

1 CORINTHIANS

1. Questions.

- a. If Paul received a report of our local church, what would he hear?
- b. If Paul wrote a letter to our local church, what would be his top concerns?
- c. What are some things that could divide us?
- d. If we could send a list of five questions to Paul, what would we ask?
- e. How do we as the church address the pluralist, postmodern culture we're living with a worldview that we believe to be the only absolutely truth?
- f. Is your family falling apart because of technology or some other addiction?
- g. To what degree are we to "judge" one another in the church?
- h. How do we handle differences of theological emphasis in the local church?
- i. Are believers who live like unbelievers still saved?
- j. How do we handle conflict between Christians?
- k. Should Christians remain single?
- l. For Christians, is divorce ever acceptable? What about remarriage?
- m. What is the standard for Christians in terms of our sexual lives?
- n. Can a person actively practicing LGBTQ activities be saved?
- o. Should women wear head coverings when they pray today?
- p. Is prophecy and speaking in tongues for today?
- q. Is it right for pastors and other ministers to get a salary?
- r. Why is it important to relate every aspect of Christian faith and behaviour to the person and work of Jesus? Can you think of issues or situations where Christians have all too obviously failed to do this?¹

2. Corinth.

- a. Geography.
 - (1) The harbor of Cenchreae (5-8 km away) faces east across the Saronic Gulf to Asia and Ephesus. The harbor of Lechaem (2 km away) faces west across the Corinthian Gulf to Italy and the west.²
 - (2) Treacherous winds made the six-day alternative route around the southern cape of the Peloponnese exceedingly dangerous for ships, especially in winter.³
 - (3) Its *diolkos* was a paved roadway built across the isthmus at its narrowest point of six kms.⁴

¹ Derek Prime, [Opening up 1 Corinthians](#), Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2005), 13.

² Anthony C. Thiselton, [The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1.

³ Anthony C. Thiselton, [The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 2.

⁴ Anthony C. Thiselton, [The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1.

- (4) Very important where the Peirene springs with “an average flow rate of 18 cubic metres per hour, enough to supply the needs of a large city.”⁵
- (5) The steep, high Acrocorinth (574 m) towered over all.
- b. History.
 - (1) It was destroyed by the Romans in 146 bc and rebuilt by Julius Caesar in 46 bc.
 - (a) The formal name of the Roman colony was *Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis*, “colony of Corinth in Honor of Julius.”
 - (2) In 27 bc it became the Roman capital of Achaia, where the proconsul lived.
 - (a) **Ac 18:12** 12 But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal....
 - (3) Much of Corinth was destroyed in an earthquake in ad 77, after which there was extensive rebuilding.
- c. Commerce.
 - (1) It was the commercial crossroads between the eastern and western empire.⁶
 - (a) “Corinth is called ‘wealthy’ because of its commerce, since it is situated on the Isthmus and is master of two harbours, of which one leads straight to Asia, and the other to Italy; and it makes easy the exchange of merchandise from both countries.”⁷
 - (2) It was “the common emporium of Europe and Asia” and “the market and festival of the Greeks.”⁸
 - (3) The commercial and business prosperity of the city, as well as its competitiveness, pragmatism, and pluralism makes it similar to the twenty-first century West.⁹
 - (4) By the second century ad it became the largest city in Greece.¹⁰
 - (5) It was a communications hub.
 - (a) “Corinth was a pluralistic melting pot of cultures, philosophies, life-styles, and religions, and had the economic feel of a ‘boom-town.’”¹¹
 - (6) Compared to Corinth, Athens was a sleepy university town (like Dunedin compared to Auckland).¹²

⁵ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 3.

⁶ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1.

⁷ Strabo.

⁸ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 2.

⁹ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000, 10.

¹⁰ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 2.

¹¹ S. J. Hafemann, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 173.

¹² Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 18.

