temple, was also the day of preparation for the festival of Unleavened Bread, when all leaven in Israel was to be discarded. The lesson has eucharistic overtones, inasmuch as Passover was celebrated by eating the Paschal Lamb and Unleavened Bread was celebrated by eating only unleavened bread for seven consecutive days (10:14-22; 11:17-34).

**5:9 my letter:** I.e., an earlier letter of Paul to the Corinthians that has not survived. Apparently the Church misunderstood his written instructions because the Corinthians assumed Paul wanted them to keep distant from all sinners without qualification. In fact, the apostle was suggesting they should isolate themselves, not from unbelievers in general, but from immoral Christians whose behavior was decidedly inconsistent with their beliefs. Tolerating their fellowship would only dishonor Christ and hamper their witness to the world.

**5:11 immorality . . . robber:** These same vices are included in the expanded list of 6:9-10, referring to sins that exclude perpetrators from the kingdom of God.

**5:13 Drive out the wicked:** An expulsion formula from the Greek version of Deut 17:7 and 19:19. Moses made legal provision in Deuteronomy to purge Israel of its most callous and reprehensible sinners. This authorized the nation to enforce the moral standards of Yahweh and so punish serious offenses. Paul extends this prerogative to the Corinthians. Here the incestuous man (1 Cor 5:1) fell under the curse of Deut 27:20.

**6:1-8** Paul is distressed by reports of litigation in Corinth. Instead of solving economic and property disputes like brothers, the Corinthians were hauling each other into the Roman courts. Paul rebukes them for this, judging that pagans should not arbitrate the internal affairs of God's covenant family. History suggests that most lawsuits in the Roman world involved cases of the rich and powerful suing the poor and helpless—a problem that may have characterized the situation in Corinth (11:17-22).

**6:1 the unrighteous:** I.e., pagan judges. For Paul, unbelievers are entirely unfit to judge God's covenant people. He would rather the Church conduct herself like Israel, which regulated its internal disputes by appointing judges from the twelve tribes (Deut 1:9-17; 16:18-20).

**6:3 to judge angels?** Only here in the Bible do we learn that Christians will condemn both unbelievers (6:2) and fallen spirits at the final judgment (2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6). Related to this, however, is the notion that believers will share in the heavenly reign of Christ (2 Tim 2:12).

**6:5 no man among you wise:** A sarcastic rebuke. For all their boasting about wisdom, the Corinthians proved themselves incompetent in resolving everyday personal differences.

**6:7 Why not rather be defrauded?** It is better, Paul reasons, to suffer wrongdoing than to cause scandal for unbelievers by taking each other to court (1 Pet 3:17).

**6:9-10** A catalogue of ten vices radically inconsistent with Christian morality. Paul lists them to remind the Corinthians of their former habits and to dissuade them from slipping back into their old pagan ways. These sins destroy all hope of sharing in God's kingdom (Gal 5:19-21; Rev 21:8;).

**6:9 nor homosexuals:** The RSV condenses two Greek terms into the single English word "homosexuals". The first term could be rendered "male prostitutes". and the second "male homosexuals." The context makes it clear that Paul is thinking, not of persons merely attracted to others of the same sex, but of those who engage in perverse sexual acts with them. Both Testaments agree that homosexual conduct is gravely disordered and poses a serious threat to eternal salvation (Lev 18:22; 20:13; Rom 1:26-27; 1 Tim 1:10).

**6:11 such were some of you:** Once prisoners in sin (6:9-10), the Corinthians have been redeemed and renewed by the washing of Baptism. The point is that God's grace and forgiveness

can rescue even the worst sinners from their deadly habits. **washed . . . sanctified . . . justified:** Three effects of Baptism, through which sinners are cleansed of guilt (Acts 22:16), made holy (Rom 6:22), and adopted as heirs of eternal life (Tit 3:5-7). The added mention of Christ's **name** and the work of the Spirit makes it certain that Paul is alluding to Baptism as the sacramental context for the Corinthians' conversation.

