



A PASSAGE THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT
PART SIX

First Corinthians

by Jeff S. Smith

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First Corinthians

Authorship: Paul, A.D. 57

The book of First Corinthians is a letter written by the apostle Paul (1:1, 16:21) and addressed to the church in Corinth. It was likely written around the year A.D. 55, during Paul's third missionary journey. Since he was planning his departure according to chapter 16, it was probably during the last of his three years in Ephesus that he wrote this impressive letter. Tertius was his amanuensis, or secretary (16:22).

Because of Venus's supposed presence, the city was given to sexual immorality and her temple boasted a hundred priestesses dedicated to harlotry. Even the most immoral cities and people of the world looked down on Corinth for her vice. Corinth had been founded as a Roman colony during the years before Christ's birth, being strategically located between the Aegean and Adriatic seas, making it an ideal hub for the trade routes between east and west. This resulting prosperity, however, led to excessive lifestyles of luxury and immoral experimentation. "To live like a Corinthian" came to be an axiom for the immoral lifestyle.

The establishment of a church in this most inhospitable moral climate is described by the historian Luke in Acts chapter 18. Paul arrived there from Athens and found Aquila and his wife Priscilla, and he began persuading both Jews and Greeks to accept Christ, initially by preaching in the synagogues where Jews assembled on the Sabbath for worship. Silas and Timothy joined him from Macedonia and notable converts included Justus who lived next to the synagogue and Crispus who ruled it. Paul remained there for 18 months in spite of terrific opposition from the local Jews.



First Corinthians is apparently a response by Paul to some written questions that had been forwarded to him, as well as some information he had received from other sources concerning the church's difficulties. Serious doctrinal, moral and ethical problems had arisen, causing the infant congregation to splinter.

First Corinthians has perhaps more distinct themes than any letter in the

New Testament. It is Paul's observations and responses to the numerous troubles the church there was experiencing.

Beginning with the disturbing practice of idolizing their preachers, Paul attempts to remind the saints that they are to seek unity of doctrine and brotherhood. When he thanks God that he did not personally baptize more of them, it is not within some context diminishing the importance of immersion, but rather that they could not use that to perpetuate their idolization of him, Apollos, Peter and perhaps others. Their sectarian efforts hint at what Protestantism has eventually done to the body of Christ.

The contrast between wisdom and folly abounds early in the book as Paul describes the power that comes through God and his word and the ways in which men attempt to follow their own version of wisdom, which is utterly weak by comparison.

Seven questions that begin "Do you not know?" pepper chapters five and six. These form seven evident principles that believers forget to their own destruction because they should be fairly obvious.

Persecution of the early church created what Paul called a "present distress" and led him, along with other reasons, to caution against the challenges of marriage. Divorce was already a booming business and Paul issues a series of commandments that the modern world often finds difficult to uphold. Marriage is still one man for woman for life, and only adultery is an exception to that.

As in Rome, the interaction of formerly pagan Gentile Christians and their Hebrew brethren also provides impetus for disorder. Paul's instructions mirror those in Romans—the strong and weak should respect one another because the kingdom is not about eating and drinking and idols are nothing.

The matter of spiritual gifts and worship within the church was designed to foster unity, but without love as a motivation, even such blessings can be warped into curses. Women are especially singled out for their proper behavior in worship assemblies. Supernatural gifts took many forms, but without love, they were not being used to God's ultimate glory.

The importance of the resurrection to our faith is underscored as the book concludes. Although moderns may have difficulty accepting such a miracle, without it, all hope is lost. Paul describes the resurrection of Christ and uses it to foretell the resurrection of all believers when he returns, a subject that is treated in even more detail in First Thessalonians and Second Peter.

Paul's final chapter introduces a theme common to Second Corinthians—the matter of Christian giving into a collection made by the church, at first for benevolent needs but also applicable to the costs associated with assembling, evangelism and edification.

