

Key to I CORINTHIANS

1. BACKGROUND

Writer is Paul (Acts 18:1-18). Place of writing is Ephesus, about A.D. 59, near the close of Paul's ministry there (20:31). Corinth was a city in southern Greece, rich, populous, and highly immoral. Paul had visited there for 18 months, establishing a large church.

After Paul had left, numerous questions arose as to life and conduct. Paul had heard rumors (1:11) and had received a letter asking questions (7:1). Hence this letter to the Corinthian church, dealing with practical matters of the Christian life.

2. THEME

The subject is Christian living. Sincerely and frankly the apostle deals with factions in the church, immoral conduct of one of its members, lawsuits against Christians, marriage and divorce. Christian liberty, separation from sinners, conduct at the LORD's Table, distribution and exercise of spiritual gifts, problems connected with the gift of tongues, truth of the resurrection. It is easy to feel the grief, solicitude, and holy indignation the apostle feels on these vital matters of conduct.

3. MAIN DIVISIONS

There can be no rigid analysis of the contents of I Corinthians. The apostle takes one subject after another and deals with it.

The divisions are the topics under discussion.

4. SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS:

It should be noted that chapter 1, verse 2, shows the scope of this practical letter to be "**all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ.**"

While it is true that Paul speaks in true affection, still there is an utter absence of compromise. He "pulls no punches" nor does he "soft pedal" any basic truth. With error of any kind, Paul is a stern taskmaster.

Interposed between many of Paul's corrective teachings is positive doctrine such as:

- (1) the truth about the Christian's rewards (3:11-15);
- (2) the teaching about the HOLY SPIRIT's indwelling (6:19, 20);
- (3) the mystery of the rapture of the Church (15:51, 52).

5. OUTLINE:

Introduction (1:1-9)
Divisions Deplored (1:10-4:21)
Discipline Directed (5; 6)
Difficulties Discussed (7-11)
Spiritual Gifts (12-14)
The Resurrection (15)
Conclusion (16)

6. OUTSTANDING TEACHINGS:

What contempt and shame Paul pours on the divisions forming in the church 1:11-17: **"Is Christ divided?"**

Corinth was a center of worldly wisdom. But the cross of CHRIST is the antithesis of worldly wisdom. Chapters 1 and 2 deal thoroughly with this.

The question of meat offered to idols serves as an illustration for a vital Christian life principle. Can we afford to do anything, even though it may appear to be innocent, or harmless, if such a practice harms a weaker brother?

The important subject of the LORD's Table had evidently become the subject of a special revelation from the LORD to Paul. In chapter 11 he severely rebukes disorders there, and warns concerning who may partake.

The subject of "spiritual gifts," especially the matter of the gift of "tongues," is satisfactorily dealt with in 12-14.

Another mountain peak is the lovely chapter 15 about the Resurrection.

7. KEY:

Just understand I Corinthians for what it is, GOD's answer to many problems in the Christian life. There are some basic principles here too.

~ end of I Corinthians ~

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