**6:12 All things are lawful for me:** probably a slogan coined by certain Corinthians to justify their promiscuous life-style. Like many Greeks, they attached little importance to the body and held that sexual activity was as morally neutral as eating and drinking. This Theoretical separation between body and spirit led them to believe that physical urges could be indiscriminately satisfied without harm to the spiritual life. Another view is that these words originated with Paul, but that members of the congregation have distorted his meaning to justify their sin. On this view, Paul is clarifying the expression to exclude a permissive interpretation of his teaching. Either way, participation in cultic prostitution was the disturbing result (6:15).

**6:13 The body . . . for the Lord:** Paul hints that as the body of a bride belongs to her husband through the covenant of marriage (7:4), so the body of the believer is consecrated to Christ through Baptism (6:11). Christ's spousal right over the body is thus violated when believers are involved in sexual impurity—a fact that makes promiscuity equivalent to adultery (2 Cor 11:2-3). The general resurrection puts this moral crisis in perspective: because our bodies belong to the Lord and are destined for eternity, they should not be desecrated by evildoing (1 Cor 6:14).

**6:15 members of Christ:** A theology developed at length in 12:12-31. **prostitute:** Prostitution was a regular part of Roman society and often took place in a cultic context within pagan temples

**6:16 The two shall become one:** A reference to Gen 2:24. According to Genesis, sexual union cements a bond between a man and a woman that makes them one flesh. The proper context of this unifying act is the covenant of marriage, where the bond is meant to be permanent, fruitful, and exclusive.

**6:17 one spirit with him:** The point is, not that sexual union (6:16) is a mere reflection of our spiritual union with Christ, but that even our bodies become united with Christ through the Spirit (15:45). This union with Christ's humanity—which is sacramental, not sexual—has its beginning in Baptism (12:13) and is strengthened by the Eucharist (10:16-17).

**6:19 your body is a temple:** Baptism makes every believer a spouse of God the Son and a sanctuary of God the Spirit. If prostitution is a sin of adultery against the former, it is a sin of adultery against the latter, it is a sin of profanation against the latter.

**6:20 bought with a price:** The background of this statement, as in 7:23, is the ownership that a master has over a slave once the purchase has been finalized. It is possible too, given the marital theme that runs through the preceding discussion, that Paul consider the price of Jesus' death a dowry paid in advance of our spousal union with through grace (1 Pet 1:18-19). **glorify God in your body:** There is probably an implied contrast in these words: whereas the Gentiles in Corinth dishonor God in their temples through idolatrous worship and sacred prostitution, believers must glorify God in their bodily temples by offering them to God through chastity (Rom 12:1).

**7:1-40** Paul gives spiritual direction on marriage, celibacy, and widowhood. The chapter brings together instructions derived from Christ (7:10-11) and those formulated by Paul (7:12, 25).

**7:1 Now concerning:** A recurrent expression found throughout the letter (7:25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1). Paul uses it to address specific questions posed to him in a previous (now lost) letter from the Corinthians. **not to touch a woman:** A euphemism meaning, "not to have sexual relations" It may have been a motto of certain Corinthians (ascetics) who frowned upon marriage and the physical pleasure that accompany it (1 Tim 4:1-3). Paul treats the slogan as a half-truth that is ultimately misleading: Celibacy is good, but it does not nullify the goodness of marriage or the propriety of sexual relations within marriage.