Lesson 1: Factions

First Corinthians 1:1-31

1. From whom does Paul credit his apostleship? Compare First Corinthians 9:1 and Second Corinthians 12:12.

2. What do you think is meant by “all utterance and all knowledge” in verses 4-7?

3. Verse 8 admonishes them to found “unreprovable” (blameless) in that day. Paul discussed this goal in other letters as well, expounding upon how a Christian might survive in judgment. Consider Colossians 1:21-23 and discuss his strategy.

4. How can one have fellowship with Jesus?

5. In this paragraph, Paul goes to great lengths to point out the union between Christ and Christians that God has brought about. What problem in the Corinthian church stands in stark contrast to this close union?

6. What are his instructions to achieve unity?

7. Do you think this paragraph shows the existence of denominations in Corinth like we know today? What is Paul's opinion of creating sects to follow a man?

8. There are really three classes of people in this paragraph who view the cross differently. Discuss each:

- Christians:
- Jews:
- Greeks:

9. Paul sought to show them that God had chosen the weak, the common and the base in the world to destroy the so-called wise and powerful and noble of the world. Verse 29 is key to this discourse. Why did Paul pursue this plan?

Lesson 2: Wisdom

First Corinthians 2:1-16

1. Describe Paul and his preaching from 2:1-5.
2. What do you think he meant by, preaching nothing to them, save Christ and Him crucified?
3. How do people sometimes gain faith that is really just in men? What happens to their faith in time (First Corinthians 1:10)?
4. What assertion does Paul make about the inevitability of the crucifixion of Christ?
5. Some confine the words of verse 9 to heaven, but the writer's intent from the context is different. When do men begin to receive the things God prepared for him?

6. What advantage does the Spirit we have received have over that of the world?

7. Paul makes the claim that the wisdom of the gospel which he teaches did not come from men, but that he was inspired whom?

8. What kind of words should we use when discussing subjects of the faith?

9. Why do worldly people reject the gospel and its morality?

10. Whose mind do we have to mine?

Lesson 3: More Factions

First Corinthians 3:1-4:21

1. Had Paul's instruction to this point consisted of advanced principles of the gospel or a grounding in the first principles? Why do you think this offered his opponents to claim that he was shallow and not at all acquainted with the mind of Christ?

2. Paul showed them why he taught them the way he did through their own behavior. What were they doing that proved their spiritual immaturity?

3. How do religious people do this today?

4. Explain from your knowledge how Paul planted, Apollos watered and God gave the increase.

- Paul:
- Apollos:
- God:

5. What is the foundation of faith and the church?

6. What will declare each one's work?

7. If a preacher leads a man to God and that man eventually turns away from God, will the preacher then be damned?

8. What is the temple of God today?

9. Instead of pitting the teaching of Paul against that of Peter and of Apollos, how should the Corinthians have accepted all three?

10. Is a minister to be the leader of the church or merely a steward of God's?

11. Paul seems to now exalt the Corinthians and their wisdom while reducing his own. Why do you think he says what he says here?

12. Does Paul speak from love? What is Timothy's purpose in coming? Is it because Paul is afraid to come?

Lesson 4: Sin

First Corinthians 5:1-6:20

1. What sin is going on in the Corinthian church? How did they feel about it? What does Paul tell them to do?
2. Is this process of corrective discipline still applicable today?
3. What is meant by the sinner's leaven?
4. If a brother or sister is named a fornicator, covetous, etc., what is to be our attitude and relationship to him?
5. Paul's mind continues a theme from the end of chapter 5 on the distinction between Christians and the world. What problem does he now address? What is his command?

6. If a Christian commits the sins mentioned in verses 9 and 10, may he go to heaven without repentance anyway? Do churches have authority from God to accept homosexuals into their fellowship on the basis that God will have to judge that and it is not our responsibility or right to judge?

7. What does Paul mean in verse 12 by, “All things are lawful for me”?

8. According to verses 15-16, what happens to the body of a Christian when he is joined to a harlot?

9. Refer to Romans 6:15-23. According to verse 17, how were they freed from their slavery to Satan (sin)? According to verse 23, what will be the wages for a Christian who continues as a slave to sin?

