

First Corinthians

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NEW TESTAMENT SURVEY

364 (p. 370 in book)

FIRST CORINTHIANS

55 AD

"Brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand." 15:1

Author: Paul

Written From: Ephesus

Sent To: Church in Corinth

Purpose: Correct behavior by correcting doctrine Theme: The Christian's new life is to be applied to everyday life. Basic Outline:

Chapters 1-6 - Paul attempts to correct issues in the Corinthian church made known to him by members of Chloe's household who had crossed the Aegean Sea to speak with Paul. The problems included:

1. 1:10-4:21 – Divisions over church speakers, factions, jealousy and quarrelling in the local Corinthian church that resulted from a misunderstanding of the message of the cross and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Yhrd
2. 5:1-13 - Immorality
3. 6:1-11 - Legal Battles
4. 6:12-20 – Immorality and the body's resurrection

Chapters 7-16 - Paul addresses questions brought by an official delegation that presented him a letter with concerns that arose from Paul's previous letter to the Corinthians. These each begin with περι δε in the Greek which translates "now concerning" and include:

1. 7:1, immorality and marriage
2. 7:25, celibacy and marriage
3. 8:1-11:1, food sacrificed to idols. Chapter 8-10 involves Christian liberty and responsibility. This leads into Paul discussing his apostleship and the Lord's Supper
4. 11:2-14:40 – Divisions concerning Congregational worship services
 - a. 11:2-16 - Head coverings
 - b. 11:17-34 – social status at the Lord's Table
 - c. 12:1, spiritual gifts
5. 15:1, the gospel and the doctrine of resurrection
6. 16:1, collection of money for the Jerusalem saints
7. 16:12, Paul's fellow teacher, Apollos

Timeline of Paul and the Corinthians

Fall 50 AD to Spring 52 AD – Paul goes to Corinth during his second missionary journey.

53-56 AD – Paul goes on a third missionary journey. Apollos is in Corinth.

- a) Paul stays in Ephesus for 2 ½ years
- b) Paul writes a letter to Corinth that has been lost and is referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:9 as the “previous letter”
- c) In 1 Corinthians 1:11 Paul has heard of disorder in the Corinthian church from Chloe's household.
- d) A delegation (1 Corinthians 16:17) had been sent to him in Ephesus from Corinth. They presented him with questions from the congregation that he addresses in 1 Corinthians 7:1.

LETTER:

1

2

Paul follows up this letter with a “painful” visit directly from Ephesus and back in 2 Corinthians 2:1.

Paul leaves Corinth and returns to Ephesus and writes a “sorrowful letter” referred to in 2 Corinthians 2:4 and 7:8,9. He shed “many tears” writing this letter according to 2 Cor. 2:4. Paul says he “repented” or “regretted” writing it because it made them sad in 2 Corinthians 7:8. This letter, his third to the Corinthians, has also been lost.

3

Paul left Ephesus and went to Macedonia where he met Titus who was on his way back from the Corinthian church. Titus had an encouraging report. (2 Corinthians 7:5-7)

Paul then writes his 4th letter to Corinth (called 2 Corinthians) from Macedonia in 56 AD.

Paul spends the winter in Corinth (Acts 20:2-3) and wrote the book of Romans. Paul left for Jerusalem in the spring of 57 to end his third missionary journey.

TOTAL: Paul wrote 4 letters to Corinth and made 3 visits to Corinth.

