

Introduction to 1 Corinthians

Author, Date and Recipients

The apostle Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthian church in the spring of AD 53, 54, or 55. This was near the end of his three-year ministry in Ephesus.

The Gospel in 1 Corinthians

The gospel—the good news of what God has done for sinners through Jesus Christ—permeates [1 Corinthians](#). The letter opens with a celebration of the cross of Christ ([1:18-31](#)), closes with an emphasis on Christ's resurrection ([15:3-58](#)), and repeatedly presents Christ and the gospel as the essence of Paul's preaching ([2:1-5](#); [3:10-11](#); [9:16](#); [15:1-8](#)).

Despite these emphases, [1 Corinthians](#) offers several challenges to gospel-focused interpretation. Because Paul addresses various practical problems confronting the Corinthians, it is easy to view the letter as a collection of unrelated topics. But such an approach misses larger patterns of gospel truth that run throughout Paul's instructions. To be sure, the epistle contains stern warnings about judgment, discipline, and the consequences of sin. Yet as we seek to hear such warnings within the framework of the gospel, we must take care that neither voice drowns out the other. [First Corinthians](#) discusses many hotly debated issues, including divorce and remarriage, gender roles in worship, and spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues and prophecy. While we must acknowledge the complexity of the issues, we should not allow this to obscure gospel principles that are clearly expressed in the text.

Readers of [1 Corinthians](#) should be alert for four pervasive gospel themes. First, human beings—including believers in Christ—desperately need God's grace. Every problem Paul addresses stems from the fact that we have profoundly flawed spiritual priorities. Our need is so great that only Christ, who is the very wisdom and power of God, can redeem us ([1:22-25](#)). Second, our hope is in Christ, and not in our own perfection. As clearly as any other portion of Scripture, [1 Corinthians](#) demonstrates that God's people, both individually and in community, can develop serious spiritual "blind spots." Yet we need not despair, because the work of Christ makes genuine repentance and transformation possible. Third, where the grace of the gospel is at work, holiness will result. On the one hand, this means that we must not soften the book's radical demands for holy living, for these reflect the transforming power of the gospel. On the other hand, it means that we must not neglect the book's emphasis on the gospel as the power by which we fulfill these demands. Fourth, Christians are called to apply the gospel to everyday life. Where our faith intersects with culture, the potential for compromise abounds; where we disagree with other believers about Christian freedom, conflict can erupt. But whatever the problem, we must pursue the glory of God and the good of others, even at great cost to ourselves—in short, we must embody the priorities of the cross ([10:31-11:1](#)).

Q4 | Week 7: November 14 - 19

Weekly Overview

[First Corinthians](#) is addressed to people who desire spiritual maturity. Some seek maturity through displays of wisdom and eloquence, some through a complete break with the circumstances of their pre-Christian lives, and some in the exercise of personal freedom. But as Paul reminds us, the gospel is not, “I am wise, I am pure, I am free.” Rather, the gospel boasts in nothing but “Jesus Christ and him crucified” ([2:2](#)). To the human mind it seems foolish to hope that we could be saved through the cross of Christ, with its associations of weakness and shame. But it is at the cross that God’s wisdom, power, and glory are fully revealed—along with the true nature of self-sacrificial love. Because love never ends ([13:8](#)) and because we long to see God’s power over all things displayed forever ([15:28](#)), we must never lose sight of the cross. True maturity will take us deeper into the gospel of Christ crucified, but never beyond it.

Outline

- Introduction to the Letter’s Main Themes ([1:1-9](#))
- Divisions over Christian Preachers ([1:10-4:21](#))
- A Report of Sexual Immorality and Lawsuits ([5:1-6:20](#))
- Three Issues from the Corinthians’ Letter ([7:1-11:1](#))
- Divisions over Corporate Worship ([11:2-14:40](#))
- The Futility of Faith If the Dead Are Not Raised ([15:1-58](#))
- The Collection for the Saints and Travel Plans ([16:1-12](#))
- Closing Admonitions and Greetings ([16:13-24](#))

Introduction to 2 Corinthians

Author, Date & Recipients

Based on the opening salutation ([1:1](#)), there is a clear consensus that the apostle Paul wrote [2 Corinthians](#). The historical setting suggests that Paul penned the epistle in Macedonia sometime after leaving Ephesus ([Acts 20:1](#)) but before returning to Corinth ([Acts 20:2-3](#)). This places the date for the letter around AD 55/56.