10. At what price were Christians bought back?

Lesson 5: Marriage

First Corinthians 7:1-40

1. Does Paul condemn marriage? Compare to First Timothy 4:3 and Hebrews 13:4.

2. Under what circumstances and conditions may a husband or wife suspend conjugal duties? Compare other translations.

3. Some use this passage (especially verses 8-9) to argue that Paul does not condemn marriage for anyone. But to whom is he speaking here, according to v. 8?

4. If a husband and a wife separate for some reason, what is to be the conduct of each?

5. If a believer is married to an unbeliever, all aspects of their marriage being authorized by other, relevant Scripture, is the believer to depart on this ground? What is to be the goal of the believer in this marriage? If the unbeliever departs for a reason other than adultery, is the believer freed from Scriptural commands to remain unmarried (Matt. 19:9)?

6. Things about which the word of God is indifferent are called “nothing” in verse 19. Paul says what matters is “keeping the commandments of God.” Do you believe that this would preclude us from accepting things contrary to the word of God elsewhere regarding divorce and remarriage?

7. Paul addresses two groups of people in these verses. Verse 25 makes “Virgins” the obvious first one. The other takes more work to discern in some translations of the original Greek. Verse 27 addresses those who are “loosed from a wife.” The original Greek meaning of this phrase was the male counterpart of a virgin—a man who had not ever been married. Paul allows marriage for these two types of people in verse 28. Does this apply to one who is divorced in any way?

8. Does Paul decree that unmarried people are holier (consecrated to God to a greater degree) than married people? Or does he say that they are less encumbered by social ties?

9. Paul is finished speaking to virgins now and turns to widows. May they remarry?

Lesson 6: Meat Sacrificed to Idols

First Corinthians 8:1-13

1. Is there anything inherently wrong with a Christian eating meat that had been sacrificed to an idol? What could make it wrong at times?

2. Should our own desires take priority over the soul of a brother in our hearts?

3. How does the knowledge that idols are nothing puff up in this context?

4. How were some Christians defiling their consciences?

5. What was the word from God concerning eating meat (verse 8)?

6. How could the liberty to eat meat become a stumbling block to the weak?

7. To review, is it inherently sinful to eat meat? Then, why would the weak brother who went ahead and ate meat be condemned (see Romans 14:23)?

8. Was the strong brother “off the hook” (Matt. 18:6-7)?

9. What should be our attitude toward any liberty which may cause another to stumble (verse 13)?

Lesson 7: Self-Discipline

First Corinthians 9:1-27

1. What rights did Paul claim, as common to Peter and other prominent disciples?
2. What illustrations did he use in this regard?
3. What did the law say?
4. What right is he claiming in this passage?
5. What illustration from the law does he make in verse 13?
6. The Corinthians were being troubled by those who wished to cast doubt upon Paul's apostleship. One of their ploys was to accuse him of fraud by the fact that he accepted no pay for his work among them. Paul explains that he refused pay, "lest we hinder the gospel of Christ." How might that have had this effect?

7. Why did Paul refuse to boast of preaching the gospel?

8. What was his reward?

9. To what extent was Paul willing to go in proclaiming the gospel in service to Christ?

10. In what way should a Christian conduct his life? Did Paul feel as though he was already standing at the finish line?

11. How does Paul compare himself to a boxer?

12. Is it possible to fall away from Christ and be lost again?

Lesson 8: Take Heed

First Corinthians 10:1-11:1

1. Paul continues the theme of “running in a way that you may win” in chapter 10. List the things that all the ancient Israelite pilgrims did together.

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

2. What did they do to displease God?

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

3. Why was the record of this process made?

4. What is the application of verse 12?

5. Identify the two means by which God aids us against temptation, according to verse 13.

- a.
- b.