4

50 AD –Apostle Paul starts Corinthian church.

53 AD – Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus (Acts 18:24-26);

- Apollos goes to Corinth (Acts 18:27)
- Paul arrives in Ephesus and begins a 3 year stay;

54 AD – Paul is teaching daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus;

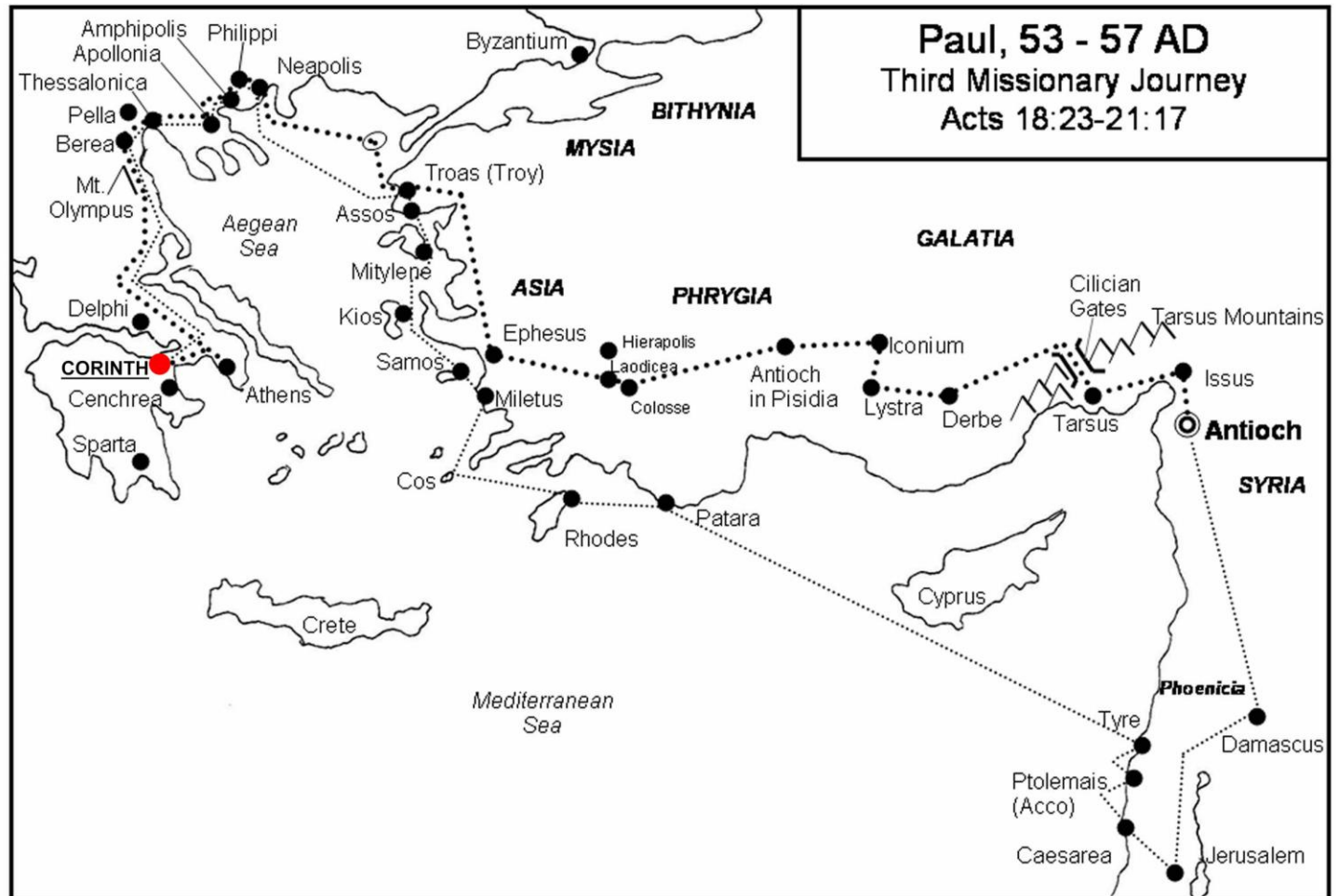
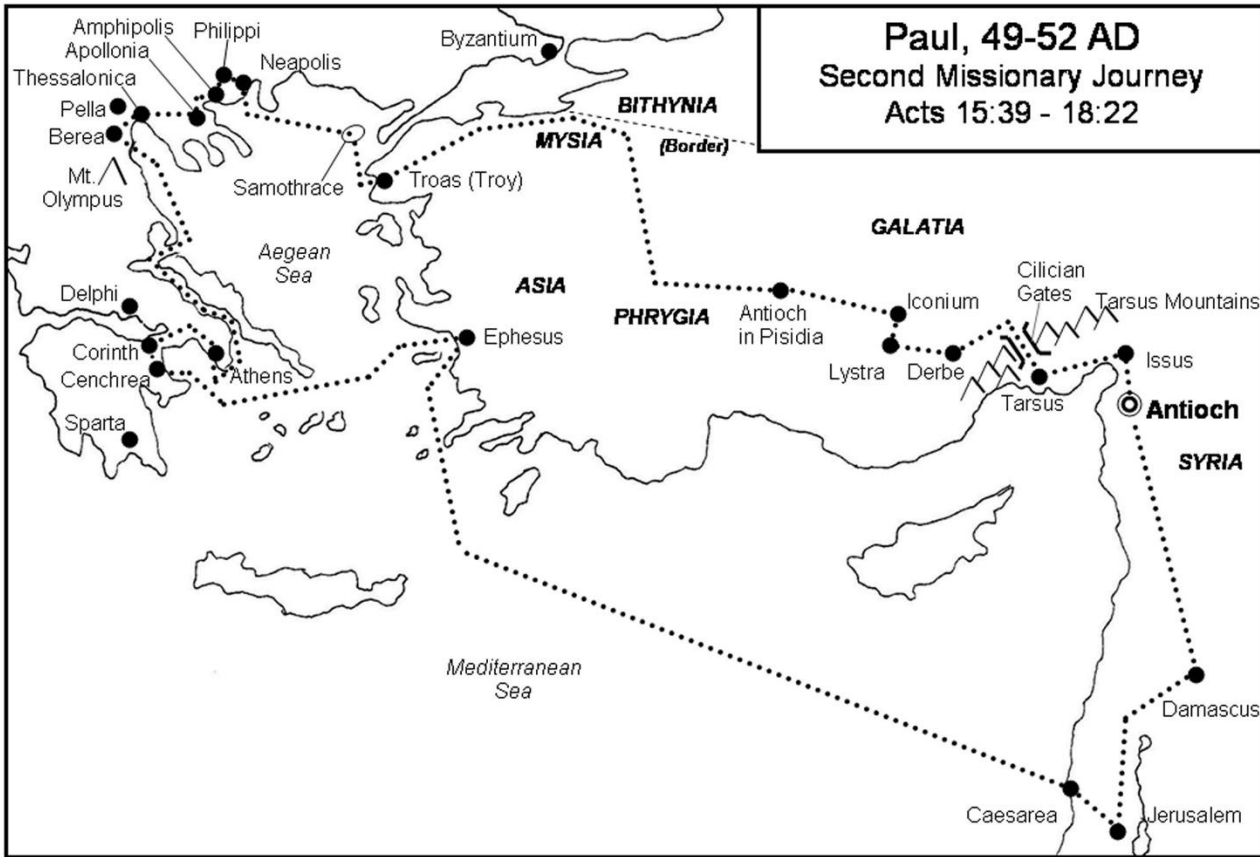
- Paul sends Timothy into Macedonia (Acts 19:22);
- Nero becomes Roman Emperor at the age of 16 years old.

