

Expositional Notes on I Corinthians

NT 602

Dr. Thomas M. Strouse

INTRODUCTION

Paul obeyed the Great Commission given by the Saviour (Mt. 28:19-20) and went to Corinth on his third missionary journey, preached in the synagogue, and won disciples to Christ (Acts 18:1-8). He baptized his converts and organized them into the Church of God at Corinth (I Cor. 1:1-2). He stayed in Corinth eighteen months and taught them the word of God (Acts 18:9-11). He left Corinth and later heard that there were divisions in this assembly (I Cor. 1:10). He wrote I Corinthians to rebuke and instruct about divisions in the church. He enumerated many of their theological and practical errors and gave biblical counsel concerning them. Some that he listed included the following: 1) perpetuating baptism factions (Chap. 1), 2) wallowing in self-glory (Chap. 1), 3) following Greek philosophy (Chap. 2), 4) practicing carnality (Chap. 3), projecting spiritual immaturity (Chap. 3), 5) building on some other foundation than Christ (Chap. 3), 6) destroying the assembly (Chap. 3), 7) judging Paul (Chap. 4), 8) strutting spiritual pride (Chap. 4), 9) fornicating (Chap. 5), 10) going to law with one another (Chap. 6), 11) sliding back into old sins (Chap. 6), 12) misunderstanding about marriage (Chap. 7), 13) being complicit in idolatry (Chap. 8), 14) questioning Paul's authority (Chap. 9), 15) challenging Paul's financial support (Chap. 9), 16) being associated with idolatry (Chap. 10), 17) causing division in the Lord's Supper (Chap. 11), 18) failing to understand spiritual gifts (Chap. 12), 19) allowing women to speak publicly in the assembly meetings (Chap. 14), and denying the resurrection (Chap. 15).

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

External evidence for Pauline authorship received support from early patristics such as Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, etc. Clement of Rome wrote to the Corinthians (1st century) and stated that Paul had written a letter to them dealing with factions within the church.

Internally, Paul claimed authorship at both the beginning and the end of this Epistle (1:1; 16:21). The author was an apostle (4:9; 9:1; 15:9) and he had seen the resurrected Christ (9:1; 15:8). Paul started the Corinthian church (Acts 18:8 ff.) and there is no biblical reason why he could not or did not author the Corinthian correspondence. He wrote this Epistle towards the end of his stay at Ephesus about AD 55, according to I Cor. 16:8.

PURPOSE OF BOOK

His purpose was correct numerous problems within this local Body of Christ, such as divisions, immorality, abusing Christian liberties. Also, he wanted to answer the queries of the Corinthians about marriage state for them, as they expressed in their letter (I Cor. 7:1).

CHARACTERISTICS OF BOOK

Some of the significant characteristics of the Epistle relate to Paul's rebukes and instructions to the assembly of baptized believers in Corinth.

1. He gives the most complete discussion of the married state in the NT (Chap. 7).
2. He corrects fallacious doctrinal practices concerning church discipline, tongues, meat and holy days.
3. He gives the most thorough-going treatment of practical ecclesiology, including the spiritual gifts, and the power of the Christian life rooted in the historical resurrection of Christ.
4. Since he addressed this ecclesiological letter to all believers (1:2), he assumes all believers will be baptized into local assemblies in obedience to the Lord, therefore making the instructions pertinent.
5. This letter strongly suggests that there was a proto-I Corinthian letter addressed to the Corinthians from Paul dealing with fornication and fornicators (I Cor. 5:9). Was this an epistolary *aorist*, or a reference to a previous letter (cf. "Ἐγράψα in 5:9 with γράφω in 4:14)?

