

Introduction to 1 Corinthians

1. Author

- a. Paul, the apostle (1:1, 1:13-14, 4:3-4, 4:14-17, 9:1-27, 11:1, 15:9-10, 16:21).
- b. A quick count of the KJV produced 197 occurrences of the pronoun *I* referring to the author, 30 of *me*, 37 of *my/mine*, and 5 of *myself* (some emphatic with *I*). The letter is an intensely personal production of its author about the relationship he has with his readers, making a falsified identity simply impossible. C. K. Barrett observes: "To manufacture a document which in every other line reflects the concerns of the fifties of the first century, and the personal characteristics of Paul, is a task that would have proved far beyond the powers of any Christian at the end of the century."¹
- c. External evidence² of Pauline authorship includes. . .
 - i. representatives from the post-apostolic period (A.D. 90-160): Clement of Rome (*Epistle to the Corinthians*) and Polycarp of Smyrna (*Epistle to the Philippians*);
 - ii. and the Greek apologist (A.D. 130-180) Athenagoras (*The Resurrection of the Dead*).
- d. 500 who had witnessed the resurrected Christ were still alive during the time of the epistle's authorship (15:6).

2. Corinth

- a. Location – southern end of the isthmus that connects the Grecian Peloponnesus with the rest of Greece, or what was known in NT times as the Roman province of Achaia.
- b. Political importance - Capital of the province of Achaia and home of the Roman proconsul for that province (Acts 18:12-17).
- c. Economy – Its dual-port location made it a critical control point for trade between Italy and Asia. Its residents were typically well off. Corinth was well-known for its production of pottery, brass (including mirrors), and columns and capitals.
- d. Population – Corinth was a city of between 600,000 and 700,000 people, 2/3rds of whom were slaves.
- e. Culture – Corinth was home to the Isthmian games bi-annually. Rampant prostitution. Calling someone a Corinthian meant that he was a sexually immoral person. The act of prostitution became known as the verb – to corinthianize. Paul wrote Romans 1 from Corinth aided by his personal experience with the culture of this city (Acts 20:3).
- f. Religion – Corinth was home of the goddess Aphrodite (later the Roman Venus), goddess of love. A thousand female prostitutes serviced worshippers at her temple. Corinth had its own Pantheon, as well as many temples to other gods, both foreign and domestic.

3. Paul and the Church at Corinth

- a. Paul, Silas, and Timothy plant the church at Corinth on the 2nd missionary journey (Acts 17:14-15; 18:1-11; 2 Cor. 1:19). The work takes a year and six months (Acts 18:11).
- b. After Corinth, Paul makes a brief stop in Ephesus before returning to Antioch, his sending church, thus completing his second missionary journey (Acts 18:18-22).
- c. During the 3rd missionary journey, Paul spends two years in Ephesus planting a church in that city of Asia (Acts 19:10), where the Holy Spirit had not allowed his ministry on the 2nd missionary journey (Acts 16:6-10).

¹ *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (1968, reprint; Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 11.

² Henry Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943), 201. Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer note that the Clement of Rome quotation (circa A.D. 95) is "the earliest example in literature of a New Testament writer being quoted by name." *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians* 2nd ed. (1914; reprint, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), xvii.