55 AD – Paul writes first of four letters to the Corinthians (not 1 Corinthians, but the one in 1 Cor. 5:9)

- A delegation from the Corinthian church arrives in Ephesus with problems and questions.
- Paul responds by writing 1 Corinthians
- Paul follows this letter with a quick visit across the Aegean Sea from Ephesus to Corinth and back (2 Cor. 2:1) This is Paul's second visit to Corinth (2 Cor. 12:14; 13:1,2)
- Paul writes a third letter to Corinth from Ephesus which we do not have (2 Cor. 2:3, 4; 7:8, 9, 12). This is called the “sorrowful letter” in 2 Corinthians 2:4 and 7:8,9 which caused Paul to shed “many tears” while writing. Paul says he “repented” or “regretted” writing it because it made them sad according to 2 Corinthians 7:8.
- Titus carries this letter and stays to fix the church in Corinth (2 Cor. 7:15, 13, 14)

56 AD – After the riot in the Ephesian Theater, Paul leaves Ephesus in the fall for Corinth and goes through Troas into Macedonia on his way to Corinth.

- While Paul is traveling through Macedonia he meets Titus who had left Corinth to return to Ephesus (2 Cor. 7:5,6)
- Titus gives Paul an encouraging report about the Corinthian Church (2 Corinthians 7:5-7)
- While still in Macedonia Paul writes his fourth letter to the Corinthians known as 2 Corinthians (2 Cor. 2:13; 7:5) and sends Titus back to Corinth with the letter.
- Titus and Luke are sent back to Corinth with the letter 2 Corinthians (2 Cor. 8:17,18)
- Paul follows them into Corinth for his third visit to the city and spends the winter in Corinth.



57 AD – In the spring, Paul writes to the Roman Church from Corinth and sends the letter of Romans with a delegation of people led by Phoebe of Cenchrea to Rome (Rom. 16:1)

- Paul plans to sail to Syria from Cenchrea but the Jews are planning to kill him so he goes by land back up through Macedonia and down past Ephesus (Acts 20:3-6)
- Paul arrives in Jerusalem with the donated money (Acts 21:17)

Chapters 1-6 - Paul attempts to correct issues in the Corinthian church made known to him by members of Chloe's household who had crossed the Aegean Sea to speak with Paul. The problems included:

1. 1:10-4:21 – Divisions over church speakers, factions, jealousy and quarrelling in the local Corinthian church that resulted from a misunderstanding of the message of the cross and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.
 - a. 1:18-2:5 – Greek philosophy vs. Word of God
 - b. 2:6-2:16 – Greek philosophy vs. Spirit of God
 - c. 3:1- Spiritually Mature vs. Worldly Infants
 - d. 4:1 – Apostles vs. Philosophers. Servants of God are ministers of the Word. The Word is the universal standard of the content of the preachers' message.
2. 5:1-13 - Immorality
3. 6:1-11 - Legal Battles
4. 6:12-20 – Immorality and the body's resurrection

Corinthians thought they had superior "wisdom", "spiritual" experience, application, life style, etc.

So, in rebuking the Corinthians Paul asks them TEN times, "Don't you know?" Basically saying to them, "Surely, a people of your superior spiritual experience and loftier wisdom would know this basic truth?"

1. 3:16 – Don't you know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit lives in you.
2. 5:6 – Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.
3. 6:2 – Don't you know that the saints will judge the world.
4. 6:3 – Don't you know that we will judge angels.
5. 6:9 – Don't you know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom.
6. 6:15 – Don't you know that your bodies are members of Christ himself.
7. 6:16 - Don't you know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body.
8. 6:19 - Don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you.
9. 9:13 - Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple.
10. 9:24 - Don't you know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets a prize.
11. 15:58 – DO YOU KNOW that your labor in the Lord is NOT in vain

Chapters 7-16 - Paul addresses questions brought by an official delegation that presented him a letter with concerns that arose from Paul's previous letter to the Corinthians. These each begin with περι δε in the Greek which translates "now concerning" and include:

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4. 11:2-14:40 – Divisions concerning Congregational worship services
 - a. 11:2-16 - Head coverings
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7. 16:12, Paul's fellow teacher, Apollos

Memorable Verses:

