

13. Paul's Corinthian Correspondence

Paul wrote a series of letters to one of his most important missionary sites, one with a strong church nonetheless wracked with problems.

“Testimony” (hymn no. 137)

“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” (1 Corinthians 2:12-13)

1. The witness of the Holy Ghost,
As borne by those who know,
Has lifted me again to thee,
O Father of my soul.

2. I know that thou art in the heav'n.
I know the Savior reigns.
I know a prophet speaks to us
For our eternal gain.

3. My eyes are wet; my heart is full.
The Spirit speaks today.
O Lord, wilt thou my life renew
And in my bosom stay.

4. As testimony fills my heart,
It dulls the pain of days.
For one brief moment, heaven's view
Appears before my gaze.

Corinth at the Time of Paul

- Historically a **prosperous Greek city** because of its position on a strait joining central and southern Greece
- Had been destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC and then refounded as a **Roman colony** in 44 BC
- Was the **capital of the Roman province of Achaia** and the home of **Greeks, Romans, Syrians, Jews, and many others**
- (In)famous for its immoral atmosphere
- **Early saints converted by Paul during his second missionary journey, A.D. 50/51-52**



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Paul's Visits and Letters to Corinth

Simplified from Brown *INT*, 514-515, 541-544, 548

- **Paul's First Visit A.D. (A.D. 50/51-52)**
 - Letter A (lost; 1 Cor 5:9 indicates that Paul had written Corinth after he had left warning the saints against dealings with immoral people)
 - Letter B (1 Corinthians, written from Ephesus)
- **Paul's Second, "Painful" Visit (c. A.D. 57; see 2 Cor 2:1)**
 - Letter C (Letter written "with many tears," 2 Cor 2:3-4; 7:8-9)
 - Letter D (2 Corinthians 1-9, written from Macedonia)
 - [Letter E (perhaps 2 Corinthians 10-13, written as an addendum or sequel to Letter D)]
- **Paul's Possible Third Visit (A.D. 57-58; 2 Tim 4:20)**

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Occasional Situation of 1 Corinthians



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Occasion of 1 Corinthians

- **Reports have come to Paul of various problems in the church at Corinth**
 - **Rival groups struggling for control (1:10–17)**
 - **Indifference to flagrant sexual immorality (5:1–13)**
 - Disregard for those not fully enlightened about proper Christian conduct (8:1–11:1)
 - **Marginalization of the economically and socially less advantaged (11:17–34)**
- **Additionally Paul is concerned about:**
 - **Those who claim special wisdom or knowledge**
 - **Those who regard spiritual gifts (esp. ecstatic tongues) as signs of higher spiritual status**
 - Feel that they are **already “reigning with Christ,”** hence freed from law and responsibility (antinomian)
 - *The so-called “Spirituals” (see 4:8a) thought that they were somehow already resurrected!*
- **Paul writes to correct doctrinal misunderstandings that led to moral misbehavior**
 - *Compare Paul’s correction of the Spirituals’ misunderstanding of the resurrection to Alma’s correction of Corianton (Alma 39–42)!*

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Who Were Paul’s Opponents?

Huntsman, “Your Faith Should Not Stand in the Wisdom of Men: Greek Philosophy, Corinthian Behavior, and the Teachings of Paul”

When Paul states early in his letter “that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble” were called as Christians (1 Corinthians 1:26), the implication is that some, in fact, were:

- **Well-educated (*sophoi*, KJV “wise men,” perhaps “wise guys” works!)**
 - class that was likely to have been well-educated and seems to have been particularly susceptible to doctrinal or behavioral aberrations arising from claims of special wisdom (*sophia*) or knowledge (*gnōsis*)
 - the philosophical world view of certain Corinthian Christians seems to have either encouraged them to *think that they were above the law—leading them to ignore deeds in the flesh and purposefully flout social and cultural customs—or predisposed them to excessive asceticism*
- **Politically influential (*dynatoi*, KJV “mighty”)**
 - the wealthier and more influential among the Christians, who probably hosted most worship services in their homes, *thought that leadership naturally should belong to them*
- **Those of high social status (*eugeneis*, KJV “noble”)**
 - there may have been some conscious *discrimination against the less fortunate in the congregation* (see 1 Corinthians 11:17–22)