- (a) “Corinth offered advantages which Athens lacked.... The latter was an old sick city whose past was infinitely more glorious than its present.... Athens was no longer either productive or creative...a mediocre university town.... As a centre of learning it had been surpassed even by Tarsus.”¹³
- d. People.
 - (1) In 44 bc Julius Caesar populated the city with military veterans, freed slaves, artisans, tradespeople, and laborers.
 - (2) Many immigrants came from from Greece, Macedonia, Syria, and Judea.
 - (3) Although in Greece, the city had a Roman feel about it.
 - (4) Corinth also had a large Jewish community, especially after the edict of Claudius. A Jewish synagogue was in the lower city.
 - (a) **Ac 18:4** 4 And [Paul] reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.
- e. Culture.
 - (1) Entrepreneurial competitiveness.
 - (a) Cosmopolitan immigration and trade. Market forces in business and rhetoric.
 - (b) “‘Wealthy Corinth’ was based on *an economy of market exchange of goods and services* in the traditions of keen business practices, including competition and the pursuit of pragmatic success.”¹⁴
 - (c) Corinth was a place where winning in the marketplace was far more important than personal integrity or adherence to an established code of ethics.¹⁵
 - (2) Prosperity, success, and self-sufficiency.
 - (3) Religious pluralism.
 - (a) There were temples dedicated to Poseidon, Aphrodite, Apollo, Demeter, Kore, and Asclepius.¹⁶
 - (4) Sexual deviancy.
 - (a) The steep, high Acrocorinth (574 m) contained the temple of Aphrodite, where 1,000 female slave-prostitutes were available.
 - (b) Aristophanes (d. 385 bc) coined the term *korinthiazesthai* (“to act like a Corinthian,” i.e., “to commit fornication”). Plato used the term “Corinthian girl” as an euphemism for a prostitute.¹⁷
 - (c) “What goes in Corinth, stays in Corinth.”
 - (5) Athletic games.
 - (a) “The Isthmian Games were one of the three or perhaps four great pan-Hellenic festivals, were celebrated biennially, and provided considerable income for the city. The remains of the Games held in ad 49 shortly before Paul’s arrival in

¹³ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 18.

¹⁴ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 4.

¹⁵ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 15.

¹⁶ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 6.

¹⁷ S. J. Hafemann, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 172-73.

Corinth... and the huge crowds which came to Corinth during the Games, which took place while Paul was ministering in Corinth (ad 51), would have been a significant part of the world of the Corinth that Paul knew”¹⁸

- (b) “From the period of Tiberius (before ad 37) the program of events expanded as time went on, including events in honor of the emperors (every four years), a poetry competition, musical competitions in trumpets, flutes, and lyres, and a range of athletic events and chariot races. In the *apobatikon* one rider would ride several horses, leaping from one to another. Kent observes that athletic contests for women were ‘a striking innovation in the Isthmian festival under the Empire.’”¹⁹
- (c) **1 Co 9:24-27** 24 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. 25 Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. 26 So I do not run aimlessly. I do not box as one beating the air. 27 But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.
- (6) Self-promotion.
- (a) Recognition in a socially constructed world. Peer-group prestige.
- (b) “Corinth was a city where public boasting and self-promotion had become an art form. The Corinthian people thus lived with an honor-shame cultural orientation, where public recognition was often more important than facts.... In such a culture a person’s sense of worth is based on recognition by others of one’s accomplishments, hence the self-promoting public inscriptions.”²⁰
- (c) Orators were driven by adulation. They sought to win a following rather than to clearly express the truth, as in the case of today’s chat show hosts or mass media personalities.²¹
- (d) **1 Co 14:4** 4 The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church.
- (7) Postmodernism.
- (a) In general Corinthians prioritised the local over universal traditions, was obsessed with pragmatic success at the expense of truth, and aimed at social recognition and manipulation against argument and rationality.²²
- (b) “Corinthian culture has much in common with the social constructivism, competitive pragmatism, and radical pluralism which characterizes so-called

¹⁸ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 10.

¹⁹ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 11.

²⁰ Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 21.

²¹ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 15.

²² Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 40-41.

postmodernity as a popular mood, whether or not in strictly chronological terms it precedes, rather than follows, Western ‘modernity.’”²³

- (c) “With today’s ‘postmodern’ mood we may compare the self-sufficient, self-congratulatory culture of Corinth coupled with an obsession about peer-group prestige, success in competition, their devaluing of tradition and universals, and near contempt for those without standing in some chosen value system. All this provides an embarrassingly close model of a postmodern context for the gospel in our own times, even given the huge historical differences and distances in so many other respects.”²⁴
- (d) **1 Co 14:7** 7 If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played?
- (8) In significant ways, the culture of Corinth is like our own culture.
 - (a) “The commercial and business prosperity of the city, as well as its competitiveness, pragmatism, and pluralism, brings us nearer to the heart of similarities with, and differences from, some twenty-first century contexts of gospel proclamation.”²⁵
 - (b) “We have set forth above those many features of Corinthian culture...: an obsessive concern to win reputation and status in the eyes of others; self-promotion to gain applause and influence; ambition to succeed often by manipulating networks of power; and above all an emphasis on autonomy and ‘rights.’ It is little wonder that the proclamation of the cross of Christ, entailing the shameful death of a person marginalized from society as an alleged criminal, was perceived by many as an affront (σκάνδαλον) and sheer folly (μωρία...).”²⁶
 - (c) We might call Corinth was the “internet” of the ancient world.
- f. Here is an excellent video about ancient Corinth:



²³ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 14.

²⁴ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 17.

²⁵ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 10.

²⁶ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 21.

3.

4. Paul and the Corinthians.

- a. Paul's first visit to Corinth (Ac 18:1-23).
 - (1) The widely agreed date of Paul's ministry in Corinth is from March ad 50 to around late September ad 51,²⁷ during his second missionary journey.
 - (2) Paul viewed Corinth as a strategic location for the spread of the church.
 - (a) "In Paul's eyes the prize of Corinth as a strategic center for the spread of the gospel deserved and demanded close attention and pastoral care."²⁸
 - (b) Paul's self-humiliation, his assumption of a servant role was directly at variance with the expected and accepted values of Corinthian city culture. "In a city where social climbing was a major preoccupation, Paul's deliberate stepping down in apparent status would have been seen by many as disturbing, disgusting, and even provocative."²⁹
 - (c) There was an abundant demand for Paul's trade as a tentmaker.³⁰
 - (3) Paul consciously took a different approach (just as Jesus took a different approach when he came into our world).
 - (a) **1 Co 2:1-5** 1 And I, when I came to you, brothers and sisters, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or "wisdom." 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Messiah and him crucified. 3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, 4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.
 - (b) The biblical worldview Paul is preaching differs substantially with the dominant Corinthian world view of "postmodernism." Paul is closer to Cicero than he is to Corinthian culture.
 - (c) Paul rebuts Corinthian postmodernism in basically two ways: appeals to scripture, and appeals to reason based on shared or partially unstated premises. Paul refuses to use rhetoric to psychologically exploit his audience.
 - (d) Paul earned his keep as a tentmaker and proclaimed the cross of Messiah.
 - (4) Paul stayed for 18 months in Corinth in the home of Aquila and Prisca.
 - (a) **1 Co 16:19** 19 Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord.
 - (b) Aquila and Prisca probably came to the Christian faith earlier in Rome, and were probably freed persons of Jewish origin who left Rome in ad 49 when the emperor Claudius closed down a Roman synagogue because of disturbances around Jesus.³¹

²⁷ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 28-29.

²⁸ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 29.

²⁹ Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 21.

³⁰ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 17.

³¹ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 23.