6. What are some ways that we make trial of the Lord (or test Him)?

7. Is idolatry something to be flirted with?

8. How do people have fellowship with demons today?

9. What are Paul's admonitions regarding eating idol's meat or any other question of scruples that do not violate Scripture?

10. Can we scripturally imitate the methods of an apostle?

Lesson 9: Communion

First Corinthians 11:2-34

1. What kind of traditions are binding upon Christians?
2. Is it sinful for a man to pray with a hat on his head? Why or why not?
3. Is it sinful for a woman to pray without having her head covered?
4. Did Jesus have long hair, as most drawings today depict him? How do you know?
5. What is given to the woman as a natural covering for her head?
6. Was the Corinthian assembly benefiting the church? Why or why not?

7. According to verse 21, what is it that Paul disapproves of? What does Paul tell them to do to fix the problem?

8. What was the original purpose of the communion?

9. Is it possible to eat the Lord's Supper unworthily? If so, what must we do to avoid this?

10. What is Paul's recommendation concerning the eating of common or social meals?

Lesson 10: Spiritual Gifts

First Corinthians 12:1-13:13

1. Does this unity in diversity sanction denominationalism? If not, what does it sanction?

2. In what three areas are their diversities?

- a.
- b.
- c.

3. Is there scripturally authorized diversity in doctrines concerning things like baptism (sprinkling vs. immersion or remarriage (all are free vs. only those innocent parties in union severed by adultery)?

4. List the types of spiritual gifts listed in verses 8-10.

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.
- f.
- g.
- h.
- i.

5. Was the reception of such gifts cause for pride? Why or why not?

6. What racial division is sanctioned in the church of Christ?

7. How does this metaphor apply to the modern church?

8. What do we do concerning those members who appear weaker?

9. What is the “more excellent way”?

10. How does God view our greatest acts if they are not done from love?

11. What three things would cease? When?

Lesson II: Assembling

First Corinthians 14:1-40

1. Which gift does Paul consider the better—prophecy or tongues? Why?
2. What ability can we still desire today (verse 12)?
3. Were first century tongues speakers talking in gibberish or actual human languages?
4. How might we apply verse 15 to our worship?
5. What will outsiders think if our worship is uncivilized and confused?
6. What is special about the worship assembly mentioned in this passage, that cannot be replicated today?

7. Does Paul feel that those speaking in tongues and prophesying in Corinth could control their gift?

8. Silence is enjoined upon three classes in this passage. Identify them.

- verses 27-28:
- verses 29-30:
- verses 34-35:

9. What things today might threaten the decency and order of our worship assemblies?

Lesson 12: Resurrection of Dead

First Corinthians 15:1-58

1. Paul sets forth a number of important truths in this passage. He states without hesitation that Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that He rose again the third day...and He was seen by Cephas and many others, including Paul. Does Paul hurt his attempts to convince that He is truly an apostle of Jesus Christ? Be prepared to support your answer.

2. The Corinthians had been led to believe that Christ was not resurrected. If this is true, then what must also follow?

3. What will be the last enemy destroyed? Compare to Hebrews 2:14.

4. Some believe that this passage teaches that a person can be baptized for someone who died without being baptized themselves. But the Greek word (υπερ) translated “for” in verse 29 also means “with reference to” or “on account of.” To decide, we must examine other relevant passages. Refer to Romans 10:13-17. Is the Mormon doctrine of “baptism for the dead” plausible according to Paul?

5. How does Paul shame the Corinthians in 15:33-34?

6. How will the body be raised?

7. Paul moves to complete his discourse on resurrection by assuring them that we have victory over death. Through what do we have this victory?

8. Paul tells them that no matter what the trial or toil in the Lord, they will be rewarded. How does Paul command us to be in light of this?

6. Is Paul concerned that these other preachers working in Corinth will try to lead the church into factionalism?

7. How is a holy kiss different from other kisses? Is it the only salutation that is scriptural among Christians?

8. Was Paul ready for Jesus to return? Are you?

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