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Overview of 1 Corinthians

- Date and Place of Origin: A.D. 56–57 from Ephesus
- Audience: **Mixed Jewish and Gentile church at Corinth**
- Authorship: **Paul's role not disputed**; **Sosthenes is listed as a coauthor** (1:1)
 - He was the **ruler of the synagogue in Corinth in Acts 18:17** and seems to have been an opponent of Paul then—*apparently he later converted!*
 - As an observant Jew in pagan and immoral Corinth, *Sosthenes would have been particularly sensitive to moral issues and customs of dress and worship*
 - *How did this affect, perhaps, some of the more controversial sections of 1 Corinthians (e.g., role of women)*
- Unity
 - **Some suggest that lack of unified coherence or structure has suggested it is a conflation of two or more letters**
 - *Lack of cohesion may be explained by Paul's choice of addressing many concerns raised by different groups*
- Problems in Corinth: **Internal divisions, pride over special knowledge and gifts, moral misbehavior arising from doctrinal misunderstandings**

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Literary Questions about 1 Corinthians

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 WHAT KIND OF LETTER IS IT? WHAT KIND OF WRITING AND
 RHETORIC DOES PAUL USE IN IT? HOW IS THE LETTER
 STRUCTURED?

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Letter Type and Style

- **1 and 2 Corinthians are real letters of exhortation and pastoral counsel**
 - Consists of direction and correction from a general leader to local leaders
- Rhetorical style: **akin to deliberative, or persuasive, oratory meant for an assembly (middle level)**
- Paul employs **a style of questions and debate**, responding to quoted statements sent to him by the Corinthians
 - Results in **a lively, spirited discussion of vital Christian issues**
 - At times resorts to ***diatribe***, pedagogical discourse consisting of conversational style that includes rhetorical questions and strong rebuttals (“Shall x be? God forbid!”)

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Structure and Subjects of 1 Corinthians

- **Opening Formula (1:1-3)**
- **Thanksgiving (1:4-9)**
- **Body (1:10-16:18)**
 - **Factions (1:10-4:21, indicative)**
 - **Moral Misbehavior (5:1-11:1, imperative)**
 - Problems of Sex and Property (5:1-6:20)
 - Problems of Marriage and Celibacy (7:1-40)
 - Christian Freedom and Its Abuse (8:1-11:1)
 - **Correct and Incorrect Christian Worship (11:2-14:40, imperative)**
 - The Veiling of Women (11:2-16)
 - The Lord's Supper (11:17-34)
 - Misunderstanding and Misusing Spiritual Gifts (12:1-14:40)
- **Doctrinal Correction: the Nature of the Resurrection and its Application to Christians (15:1-58, indicative)**
 - The Resurrection of Christ (15:1-11)
 - The Resurrection of the Dead (15:12-23)
 - The Resurrected Body (15:35-58)
- **Housekeeping: Collection for Jerusalem Poor, Paul's Plans, Commendations (16:1-18, indicative)**
- **Concluding Formula (16:19-24)**

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Teachings and Admonitions in 1 Corinthians: Factionalism and Division (1 Cor 1:1-4:21)

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*“NOW I BESEECH YOU, BRETHREN, BY THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THAT YE ALL SPEAK THE SAME THING, AND THAT THERE BE NO DIVISIONS AMONG YOU; BUT THAT YE BE PERFECTLY JOINED TOGETHER IN THE SAME MIND AND IN THE SAME JUDGMENT.
(1CORINTHIANS 1:10)*

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Corinthian Factions (1:10-4:21)

- Statement of the Problem (1:10-12)
 - “Brothers, **I urge you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, not to have factions among yourselves** but all to *be in agreement in what you profess; so that you are perfectly united in your beliefs and judgments.*” (1:10 NJB)
- Arguments against Factions (1:13-3:23)
 - Factions Put Men in the Place of Christ (1:13-17)
 - **Wisdom of Men and the “Foolishness” of God (1:18-2:5)**
 - **Proclaiming Christ Crucified (2:1-5)**
 - **True Wisdom Not Present in Factions (2:6-3:4)**
 - Milk Not Meat (3:1-4)
 - Apostles Are Not Rivals But Fellow Workers (3:5-15)