OUTLINE

I. Prologue to the Corinthian Church (1:1-9)

II. Problems in the Corinthian Church (1:10-14:40)

A. Answered by Paul (1:10-4:21)

1. The Wisdom of God (1:10-31)
2. The Work of the Spirit (2:1-16)
3. The Way of the Ministry (3:1-4:21)

B. Aggravated by Pride (5:1-14:40)

1. The Problem concerning Fornication (5:1-13)
2. The Problem concerning Lawsuits (6:1-8)
3. The Problem concerning Immorality (6:9-20)
4. The Problem concerning Marriage (7:1-40)

5. The Problem concerning Worship (8:1-14:40)

- a. And Idols (8:1-11:1)
- b. And Women (11:2-16)
- c. And Lord's Supper (11:17-34)
- d. And Spiritual Things (12:1-14:40)

III. Power of the Corinthian Church (15:1-58)

IV. Plan for the Corinthian Church (16:1-24)

EXPOSITION OF CHAPTERS

Chapter One

Paul addressed the Church of God at Corinth¹ and was thankful for her enrichment in Christ (1:1-9). He challenged them about the lack of unity and the great wisdom in Christ alone (1:10-31).

Chapter Two

He emphasized the work of the Spirit on behalf of Christians, empowering them (2:1-5),² giving wisdom to them (2:6-12), and illuminating them (2:13-16).

Chapter Three

The Corinthian church required the Pauline rebuke because of her carnality through striving (3:1-7). Instead of personality divisions, all believers in the assembly are co-labourers with Christ to be judged by Christ for individual service at the βῆμα³ (3:8-15). The Apostle warned that any who would destroy the church⁴ through self-glory would receive divine destruction (3:16-23).

¹The Epistle was addressed to all church members who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 2). This is not an allusion to some mystical, universal, invisible, body of non-church member Christians since the majority of the content of I Corinthians would then be non-applicable.

²The Christian's wisdom is obtained through fideism, not rationalism or evidentialism.

³Although Paul did not use βῆμα here, he certainly alluded to it (cf. II Cor. 5:10).

⁴Paul's use of the plural pronoun "you" (ὑμῖν) indicates that he referred to the assembly members as the "temple."

Chapter Four

The Christian from Tarsus argued that the ministry is a stewardship (4:1-5), not a platform for pride (4:6-8). Paul was an example of humility in a very esteemed position, and exhorted the Corinthians to follow him (4:9-16). He wanted to extend his unified teaching to them either through Timothy or himself (4:17-21).

Chapter Five

The pride of the Corinthians manifested in the fact that they ignored immorality within the church body (5:1-2). The Apostle exhorted them with a biblical remedy to deal with public sin in the assembly—church discipline (5:3-5; cf. Mt. 18:16-18). Those that refuse to obey Christ’s headship in submission to His word must be purged out (5:6-8).⁵ He apparently had already written to the Corinthian assembly about public sins which must not be tolerated. The church must put away the wicked man, he commanded (5:9-13).⁶

Chapter Six

The church members’ pride carried over into them going to law against each other. They had looked to authorities outside of the body of Christ to settle church issues, undermining the authority of Christ (6:1-4).⁷ There were sufficient wise men in the local church at Corinth to deal conflicts within the congregation (6:5). It was needful for the membership to allow men within the assembly to settle differences (presumably legal or financial) or to accept being defrauded (6:6-8).⁸ He reminded them that the wicked do not inherit the Kingdom of God, but only regenerated sinners like them, who had the Spirit of God residing in their respective bodies (6:9-20).⁹

Chapter Seven

Having dealt with moral issues, the Apostle Paul now included answers to the previous letter that the Corinthians had sent him about morality and marriage. His answers seemed to be

⁵At least from a practical perspective, those professed Christians who reject Christ’s ecclesiological headship come under Satan’s headship and suffer the consequences.

⁶Apparently the man repented and sought restoration, as Paul averred (II Cor. 2:6-11). The Corinthian Church needed to forgive, comfort, and love him back into restoration after repentance (vv. 7-8).

⁷The local NT church is an autonomous organization and organism with Christ as the sole head.

⁸It is a tragic day when professed church members defraud other church members.