**7:5 Do not refuse one another:** The Conjugal rights shared by husband and wife provide a safeguard against infidelity (7:3-4). The withdrawal of one spouse from marital relations could lead the other to seek illicit intimacy outside the marriage covenant. **agreement for a season:** Married couples may abstain temporarily from relations. This creates opportunities for prayer and spiritual enrichment. Paul warns, however, that abstinence should not be unnecessarily protracted, otherwise Satan could manipulate the circumstances for evil

**7:7 as I myself am:** I.e., unmarried (7:8; 9:5). Paul upholds celibacy as the ideal state in life for believers, since its inherent freedom and flexibility are great advantages for serving Christ and his kingdom. He knows that marriage entails numerous commitments that can divide one's heart between a spouse and the Lord (1 Cor 7:32-35). Unlike certain Corinthians, however, Paul portrays the single life as desirable but not mandatory; he thus *permits marriage* (7:28), even though he *prefers celibacy* (7:38).

**7:9 aflame with passion:** Because sexual temptation is a danger for the young and unmarried, marriage is an appropriate station for those unable to restrain their passions. Marriage should nevertheless be pursued as a holy and fruitful partnership, not as an outlet for lust (1 Thess 4:3-5).

**7:10 not I but the Lord:** Paul's teaching on divorce is directly mandated by Christ (Mk 10:2-12; Lk 16:18). Couples are strongly discouraged from seeking divorce because of personal dissatisfaction with marital relations and companionship. Should they choose to separate, their options are twofold: "remain single" or "be reconciled" (1 Cor 7:11). Like Jesus, Paul leaves no legitimate room for remarriage, since the bond of sacramental marriage is lifelong and can be dissolved only by the death of one of the spouses.

**7:12 I say, not the Lord:** Paul offers pastoral direction for situations not addressed by Jesus' teaching, i.e., marriages between baptized Christians and nonbelievers (disparity of cult). Though the difficulties facing these couples are formidable, they are not insurmountable. Indeed, Paul holds out the hope that a Christian spouse can be instrumental in the conversion of an unbelieving partner.

**7:15 Desires to separate:** Paul's ruling on the separation of a believer and a nonbeliever. Canon Law later developed this principle into the Pauline privilege, which means that a marriage between two nonbaptized persons can be dissolved when one of the spouses is subsequently baptized. The privilege requires that the unbaptized spouse either desires to separate or refuses to cohabit peaceably without insult to the faith of the baptized partner. Also, the baptized spouse must not have given other party just cause to desire separation. In virtue of the Pauline privilege a subsequent marriage dissolves the first marriage "in favor of the faith" of the baptized person.

**7:17-24** Paul encourages Christians to be content with their state in life and set aside anxieties over unchangeable circumstances. To illustrate this for the married (7:1-16) and unmarried alike (7:25-35). he draws a lesson from different social situations: the circumcised and uncircumcised should not seek to change their condition (7:18), nor should slaves or freemen think their position makes one more or less important to Christ (7:21-22). The state in which God calls them is the state in which they should serve him.

**7:18** removes the marks of circumcision: A procedure associated with apostasy (1 Mac 1:15). For Paul, this surgical option would be pointless, since circumcision is not a sign of Christian faith (1 Cor 7:19).

**7:19 neither circumcision . . . nor uncircumcision:** The sign of circumcision no longer serves as an identity marker for God's people in the New Covenant as it did under the Old (Gal 5:6; 6:15). Along with the entire body of ritual and sacrificial legislation established through Moses, the rite of circumcision came to fulfillment in the messianic age, when God began to circumcise the hearts of the faithful through Baptism (Deut 30:6; Col 2:11-12).

**7:21 a slave:** Slavery was widespread and accepted in the Roman world. In many instances, slaves suffered maltreatment and hardship; in others, slaves were educated and charged with important administrative tasks. Paul encourages slaves to improve their situation whenever possible, implying that slavery as such is an offense against the dignity of the human person

**7:25 Now concerning the unmarried:** Paul addresses other questions posed to him by the Corinthians. See note on 1 Cor 7:1. As in 7:12, he offers his own advice on the topic of marriage and is not presenting them with specific instructions from the teaching of Christ.