- d. While Paul was in Ephesus, Apollos ministered for a time in Corinth (Acts 19:1), but then later on elsewhere (1 Cor. 16:12). We have no record of a Petrine ministry there, although Peter is granted his own sectarian party by the church's divisive spirit (1 Cor. 1:12).
- e. Paul evidently wrote a letter to the church at Corinth that predated First Corinthians (1 Cor. 5:9). This he may have done during his ministry in Ephesus, and it may be that God simply never intended this uninspired letter to be a part of the canon of the New Testament. Note, however, that this "first letter" may well be a reference to First or Second Thessalonians, which were Paul's first scriptural writings. Although directed to the Thessalonian church, these inspired epistles were written from Corinth, they speak on the matter of the immoral brother, and Paul believed that they were necessary for all the brethren (1 Thess. 5:27). For these reasons, it is conceivable that the "first letter" directing disassociation from immoral brothers referred to in 1 Cor. 5:9 was in fact a copy of First and Second Thessalonians made for the church of Corinth (see 2 Thess. 3:6-15 for this instruction about immoral brothers).
- f. While ministering in Ephesus, Paul may have made a journey into Macedonia by way of Corinth (2 Cor. 1:15-16a). This was at least his intension, after which he planned to return to Corinth on his way back to Ephesus. This trip is not specifically mentioned in the book of Acts, but if it happened it would have occurred during the two years of Ephesian ministry (Acts 19:10). Evidently, the first leg of the trip did happen, but Paul was so disturbed by what he had seen at Corinth, he returned to Ephesus without doing so by way of Corinth (2 Cor. 1:23-2:1). This was Paul's second visit to Corinth.
- g. The Corinthians wrote Paul a letter asking about a series of topics (1 Cor. 7:1, 8:1, 12:1, 16:1, 16:12), which prompts him to write First Corinthians from Ephesus. He did so with many tears and much affliction of heart (2 Cor. 2:4). Prior to answering their questions, Paul deals with the negative report he had heard from those delivering that letter to him about the continuing spiritual carnality of the church (1 Cor. 1:11, 5:1, 2 Cor. 2:3-4).
- h. Paul sends Timothy into Macedonia from Ephesus with instructions to continue on to Corinth as the Lord wills (Acts 19:21-22; 1 Cor. 4:17, 16:10-11). Timothy may have never made it to Corinth under these instructions. Nothing is said of his ministry there in Second Corinthians, although much is made of Titus's work. The reference to Timothy in 2 Cor. 1:19 likely echoes back to the original church planting efforts of Acts 18.
- i. In First Corinthians Paul mentions his intention to come to Corinth by way of Macedonia for what would be his 3rd visit to the city (first – Acts 18; second – the first leg of 2 Cor. 1:15-16), specifically to take an offering up for the saints of Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:5-7). This would have been plan B for Paul, because the second leg of his original plan had been cut short by the negative experiences of the first visit back (2 Cor. 1:15-16).
- j. From Ephesus Paul sends Titus ahead of him to help the church anticipate his coming (2 Cor. 12:17-18).
- k. As Paul journeyed first to Troas and then through Macedonia, with the ultimate intention of making his 3rd visit to Corinth (2 Cor. 12:14, 13:1), He did so hoping that Titus would come to him with helpful news of the Corinthian church (2 Cor. 2:13). This report Paul received while in Macedonia (2 Cor. 7:5-10), and it prompted Paul to write Second Corinthians from Macedonia on his way to his third visit. He sent Titus ahead with the letter (2 Cor. 8:6).
- l. Paul made this trip back to Corinth staying for three months (Acts 20:1-3). He wrote the book of Romans during those three months (Rom. 15:25-26).
- m. Paul leaves for Jerusalem from Philippi shortly after being chased out of Corinth by a plot of the Jews there (Acts 20:3).

4. Place and Date

- a. Church founded by Paul in the early 50's A.D. (Acts 18:1-18; the reference to Gallio has been confirmed and dated by archeological discoveries of ancient inscriptions).
 - b. Written from Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:8-9).
 - c. Written during the spring of the last year (of three; Acts 20:31) of Paul's ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:10; 20:1, 6).
5. Key contributions to New Testament theology.
- a. Key passage on God's choice of the foolish things of the world (ch. 1).
 - b. Key passage on the sinner's need for a prior work of God's Spirit in salvation (ch. 2).
 - c. Key passage on the nature of God's work in the church age (ch. 3).
 - d. Key passage on the limits of human judgment (ch. 4).
 - e. Key passage on church discipline (ch. 5).
 - f. Key passage on the role of the state in church (ch. 6).
 - g. Key passage on singleness (ch. 7).
 - h. Key passage on care for weaker brothers (chs. 8-10).
 - i. Key passage on role of women in worship (ch. 11).
 - j. Key passage on the Lord's Table (ch. 11).
 - k. Key passage on revelatory gifts (chs. 12-14).
 - l. Key passage on love (ch. 13).
 - m. Key passage on the resurrection of believers (ch. 15).
6. Outline
- a. Introduction – the Corinthian church's exalted position (1:1-9).
 - b. Exhortations – the Corinthian church's carnal problems (1:10-6:20).
 - i. The problem of division (1:10-17).
 - ii. The problem of intellectual pride (1:18-2:16).
 - iii. The problem of defiling God's temple, the local church (3:1-4:21).
 - iv. The problem of tolerated immorality (5:1-13).
 - v. The problem of lawsuits (6:1-20).
 - c. Answers – the Corinthian church's specific questions (7:1-16:12).
 - i. The question of singleness and marriage (7:1-40).
 - ii. The question of meats sacrificed to idols (8:1-10:33).
 - iii. The question of worship traditions—role of women and Lord's Table (11:1-34).
 - iv. The question of revelatory gifts (12:1-14:40).
 - v. The question of the resurrection of believers (15:1-58).
 - vi. The question of the Jerusalem offering (16:1-11).
 - vii. The question about the coming of Apollos (16:12).
 - d. Conclusion – the Corinthian church's need for love (16:13-24).