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The Stumbling Block

- “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 NRSV; cf. KJV “which are saved”)
- “For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim **Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews** and **foolishness to Gentiles**, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1:22–24)
- The law of Moses had proclaimed that one whose body was hung on a tree was accursed (Deuteronomy 21:23)
- For the Greeks—as for Gentiles in the Roman world generally—crucifixion was seen as the most shameful of punishments, one reserved for slaves and non-citizen rebels
- *Perhaps because his principle audiences felt so much revulsion at the way in which Jesus died that they were distracted from the wonderful effects of His suffering, death, and resurrection, Paul chose instead to focus on the very image that was such a stumbling block*
 - **LDS Doctrine of the Cross?** See 3 Nephi 27:13–14

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“Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2)

- Although the cross subsequently came to be the most common symbol for Jesus and His atonement for much of Christianity, **in the New Testament the use of the image of the cross as a symbol of the saving death of Jesus Christ was a particular characteristic of Paul**
 - See also 2 Corinthians 13:4; Galatians 5:11; 6:14; Colossians 1:20; 2:14; Ephesians 2:16; Philippians 2:8
- Outside the crucifixion scenes themselves in Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, and John 19, forms of the noun “cross” and the verb “crucify” appear in the gospels only **metaphorically of trials** (see, for example, Matthew 10:38) or in **predictions before or recollections after Jesus’ actual crucifixion**
- While the speeches of Peter as recorded in Acts indicate that he too preached the crucifixion (Acts 2:23; 2:36; and 4:10), **Peter often described the means of the Savior’s death metaphorically as being hung upon a tree** (Acts 5:30; 1 Peter 2:24)
- Significantly, the cross or the crucifixion is notably absent in the letters of John, James, and Jude

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The Mystery of the Wisdom of God

- Power and station in this world are nothing compared to the blessings of the wisdom of God and future glory
 - “**But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery**, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory . . . But as it is written, **Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.**” (2:7–9)
- Knowledge and learning of man are nothing compared to the wisdom that comes by revelation and the spirit
 - “**But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit**: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God . . . even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.” (2:10–11)

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Apostles and Faction Leaders Contrasted (4:1–13)

- Stewards should be faithful, but nonetheless **the Corinthians should not judge (sc. condemn) Paul and his coworkers**
- Likewise the Corinthian faction leaders **should not judge each other or aggrandize themselves**
 - “For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?” (4:7 NRSV)
- Faction leaders contrast markedly with the behavior and experience of the apostles
 - “For I think that **God hath set forth us the apostles last**, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. *We are fools for Christ's sake*, but **‘ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ‘ye are strong; ye are honourable,’** but *we are despised.* (4:9–10)
 - Here and elsewhere (see 6:12–13), **Paul seems to be quoting slogans or claims made by the Corinthians**, which he sets up as straw men so he can counter them
- Paul follows this with a **Personal Appeal and Fatherly Admonition (4:14–21)**

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The Church belongs to Christ

Apostles Are Not Rivals But Fellow Workers (3:5-15)

- **The image of the field and the fellow laborers (3:6-9b)**
 - “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase” (3:6)
- **The image of the building and testing the builders’ work (3:9c-15)**
- **The Body of Christ as the temple of God (3:16-17; cf. 6:15, 19-20)**
 - “Know ye not that **ye are the temple of God**, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in **you**? If any man defile **the temple of God**, him shall God destroy; for **the temple of God is holy**, which **temple ye are** (3:16-17)
 - Note that “**ye/you**” is plural, referring to the saints in Corinth, and “**temple**” is singular
 - Strict exegesis sees this passage as referring to the church as the body of Christ standing as the “temple of God”
 - Modern exposition, of course, can use this passage to teach another truth, namely that **our individual bodies are the temples of both our own spirits and the Holy Ghost** (see Mosiah 2:37; Alma 7:21; 34:36; Helaman 4:24)
- **Those who would lead should be servants and “as fools” (3:18-23)**