- (c) Like Paul, they were Jewish tentmakers/leather workers.
 - 1) Suetonius speaks of an edict of Claudius leading to the expulsion of Jews “*impulsore Chresto.*”
- (5) Paul routinely engaged in arduous physical labour as an artisan.
 - (a) **1 Th 2:9** 9 For you remember, brothers and sisters, our labor and toil. We worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.
 - (b) **2 Th 3:7-8** 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, 8 nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you.
 - (c) **1 Co 4:11-12** 11 To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed, buffeted, and homeless, 12 and we labor, working with our own hands.
 - (d) **1 Co 9:6** 6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living?
 - (e) **2 Co 11:27** 27 ...In toil and hardship....
 - (f) “Paul’s suffering is the very vehicle which God has ordained to validate his apostleship....”³²
- (6) As a visiting rabbi, Paul was allowed to preach in the synagogue every Sabbath.
 - (a) **Ac 18:4** 4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.
 - 1) Note “preaching Messiah crucified” involves reason and persuasion.
- (7) Silas and Timothy brought a monetary gift from the Philippian church (2 Co 11:9; Php 4:14-16). This enabled Paul to concentrate full time on preaching.
 - (a) **Ac 18:5** 5 When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Messiah was Jesus.
 - (b) Paul wrote 1-2 Thessalonians from Corinth.
- (8) Jews who did not accept his preaching on Jesus’ messiahship became abusive and expelled him from the synagogue.
 - (a) **Ac 18:6** 6 And when they opposed and reviled [Paul], he shook out his garments and said to them, Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.
- (9) Paul established a “rival” synagogue next door at the house of Titius Justus.
 - (a) **Ac 18:7** 7 And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the synagogue.
- (10) Many became Christians, including Crispus, the synagogue ruler.
 - (a) **Ac 18:8** 8 Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.
- (11) Jesus personally appeared to Paul to encourage him to continue his ministry in Corinth.

³² S. J. Hafemann, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 178.

- (a) **Ac 18:9-10** 9 And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, 10 for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.
- (12) Paul continued on for a total of 18 months.
- (a) **Ac 18:11** 11 And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.
- (13) Eventually the Jews took Paul civil court.
- (a) **Ac 18:12** 12 But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal,
- (14) The Roman procurator Gallio dismissed the case for lack of subject matter jurisdiction in late spring ad 51.
- (a) **Ac 18:14-17** 14 But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. 15 But because it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things. 16 And he drove them from the tribunal (βῆμα). 17 And they all seized Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to any of this.
- (15) Paul eventually left Corinth with Aquila and Priscilla and sailed for Ephesus.
- (a) **Ac 18:18** 18 After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila.
- b. Apollos' visit to Corinth.
- (1) **Ac 18:27-28** 27 And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived [to Corinth], he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, 28 for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Messiah was Jesus.
- (2) **Ac 19:1** 1 And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus.
- (3) **1 Co 3:6** 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.
- (4) Paul wanted Apollos to return to Corinth, but Apollos declined.
- (a) **1 Co 16:12** 12 Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brothers, but it was not at all his will to come now. He will come when he has opportunity.
- c. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians ("Previous Letter").
- (1) During Paul's three years at Ephesus (Ac 19)(ad 53-55/56), he wrote at least four letters to Corinth and made at least two visits.
- (2) Paul's epistles were letters to everyday people in the everyday world.³³
- (3) **1 Co 5:9-11** 9 I wrote to you in my *letter* not to associate with sexually immoral people— 10 not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.
- d. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians (*1 Corinthians*)(ad 54).

³³ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 25.

- (1) In ad 55, upon hearing reports from Chloe's people, Paul dictated a second letter (1 Co 1-4).
 - (a) **1 Co 1:11** 11 For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarrelling among you, my brothers and sisters.
- (2) Before this letter was dispatched, Paul received a letter from Corinth brought by three messengers—Stephanus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus. Paul responds to this letter in 1 Co 7-15.
 - (a) **1 Co 7:1** 1 Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.
 - (b) **1 Co 16:17-18** 17 I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence, 18 for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such people.
 - (c) The Corinthians' seven question to Paul concerned:
 - 1) Marriage (1 Co 7:1-40).
 - 2) Meat sacrificed to idols (1 Co 8:1-13).
 - 3) Worship services (1 Co 11:2-16).
 - 4) The Lord's supper (1 Co 11:17-34).
 - 5) Spiritual gifts (1 Co 12:1-14:40).
 - 6) Resurrection from the dead (1 Co 15:1-58).
 - 7) A monetary collection for Jewish believers (1 Co 16:1-4).³⁴
- (3) These messengers probably supplied the news to which Paul responds in 1 Co 5-6.
 - (a) **1 Co 5:1** 1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife.
- (4) Paul probably wrote the letter over a few weeks. When the letter was complete, Paul signed it himself.
 - (a) **1 Co 16:21-24** 21 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. 22 If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come! 23 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. 24 My love be with you all in Messiah Jesus. Amen.
- (5) The completed *1 Corinthians* was probably sent back in the hands of the same three messengers—Stephanus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus.
 - (a) **1 Co 16:15-16** 15 Now I urge you, brothers and sisters—you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints— 16 be subject to such as these, and to every co-worker and co-labourer.
- (6) On arrival the letter would be read aloud to the church. Very few would have read it privately in silence as individuals.³⁵
- (7) *1 Corinthians* is definitely genuine.

