



# BOOKS OF THE BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS

by WAYNE PALMER

## 1 CORINTHIANS



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3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, MO 63118-3968  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Book of 1 Corinthians focuses on how the Gospel of Christ crucified unites us, especially in a diverse, cosmopolitan city like Corinth.

## **AUTHORSHIP**

The Book of 1 Corinthians was written by the apostle Paul.

## **PURPOSE**

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to unite a congregation that had divided into various groups and parties, each vying against the other for honor, prestige, and power.

## **OUTLINE**

First Corinthians can be divided into eight sections:

- 1.** Greeting (1:1–3)
- 2.** Thanksgiving (1:4–9)
- 3.** Conflict over Divisions (1:10–4:21)
- 4.** Compromise and Conflict in Corinth (Chapters 5–6)
- 5.** Response to Questions Raised by the Corinthians (7:1–11:1)
- 6.** Freedom and Love in Worship and the Use of Gifts (11:2–14:40)
- 7.** The Resurrection of the Dead (Chapter 15)
- 8.** Final Matters (Chapter 16)

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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### GREETING (1:1–3)

After establishing his apostolic authority to write this letter (and expectation that the Corinthians will obey him), Paul subtly points out his goal behind writing this letter.

**Read 1:1–3.**

**Q 1: How does Paul stress the unity he longs to see among the Corinthians?**

A 1: He lifts their thinking above earthly distinctions and divisions to remind them they are called to be saints together in Corinth, and with all Christians throughout the world.

**Q 2: What is notable about Paul mentioning Sosthenes (see Acts 18:17)?**

A 2: Sosthenes was a synagogue ruler in Corinth. During Paul's trial in Acts 18, Sosthenes was beaten by the frustrated crowd because they couldn't get their hands on Paul. By calling him "brother," Paul points out that Sosthenes is a fellow believer.

# THANKSGIVING (1:4–9)

Before addressing the problems and issues that confront the Corinthian congregation, Paul focuses on what is going right—giving thanks to God for the strengths He has given it and all believers.

**Read 1:4–9.**

**Q 3:** List the strengths God has given the Corinthians. Which of these strengths can be found in your congregation?

A 3: Their speaking about God and Christ Jesus have been enriched. The testimony or preaching about Christ has been confirmed by the faith that grew as a result. And they lack no spiritual gifts and wait eagerly for Jesus' return on the Last Day.

# CONFLICT OVER DIVISIONS (1:10–4:21)

## 1. REPORT OF THE PROBLEM IN CORINTH

Paul discusses reports he received concerning problems within the Corinthian congregation.

**Read 1:10–17.**

**Q 4: What is the chief problem Paul mentions right at first?**

A 4: The Corinthians are giving too much devotion to the various ministers God has sent them, and not to God the Father and Jesus Christ, who has saved them from sin and given them eternal life.

## 2. THE CROSS AS THE POWER OF GOD

All the divisions result from worldly estimations of wisdom and power. Paul points the Corinthians to consider the weakness and foolishness of Christ crucified, which is the only true strength and life.

**Read 1:18–2:5.**

**Q 5: To what two things does Paul point to encourage his readers to abandon their sinful pride?**

A 5: He points first to the low station in society that most of them possessed before they were brought to faith. Second, he points to his demeanor when he first came among them. He preached to them with fear and trembling.

## 3. THE TRANSFORMING WORK OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD

Paul draws a sharp distinction between unbelievers and those who have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit through God's Word. But sadly, the Corinthians are acting more like unbelievers with their proud divisions.

**Read 2:6–3:4.**

**Q 6: What emotions and actions are evidence the Corinthians are acting as infants in Christ and not mature believers? What examples of great spiritual maturity do you see in your congregation? What evidence of worldly jealousy and strife?**

A 6: The jealousy and strife that rages among the members show that the Corinthians are not acting as mature believers.

