

# First Corinthians

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In the book of Acts, we learn about Paul's travels to different places sharing the Good News about Jesus and starting churches. In Acts 18:1-17, Paul arrives in a city called Corinth and meets a couple named Priscilla and Aquila and stays with them. Paul spent a year and a half in Corinth teaching and testifying that Jesus was the Messiah. He established a church in Corinth and then moved on to another city called Ephesus. This letter called First Corinthians is a letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthian church from the city of Ephesus (16:8).

**Writer:** The Apostle Paul

**Date of writing:** Around 55 AD.

**Original Audience:** Followers of Jesus in the city of Corinth. Most followers of Jesus in Corinth were not Jewish.

**The Reason for the Letter:**

The apostle Paul is writing to the church in Corinth to answer questions they asked in a letter sent to Paul (7:1).

He is also writing about some problems he has heard from

other people (1:11; 5:1). Paul is writing to correct these problems and help the followers of Jesus do what is right.

**Main Message of the Letter:** The first letter to the Corinthians is the most challenging letter to identify the main message or theme in the New Testament. Paul teaches on many different topics as he answers questions and attempts to correct problems that some church members have reported to him. Here is the outline of the topics Paul teaches:

1. Introduction and thanksgiving (1:1-9)
2. The need for unity under one leader: Jesus (1:10-3:23)
3. Paul is a servant of the Messiah and like a father of the Corinthian church (4:1-21)
4. Sexual immorality has no place in the church (5:1-13)
5. Lawsuits among believers (6:1-11)
6. The body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (6:12-20)
7. Marriage, divorce, and singleness (7:1-40)
8. Food sacrificed to idols (8:1-13)
9. The apostle Paul's rights as an apostle (9:1-27)
10. Staying away from idolatry (10:1-11:1)
11. Abuses in worship (11:2-34)
12. Gifts of the Holy Spirit, love, and worship (12:1-14:40)
13. The resurrection of the body (15:1-58)
14. Instructions about collecting money, final advice, and letter closing (16:1-24)



## The City of Corinth

Corinth is a city in Greece today. When Paul wrote his letter to the Corinthians, Corinth was a large important trade city in the Roman empire. It was a wealthy city that was known for its entertainment and sports. In other areas of the Roman empire, Corinth was considered a sexually immoral city. There was a saying “to act like a Corinthian,” which meant sexually immoral behavior. The believers in Corinth came from that culture, and it is why Paul teaches so much about sexual purity in chapters 5-7.

## The Lord’s Supper

Jesus gave his followers two religious symbols to practice. One is baptism, and the other is the Lord’s Supper. Paul talks about baptism in 1 Corinthians, saying, “We were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body” (12:13). Paul also gives very clear teaching on the Lord’s supper in chapter 11. He starts by correcting the Corinthians on their misuse of the Lord’s supper and then reminds them of the instruction he gave them to follow. Followers of Jesus worldwide remember Jesus’ death and resurrection when they take the Lord’s Supper. In taking the Lord’s Supper, we also look forward to when Jesus will come again (11:26). Many followers of Jesus read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 before taking the Lord’s Supper.

## Love and the Spiritual Gifts

The believers in Corinth wanted the gifts of the Holy Spirit but didn’t understand the most important thing. In chapters 12-14, Paul corrects their understanding. He gives careful teaching about love and the gifts of the Spirit. The outline of this teaching creates three steps:

In organizing his teaching in this way, Paul is bringing the reader’s focus to the top step and the most important thing, love. It seems the Corinthian believers were eager to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit but weren’t showing love. After talking about the gifts of the Spirit Paul says, “Now eagerly desire the greater gifts” (12:31). The greater gift is love. After explaining what love really is, Paul says, “Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit” (14:1). By putting love in the middle of his teaching on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, Paul is showing that love is the most important thing.

## The Lost Letter

In 1 Corinthians 5:9, Paul mentions another letter he wrote to the Corinthian church before this one. That letter has been lost, and we don’t know much about it. Many would like to know what else Paul said in that first letter. What we do know is writing and sending letters was Paul’s way of continuing to teach and train leaders in the churches that he started.