³⁴ Derek Prime, [Opening up 1 Corinthians](#), Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2005), 11-12.

³⁵ Anthony C. Thiselton, [The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 44.

- (a) We have a Greek manuscript of the entire letter which dates from around ad 200 (P⁴⁶), no more than 150 years after Paul wrote the epistle. This is far earlier than any of the near complete manuscripts of the gospels.³⁶
- e. Timothy's second visit to the Corinthians.
- (1) **1 Co 16:10-11** 10 When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. 11 So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers.
- f. Paul's third letter to Corinth ("letter of tears").
- (1) **2 Co 2:3-4** 3 And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. 4 For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.
- g. Paul's second visit to Corinth ("painful visit").
- (1) **1 Co 4:21** 21 What do you wish? Shall I [Paul] come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?
- (2) **2 Co 2:1** 1 For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you.
- (3) Most scholars agree this "painful visit" occurred between the writing of 1 and 2 Corinthians, and this is probably the case.³⁷
- h. Paul's third letter to the Corinthians (*2 Corinthians*).
- i. Paul's third visit to Corinth.
- (1) **2 Co 12:14** 14 Here for the third time I am ready to come to you.
- (2) **2 Co 13:1** 1 This is the third time I am coming to you.
- (3) This is probably when Paul wrote *Romans*.
- j. Clement's letter to the Corinthians (*1 Clement*).
- (1) Clement wrote a letter to the Corinthian church around ad [].
- k. Summary.
- (1) Paul did everything he could to see the Corinthian church succeed.
- (2) Given Paul had ministered at Corinth for 18 months, the credibility of his ministry and Christianity in general was at stake.

5. The Corinthian Church.

- a. People.
- (1) The majority of believers in Corinth were from the lower class, and some were slaves.
- (a) **1 Co 1:26** 26 ...Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.
- (b) **1 Co 7:21** 21 Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.)
- (2) However, there were upper class persons as well.

³⁶ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 36.

³⁷ Verlyn D. Verbrugge, "1 Corinthians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans–Galatians (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III & Garland, David E., vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 246.