Paul wrote on several occasions “to the church of God that is at Corinth” ([1:1](#); cf. [1 Cor. 1:1-2](#); [5:9](#); [2 Cor. 2:3-4](#)). The Corinthian church rebelled against Paul and his teaching because they were being influenced by “super-apostles” who were proclaiming “a different gospel” ([11:4-5](#)). Paul writes this letter to demonstrate their error and to convince them to embrace the true gospel.

The Gospel in 2 Corinthians

[Second Corinthians](#) is filled with the astounding paradoxes of the gospel. Rather than a well-ordered theological treatise (like Romans or [Ephesians](#)), we find a letter that stylistically is somewhat free-flowing. Yet it is overflowing with the apostle’s gospel-love for his readers. Though this can sometimes make the argument of the book difficult to follow, the unique historical setting of the book allows the modern reader to see how Paul applies the gospel *in the moment*. He is using the real-life situation of his audience in order to apply the truths of the gospel in real time. As a physician cleans and bandages a wound, Paul addresses the contamination of the Corinthians’ foul hearts and applies the healing balm of the gospel.

The primary occasion for the book (false teaching) provides Paul an opportunity to demonstrate the contrast between the gospel and the prevailing cultural story of his day. Whereas the false apostles are concerned with external qualifications, Paul focuses on the internal heart change brought about by the Spirit ([2 Cor. 3:1-4](#)). Whereas his opponents are concerned with self-commendation by the use of rhetoric, Paul is characterized by a self-effacing, simple presentation of the truth of the gospel in word and deed ([11:4-10](#)). Similarly, the book is effective in unmasking our own cultural idols of wealth, power, and comfort.

The theme of gospel paradoxes appears frequently throughout the book: in Christ, we are comforted in affliction ([1:3-13](#)), rich in poverty ([8:9](#)), and strong in weakness ([12:10](#)). Gospel comparisons also provide needed encouragement: God’s promises are more permanent than our momentary trials ([4:7-18](#)), and our future life is more certain than our present circumstances ([5:1-10](#)). We can boast in our suffering, knowing that God uses it as a crucible to produce humility and true strength ([11:16-12:10](#)). We can reconcile because we have been undeservedly accepted and restored ([5:18-21](#)). We can give generously because we have received the self-giving love of Jesus ([8:9-10](#)).

[Second Corinthians](#) provides documentary evidence that the gospel works. By the grace of God, over time, the gospel is worked into our hearts so that we will recognize the deep implications of the gospel in every dimension of life. As you encounter God's Word, you can trust that God the Holy Spirit is operating *in the moment* to transform your heart and to reorganize your life around the promises of God which find their "Yes" in Jesus ([1:20](#)).

Outline

- Introduction ([1:1-11](#))
 - Greeting ([1:1-2](#))
 - Thanksgiving for comfort in affliction ([1:3-11](#))
- Paul's Gospel-Driven Account of His Ministry ([1:12-7:16](#))
 - God's faithfulness in changed plans ([1:12-2:4](#))
 - Living the truth in love through restoration ([2:5-11](#))
 - The ironic glory of new covenant ministry ([2:12-4:6](#))
 - Apparent experiences eclipsed by actual realities ([4:7-5:10](#))
 - Unfashionable ambassadors of reconciliation ([5:11-6:13](#))
 - Undivided living in response to undeserved grace ([6:14-7:1](#))
 - The gospel applied in church relationships ([7:2-16](#))
- Paul's Christ-Centered Appeal for Sacrificial Giving ([8:1-9:15](#))
- Paul's Upside-Down Apologetic for His Apostolic Ministry ([10:1-13:10](#))
 - Boasting only in that which is given by Christ ([10:1-18](#))
 - Uncovering the falsity of the "super-apostles" ([11:1-15](#))
 - Upside-down commendation of the apostolic call ([11:16-12:13](#))
 - Preparations for a future visit ([12:14-13:10](#))
- Concluding Greetings ([13:11-14](#))