**7:26 impending distress:** Or, “the present necessity”. It is uncertain whether Paul has something general or specific in mind. (1) If general, Paul recommends celibacy because of the perennial troubles that face married couples. The ordinary pressures of daily life can make an undistracted commitment to Christ a constant struggle. (2) If specific, Paul endorses the single life in light of the hostile and pagan environment of Corinth. He knows that persecutions will multiply hardships for married couples who are concerned for the welfare of each other and their children.

**7:28 You do not sin:** The clarification made here and at 7:36 is aimed at certain Corinthians who either discouraged or denounced marriage. Paul does not want his preference for celibacy to be misunderstood as a rejection of lawful matrimony.

**7:31 this world is passing away:** Both marriage and its daily concerns will expire when the present age comes to an end (Lk 20:34-36). This puts marital struggles and worldly affairs in perspective, since only one’s relationship with the Lord endures forever.

**7:36-38** Paul counsels men engaged to be married and presents them with two options: a man does “well” to marry his fiancée, but he does “better” if he remains unmarried (7:38). The decision depends on whether he is disciplined enough to control his passions.

**7:39 as long as he lives:** The marriage bond endures as long as both spouses are living. When one of them dies, the union is dissolved (Rom 7:2-3) and the surviving partner is then allowed to remarry (1 Tim 5:14).

**8:1-11:1** Paul addresses the question of whether Christians are permitted to eat idol food. This was a significant moral challenge for many early believers living in the Roman world, since various foods offered to idols were afterward eaten in pagan temples (8:10) or sold in the marketplace and eaten at home (10:25-29). Paul insists that the Corinthians must never eat idol food if the danger of idolatry or scandal is in any way present (10:14, 27-29).

**8:1 all of us possess knowledge:** A Corinthian motto. Paul qualifies it by stressing that Christian knowledge is not merely factual or intellectual; it is grounded, rather, on a relational bond of love between the Lord and his people (8:3; Gal 4:9).

**8:4 an idol has no real existence:** Another Corinthian motto. It is true in a comparative sense that idols are nothing compared to Yahweh (Is 44:6-11), but it is false in an ontological sense, because Paul insists that demonic forces masquerade behind what appear to be lifeless idol images (1 Cor 10:14-22).

**8:6 one God . . . one Lord:** Paul distinguishes the Christian faith from paganism, which venerated many gods, and from Judaism, which declined to accept the messianic Lordship of Jesus.

**8:7-13** The idol food controversy involves two groups of people: the “weak”, whose conscience is fragile because of their recent conversion from idolatry (8:7), and “the strong”, whose conscience is better informed about idols but whose conduct endangers the weak (8:4,11). In terms of knowledge, the weak appear to think that idols are associated with real divinities, whereas the strong possess the mature knowledge that there is only one God and (8:6). Paul urges the strong to temper their knowledge and freedom (to eat idol food) with love, which does not assert itself in spite of others but looks out for the good of others (13:5). The strong are warned that eating idol food can destroy a weaker brother by drawing him back into sins of idolatry (8:12-13).

**8:8 no worse off . . . no better off:** Paul is ambivalent toward idol food to the extent that nothing about the food itself is inherently dangerous (10:25). He cautions, however, that although eating idol food is *harmless* in principle, it can be *harmful* in practice, because it can lead both the weak (Chap. 8) and the strong (chap. 10) into the grip of idolatry (10:14).

**8:10 might he not be encouraged:** Literally, “might he not be built up” Presumably some in Corinth ate in public temples because they hoped to build up weaker Christians by demonstrating that idol food was harmless. Paul rebukes them with sarcasm: eating idol food will not build up the weak to spiritual maturity; it will build them up to violate their conscience and fall into sin (8:13). Only love and consideration for the weak will truly build them up in Christ.

**8:13 I will never eat meat:** The exercise of Christian love is more important than the exercise of Christian liberty. To assert our freedoms in a way that puts others in danger is to against charity (10:24; Rom 14:15).