- "To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy." 1:2
- "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." 1:18
- "None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." 2:8
- "We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us." 2:12
- "Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly – mere infants in Christ." 3:1
- "If a man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is." 3:12, 13
- "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" 3:16
- "The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power." 4:20
- "Hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord." 5:5
- "The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already." 6:7
- "Each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him." 7:17
- "Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts." 7:19
- "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak." 8:9
- "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible." 9:19
- "I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air." 9:26
- "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come." 10:11
- "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man." 10:13
- "In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good." 11:17
- "Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord." 11:27
- "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." 12:7
- "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it." 12:27
- "Love never fails." 13:8
- "Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts." 14:1
- "The spirits of the prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace." 14:32, 33
- "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, you are still in your sins." 15:17
- "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." 15:56, 57
- "If anyone does not love the Lord – a curse be on him. Come, O Lord." 16:22

Healthy Doctrine:

- Sanctified
- Unity
- Authority
- Marriage
- Family
- Now but not yet, the interval
- Freedom
- Responsibility
- The Body, The Church
- The Cross
- Lord's Supper
- Spiritual Gifts
- Holy Spirit
- Resurrection

Corinth was a large metropolis with a population of about 700,000 which as many as 450,000 were slaves of some sort. Corinth was located on a narrow isthmus (a piece of land that connects two larger land masses) that had two major seaports: Corinthian Gulf and Saronic Gulf. They were extremely prosperous and lived in luxury surrounded by pagan temples and were known for their sinful lifestyle throughout the Mediterranean world.

The Corinthian church began when a Jewish synagogue split (Acts 18) but was now made up of a mixture of Jews and many Gentiles who were rich and poor from both the low class and nobility.

The Location of the City

Corinth was located on the isthmus (land bridge) between Attica to NE (mainland Greece) and Peloponnesos (peninsula like formation to the south.)

There were two ports. The eastern port 5 miles away in the city of Cenchrea in the Saronic Gulf that led to the Aegean Sea. The western port which was north of Corinth in the city of Lechaem in the Corinthian Gulf that led to the Ionian Sea.

Small ships were rolled across the 4 ½ mile isthmus on rollers to avoid the dangerous sea around the cape at the southern tip of the Peloponnesos. Large ships would unload in the eastern port, transport the goods across the Isthmus and reload in the western port.



The People of Corinth in Paul's Day

The city of Corinth in Paul's day had only been rebuilt 100 years before but it was five times as large as Athens. The city was young, dynamic and not bound by tradition. The people were a mix of dislocated individuals without strong ethnic identities. The Corinthian church shows this mixture in the names of its members:

Roman (Latin) Names in Corinthian Church

1. Gaius \$
2. Fortunatus
3. Crispus
4. Titius Justus \$

Greek Names in Corinthian Church

1. Stephanas \$
2. Achaicus
3. Erastus \$

Jewish Names in Corinthian Church

1. Aquila
2. Priscilla
3. Sosthenes



The Erastus Stone

Paul writes from Corinth in his closing greeting to the Roman,

"Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings."
- Romans 16:23

Erastus is also mentioned in Acts 19:22 as one of Paul's associates in the ministry that was sent with Timothy to Macedonia. The below picture is a stone from a paved road on the east side of the theater. The inscription in the stone says, "**Erastus the commissioner of public works bore the expense of this pavement.**" Scripture and this stone identify from the same time period in Corinth a man with the same name and with the same public office. It is almost for certain Paul and this 2,000 year old stone are talking about the same individual.



The **Erastus inscription** is a Latin inscription made in the mid-first century CE. It was found in 1929 in Corinth near a pavement.



The Latin inscription reads:

ERASTVS PRO AED S P STRAVIT

"Erastus, for his aedileship, paved it with his own money."

In chapter one a group of Corinthians from the household of Chloe have come over to Ephesus to warn Paul of the division and factions that have formed in the Corinthian church. Paul begins to explain that this is the result of not understanding basic doctrine, namely, the message of the cross.