- (a) Gaius, Stephanas, and Crispus represent prominent persons of high rank, esteem, and probably wealth, respectively, within the Roman, Greek, and Jewish communities.³⁸
- (b) **Ro 16:23** 23 Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.
 - 1) “An area paved with limestone from Acrocorinth contains the remains of an inscription once filled with bronze, *Erastus pro aedilit[at]e s[ua] p[ecunia] stravit*. ‘Erastus in return for his adileship laid [the pavement] at his own expense.’ Kent records that this was found *in situ* east of the theater in April 1929. In 1966 Kent observed that ‘the original suggestion that Erastus is to be identified with the Corinthian Erastus of the NT (Rom 16:23) still seems sound.’”³⁹
- (3) Some of the wealthier members of the church in Corinth took a superior attitude.
 - (a) **1 Co 11:22** 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.
 - (4) Many of the Corinthian believers had come from an idolatrous background.
 - (a) **1 Co 12:2** 2 You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led.
 - (b) Even though many wanted to separate themselves from their pagan past, this did not always translate into different moral behavior.
- b. Problems.⁴⁰
 - (1) Divisions/factionalism/personality-driven politics (1 Co 1:10-17; 3:1-23).
 - (a) The Pauline group stressed Paul’s slogans of liberty.
 - (b) The Petrine group the need to hold to Jewish practices
 - (c) The Apollos group the value of philosophical understanding and oratory.
 - (2) Arrogance (1 Co []).
 - (3) Sexual immorality, ethical laxity (1 Co 5:1-13; 6:12-20).
 - (4) Lawsuits among believers (1 Co 6:1-11).
 - (5) Marriage, celibacy, and divorce (1 Co 7:10-17).
 - (6) Meat associated with pagan worship (1 Co 8:1-13).
 - (7) Abuse of Christian freedom (1 Co 8).
 - (8) Dress codes in public worship (1 Co 11:[]).
 - (9) Divisions over the Lord’s supper (1 Co 11:[]).
 - (10) Abuse of spiritual gifts (1 Co 12:1-14:40).
 - (11) Uncertainty about resurrection (1 Co 15:1-58).
- c. Position.
 - (1) Paul considers his audience to be believers, not unbelievers.
 - (a) See *The Three Phases in 1 Corinthians*.

³⁸ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 28.

³⁹ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 9.

⁴⁰ Derek Prime, *Opening up 1 Corinthians*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2005), 11.

- (b) As mixed up as some of the Corinthian believers are, they are still believers. This is hugely important in interpreting the letter. Unbelievers may attend, but Paul isn't writing to them. He is writing to the believers in the congregation.

6. Distinctives.⁴¹

- a. It is one of the earliest New Testament books written.
- b. It gives comprehensive insight into problems faced by a church in pagan society.
- c. It lays down principles for church order and discipline not found elsewhere.
- d. It provides important instructions on divorce and remarriage.
- e. It gives the Bible's most detailed discussion of spiritual gifts.
- f. It supplies the most systematic discussion about physical resurrection.

7. Theme.

a. Major

- (1) “[T]he unifying theme of the epistle is a *reproclamation of the different value system of grace, gifts, the cross, and the resurrection as divine verdict, criterion, and status bestowal within the new framework of respect and love for the less esteemed “other.” Glorifying in the Lord and receiving status derived from identification with the crucified Christ (1:30–31) lead to a new value system demonstrable in a wide array of life issues.*”⁴²
- (2) “The thing for which to watch is the way in which Paul consistently relates every subject and problem to the centrality of the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Most of the problems and difficulties of the Corinthian church arose from their losing sight of him and his Headship. The enemy of our souls encourages that same peril today.”⁴³

b. Minor.⁴⁴

- (1) Unity in the church.
- (2) Roles of church leaders.
- (3) Church discipline.
 - (a) “The church has to take seriously the fact that it is the redeemed and sanctified community of Christ. Therefore, anyone in their midst who deliberately chooses a life of disobedience and flagrant violation of God’s law has no right to remain a church member. He or she must be expelled from the fellowship through some sort of official procedure (5:1–5, 12–13).”⁴⁵
- (4) Sexual behaviour.

⁴¹ Derek Prime, *Opening up 1 Corinthians*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2005), 10-11.

⁴² Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 40-41.

⁴³ Derek Prime, *Opening up 1 Corinthians*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2005), 12.

⁴⁴ Richard L. Pratt Jr, *I & II Corinthians*, vol. 7, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 2.

⁴⁵ Verlyn D. Verbrugge, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Romans–Galatians (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III & Garland, David E., vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 253.

- (5) Marriage and divorce.
 - (6) Christian freedom and responsibility.
 - (7) Interaction with the pagan world.
 - (8) Proper behaviour in worship.
 - (9) Love and ministering to others' needs.
- c. Underlying Theology.
- (1) Trinitarian monotheism.
 - (2) Humility of Jesus.
 - (3) Jesus' resurrection and ours.