⁹The Christian’s physical body is not for fornication, but is “the holiest of holies” (*ναός*) as the dwelling place of God. When a man and a harlot join in immorality, they become “*one body*” or “united bodies,” as Paul presented this foundational truth (one body = united bodies [>>> I Cor. 12:13]).

organized around their queries about marriage: 1) What is marriage (7:1-7)? 2) Is separation/divorce acceptable (7:8-11)?¹⁰ 3) What about mixed marriages with saved and unsaved (7:12-17)? 4) What about the married state in time of persecution (7:18-35)?¹¹ 5) What is responsibility of the father in marriage (7:36-38)?¹² Finally, 6) May widows remarry (7:39-40)? He built his answers on previous revelation (the Scriptures and the Lord Jesus' teaching), and expanded with apostolic privilege.

Chapter Eight

Christian hubris affected Christian liberty, Paul recognized and addressed (8:1-3). The Corinthians realized that pagan idols were nothing and felt that with the liberty of their enlightened knowledge they could publicly eat meat offered to idols, not knowing that his practice caused some to stumble (8:4-10). He rebuked them for causing weaker Christians to stumble, giving the principle of restraining liberty for the edification of others (8:11-13).

Chapter Nine

Paul expanded on Christian liberty with his own example, indicating that he and Barnabas had freedom to expect remuneration for the Corinthian assembly (9:1-14), but that he purposefully restrained his liberty to avoid being a stumbling block to others and therefore hindering the Gospel effort (9:15-23). He stressed temperance in all things even when Christ gave liberty (9:24-27).¹³

Chapter Ten

The man of God used the example of Israel in the wilderness to show how their pride led to idolatry and consequent immorality which brought dire judgment (9:1-13). He laid out several principles to help these gentile converts deal with practical issues as they confronted potential difficult scenarios with idolatry. Religious idolatry must be avoided (9:14-22), and social idolatry must be handled biblically and graciously, so no one is offended by one's liberty (9:23-33).

¹⁰Clearly, the Apostle taught the permissible practice of temporary separation, but not permanent divorce and not remarriage after divorce!

¹¹In v. 27 Paul employed the perfect tense (λέλυσαι [“to be loosed”]) indicating the habitual practice of being loosed from a wife known as bachelorhood.

¹²If the “man” is not the father, as the ancient practice demands, then the text promotes premarital sex as the *NIV* espouses, saying, “If anyone thinks **he is acting improperly toward the virgin he is engaged to**, and if she is getting along in years and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married”

¹³The apostle used the rigorous and disciplined ancient athletic contests to help convey his perspective for the Christian to be focused and disciplined with one goal in mind.

Chapter Eleven

Pride also undermined the divinely given leadership principle in home and church: the husband is the head of the wife (11:1-3). The pagan practice of manifesting gender confusion through hair length entered the Corinthian church. Men were the head of women and needed no head covering when approaching God (11:4). Apparently some women, saved out of temple prostitution with shorn heads, continued with their shaved heads in the assembly (11:5-9). This gender confusion opened the opportunity for angels (demons) to recognize rebellious women in the assembly as targets for problems (11:10). Paul gave several principles to set order in the assembly for public worship: 1) men needed no head covering since their hair was their covering (but it should not be long and therefore effeminate [11:11-14]). 2) former temple prostitutes whose shorn hair had not grown out should wear a covering, and women who had hair did not need a covering as she was in submission to her husband (11:15-16).¹⁴ Their pride also affected the Lord's Supper as they were schismatic and aloof with others of the assembly in the meal before the Supper (11:17-20). This factional pride carried over into the following Communion service, risking the health and life of church members (11:21-30). The Supper was to be a time of self-examination to determine if one was right with the Lord by manifesting a right attitude towards body members (11:31-34).

Chapter Twelve

Ignorance was the result of the Corinthians' pride, Paul asserted, since they did not comprehend the Holy Spirit¹⁵ unity of distinctions in the local body of Christ (12:1-12).¹⁶ Paul's desire was that they would be united in the ordinances,¹⁷ since Christ was the Head and they were the body members "set" (ἔθετο) together just as God had planned (12:13-27). The remedy for corporate pride was corporate love (12:28-31).