In chapter two Paul explains the problem in the Corinthian church is that many are still pursuing worldly wisdom. There is a greater wisdom that is revealed by the Spirit of God. Paul is a minister of this wisdom.

In chapter three Paul continues to explain the reason for the Corinthian's problem with division. They are pursuing men not Christ. Paul then warns the various ministers preaching in the church telling them to be careful how they build the church. If they build it with human wisdom and motivation (wood, hay or straw) their work will be consumed and worthless in eternity. But, if they build it with God's wisdom by the Spirit (gold, silver, costly stones) their work will become an eternal reward.

In chapter four Paul discusses the true apostle or servant of God. The false ministers considered themselves kings and taught the people to enjoy the present glorious age. Paul, on the other hand, was considered by the world (and some of the Corinthians) to be lower than a dishonored servant meant only to serve in the arena for the entertainment of the world in this corrupt age.

In chapters five and six Paul addresses concerns that were brought to his attention by the group from Chloe's household. These issues include a man living with his father's wife, believers going to the court room of the world to resolve their issues, sexual immorality and pagan temple worship.

In chapter seven Paul begins to address an official letter from the church of Corinth that had taken issue with some things Paul had taught. The key matter here seems to be a misunderstanding of what is spiritual and how it applies to our place in time (eschatology). The first issue involves women who are “too spiritual” to have sexual relations with their husbands which leads into a discussion about marriage,

In chapter eight Paul addresses the second issue: food sacrificed to idols in the pagan temples. It is wrong to be in the temple of an idol, but if the meat from a temple shows up in the market place, there is no sin in buying and eating the meat. The Christian is free to eat the meat. Some believers less advanced in their understanding were still concerned about this and considered it a sin to eat the meat. This led Paul to establish the principle that Christian love and responsibility come before the individual Christian’s freedom.

In chapter nine Paul uses himself and his apostleship as an example of someone who possesses freedom and rights but restrains or even denies himself the privilege of using these rights in order to benefit others. Paul uses several examples of rights and privileges that he has as an apostle: the right to be provided with food and drink, the right to take a wife with him who would also have the right to be provided with food and drink, financial support from those (like the Corinthians) who benefited from Paul’s ministry and to make a living preaching the gospel. Paul reminds the Corinthians that he has not used any of these rights because he doesn’t want his freedom to interfere with his responsibility to minister to people.

Chapter ten begins a discussion dealing with a misunderstanding of the power of the Lord’s Supper. It was a remembrance meal, not a magical meal. The Lord’s Supper did not nullify the fact that the believer still has to walk in obedience or face God’s judgment. Several examples from the Old Testament are given.

In chapter eleven Paul explains some proper practices for worship including women, men, head coverings, long hair and again returns to the Lord’s Supper. Once again divisions in the church are mentioned. This time the division is between the social classes within the church

In chapter twelve through fourteen Paul’s responds to another issue from the Corinthian’s letter to Paul concerning spiritual manifestations or gifts. Paul explains that everyone has manifestations from the Spirit of God in their lives but these manifestations are to serve the body of Christ. In chapter thirteen Paul explains these gifts must be done not just by the Spirit of God but also in the character of God, which is love. In chapter fourteen Paul describes the proper use of tongues and prophecy. The chapter ends with Paul explaining how a church service should look.

In chapter fifteen Paul defends the reality and the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because of their corrupt eschatological doctrine, the Corinthians see no need or logic for the resurrection of believers. Paul explains the resurrection is absolutely essential for the gospel message and says if you do not have a resurrection you do not have the gospel. If you do not have the gospel then you are still in a state of sin which results in eternal damnation. The good news is Jesus has been raised, death will be defeated and we have the victory through Jesus Christ.

Paul closes down the letter in chapter sixteen but addresses two more issues: a collection of money for the struggling believers in Jerusalem and Paul’s fellow laborer in the ministry, Apollos.