8. Purpose.

- a. Paul's goals are for the Corinthian church:
- (1) To be unified and focused on Jesus (chs. 1-2).
 - (2) To encourage the exercise of church discipline to maintain purity (chs. []).
 - (3) To correctly employ spiritual gifts (chs. 12-14).
 - (4) To be convinced of bodily resurrection (ch. 15).
- b. 1 Corinthians is a problem-solving book. The ultimate goal is for the Corinthian church to be a healthy local church, like an engine running on all cylinders.

9. Paul's Literary Approach.

- a. Paul's intent is informative and transformative. He addresses the "whole person" (reason, emotions, desires, attitude, will, and action), not simply the addressee as mere mind.⁴⁶
- b. Paul requires the Corinthian church to heed "the tradition" observed in "all the churches" (1 Co 1:2; 3:13, 18, 22; 10:24; 11:2, 16, 17, 23; 14:36).⁴⁷
- c. When Paul has to raise an issue, his tone is more emphatic and indignant. When he is responding to the Corinthian's questions, his tone is calmer and gentler.⁴⁸
- d. Discovering slogans of the Corinthians in this letter is not always easy.⁴⁹
- (1) **1 Co 1:12** 12 What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ."
 - (2) **1 Co 6:12** 12 "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything.
 - (3) **1 Co 7:1** 1 Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman."
 - (4) **1 Co 10:23** 23 "All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up.

⁴⁶ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 41.

⁴⁷ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 42.

⁴⁸ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 35.

⁴⁹ Verlyn D. Verbrugge, "1 Corinthians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans–Galatians (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III & Garland, David E., vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 250.

- (5) **1 Co 14:33-36** 33 For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, 34 the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. 35 If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. 36 Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached?
- (6) **1 Co 15:12** 12 Now if Messiah is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?
- e. Epistemologically and rhetorically, Paul appeals to Scripture, Christian tradition, reasoning from shared premises.⁵⁰
- (1) “[W]hile the concern for *facts, truth, and rationality* remains central to the more ‘classical’ Roman attitudes of Cicero and Quintilian, the reductive and contrived ‘instrumental’ rationality and rhetoric *which looks not for truth but for applause and success* characterizes more readily the kind of competitive rhetoric which was most highly prized at Corinth. For Cicero and his later follower Quintilian (ad 40–95), rhetoric belonged to the area of liberal education, which trained the mind and searched for truth. It concerned the expression of rational thought in communicative action. By contrast, Pogoloff associates the pragmatic rhetoric of nonclassical provincial Corinth with a parallel move today “in contrast to modernist epistemologies...to anti-foundational linguistic hermeneutics.”⁵¹

10. Reflections.

- a. What would Paul say to us if he gave us a problem-solving letter. What problems would he identify and seek to correct?
- b. We have got to go against the grain in the way we think and the habits we form.
- (1) “Although premodern Corinth never passed through ‘modernity,’ Paul’s respect for classical, rational argument alongside his acute awareness of the molding power of the cross and the Holy Spirit stood in contrast to the seductions of more fragmented peer-group pressures experienced by many at Corinth. To them Paul re-proclaims the noncompetitive gift of grace, the humbling ‘reversals’ of the cross, and respect for the otherness of ‘the other’ within a dialectic of ordered difference and unity. In so doing, he speaks powerfully to the world of today, emphasizing as well the christological criteria of ‘spirituality,’ love for the other in building the whole, and the transformative promise of the resurrection of the whole person when giftedness by the Holy Spirit will become unhindered, transparent, and complete.”⁵²
- (2) This is especially true in how we manage lives at home. Marriage and parenting.
- c. We need more tough love in the church (and society in general).
- d. We are a small church. The benefit of that is that none of us can really hide.

⁵⁰ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 50.

⁵¹ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 14.

⁵² Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), xviii.

- e. Should we pat a Christian on the back when, in reality, they are clearly not obeying the principles of Scripture?
- f. Mediocrity begets mediocrity. Excellence begets excellence.
- g. Donkeys run with donkeys. Thoroughbred run with thoroughbreds.
- h. How much does the church allow before church discipline is actually exercised?

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