¹⁴The adjective means ἀκατακάλυπτος "(un) covered" and is distinct to the noun περιβόλαιον "covering" which refers to the hair. Women with shorn heads were to use a covering (veil or hat) until their hair grew, which would then be their natural covering.

¹⁵The stem noun πνεῦμα occurs nine times in Chapter 12 prior to verse 13, always with a Greek article to designate the Holy Spirit (vv. 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, and 11; cf. also v. 10). Since 13 did not have an article, Paul presumably was not referring to the Spirit of God, but to the spirit of unity. The original *KJV* (1611) did not capitalize "spirit."

¹⁶The Corinthians wanted to emulate Paul's spiritual gift of prophecy, and in their pride failed to recognize that the church had gifts, administrations, and operations (12:4-6).

¹⁷"In the spirit" of unity (cf. Phil. 1:27).

Chapter Thirteen

The answer to Christian hubris is Christian love, as the Apostle revealed (13:1-2). “Charity”¹⁸ (ἀγάπη) in the truth is the dictum for Christianity, since it will be the perpetual watchword (13:3-7). Some aspects of apostolic powers would cease, but not charity, even after the NT canon would be completed, Paul argued (13:8-13).¹⁹

Chapter Fourteen

Pride about having “apostolic” powers prevailed in the Church of God at Corinth. Self-edification was the watchword in this self-absorbed church membership (14:1-5). Paul used examples to encourage the audience about not emulating his spiritual abilities with regard to tongues (14:6-19). Hearing God’s word in a foreign language was not a blessing, but a curse, as he cited Isa. 28:11-12 to prove his point (14:20-25). He then listed some principles for tongues to follow as this practice was ceasing (cf. 13:8). For instance, he stated that tongues must be used, 1) for edifying, 2) with two or three speakers only, 3) in order, 4) with an interpreter, 5) in silence if no interpreter, 6) with two or three prophets, 7) with others judging, 8) with no women speaking publicly, 9) and with emphasis on prophecy and orderliness.

Chapter Fifteen

The Apostle to the Gentiles focused upon the Gospel message, which gave great theological perspective and practical power, by defining it and including the resurrection of Christ (15:1-10), defending the resurrection of the Saviour (15:11-20), delineating the resurrection program (15:21-28), denouncing misunderstanding concerning it (15:29-34), detailing the resurrection body (15:35-49), and desiring the proper application of the doctrine of the resurrection (15:50-58).

Chapter Sixteen

As he concluded his Epistle, Paul gave his plans to the church. The Apostle revealed that he would come by and collect the offerings they were laying aside for the Jerusalem church (16:1-4). He laid out his efforts to remain at Ephesus and hoped Apollos would visit the Corinthians (16:5-12). The Apostle Paul gave his final exhortation for the Corinthian church to “quit” like men, receive greetings from other churches, and reject unbelievers as “*Anathema Maranatha*” (16:13-24).

¹⁸The noun “charity” is unique with the *KJV*, but excellently expressed the nature of true biblical love—giving to others.

¹⁹¹⁹That which is perfect (τὸ τέλειον) refers to a process (“*is come...shall be done away*” [canonization]) and not an event (Rapture).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barclay, William. *The Letters to the Corinthians*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002 reprint.
- Barrett, C. K. *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publ., 1987.
- Bruce, F. F. *1 and 2 Corinthians*. NY: Harpercollins, 1981.
- Calvin, John. *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: ET, 1960.
- Fee, Gordon. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1987.
- Findlay, G. G. *Saint Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians*.
- Godet, F. *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*.
- Gromacki, Robert. *Called To Be Saints: An Exposition of I Corinthians*.
- Grosheide, F. W. *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*.
- Hodge, Charles. *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians*.
- MacArthur, John F. *I Corinthians*.
- Morris, Leon. *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1985.