## 4. THE SPIRIT AT WORK IN THE CHURCH AND ITS MINISTERS

In order to shift the Corinthians' focus from individual ministers to Christ Himself working through each of these ministers in their various roles, Paul discusses the variety of people God employs to build the faith of His people.

**Read 3:5–23.**

**Q 7: Describe the differences between Paul's ministry and Apollos's?**

A 7: Paul was the missionary who founded the congregation as he came into town and preached the Gospel. When Paul moved on to the next town, Apollos came as the resident pastor to nurture the growing congregation through Word and Sacrament. "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (3:6).

**Q 8: What is the proper way to view the various church workers God has sent to your congregation?**

A 8: Each is a distinct gift through whom God works to benefit every member. Thus each should be treasured and honored among the people of God.

**Q 9: Describe the conflicts you have seen or heard about in congregations when certain members are more loyal to one pastor than another.**

Paul now turns his focus to a group of church leaders despised by some Corinthians: the apostles.

**Read chapter 4.**

**Q 10: How should verses 9–13 warm the Corinthians' hearts toward Paul and his fellow apostles?**

A 10: Paul reminds them of the sufferings he and the other apostles willingly endured for the sake of the Corinthians and all other Christians.

# COMPROMISE AND CONFLICT IN CORINTH (CHAPTERS 5–6)

## 1. AN INCESTUOUS RELATIONSHIP WITH FURTHER IMPLICATIONS

Tolerating sexual immorality harms the Church.

**Read chapter 5.**

**Q 11: How does ignoring sexual sins damage a congregation?**

A 11: Downplaying the serious harm of this sin hardens sinners against repentance, leads to unbelief, and even emboldens others to commit the same sin to their great harm.

## 2. CONFLICT AND THE COURTS

Christians take their conflicts to court.

**Read 6:1–11.**

**Q 12: How do lawsuits among Christians harm our Gospel witness? What should we do instead?**

A 12: We make Jesus look petty and unforgiving. We should resolve our conflicts peacefully, or simply forgive the wrong to demonstrate Christ's patience and forgiveness.

## 3. COMPROMISE IN SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

Our bodies are not meant for sexual immorality.

**Read 6:12–20.**

**Q 13: Why is sexual immorality sinning against our own bodies?**

A 13: Other sins we might commit are external, directly harming other people. But sexual sin directly harms our own bodies and damages our present or future marriages.



# RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE CORINTHIANS (7:1–11:1)

## 1. MARRIAGE, STATUS, CELIBACY, AND WIDOWS

Paul begins addressing the Corinthians' questions. First, is celibacy better than marriage?

**Read chapter 7.**

**Q 14: What is the benefit of marriage for a disciple? What is its cost?**

A 14: Marriage provides a healthy outlet to our human sex drive, allows mutual encouragement, exposes unbelieving spouses to the faith, and lets children be raised in the faith. The greatest costs are extra worries and concerns that can distract a Christian from kingdom work—especially in times of persecution like the Christians faced in the Roman world.

## 2. IDOLS AND EATING

Are Christians free to eat food sacrificed to idols?

**Read 8:1–11:1.**

**Q 15: Who could really be harmed if Corinthians ate the food of idols? What care must we use when exercising our Christian freedom?**

A 15: Since there is only one true God, the Corinthians could eat without harming themselves. But the bigger question was how their eating would affect the faith of those who saw them eating it. Likewise, our freedom to dance, drink alcohol, and enjoy life must never lead weaker people away from God.

# FREEDOM AND LOVE IN WORSHIP AND THE USE OF GIFTS (11:2–14:40)

## 1. GENDER AND PUBLIC WORSHIP

Paul confronts inappropriate clothing choices of women in worship.

**Read 11:2–16.**

**Q 16: What was so scandalous about a woman uncovering her head? Which elements of our culture might Christians be wise to avoid?**

A 16: In Roman culture, wives uncovered their heads to indicate they did not intend to remain faithful to their husbands and were looking for other men.

## 2. THE UNITY CREATED BY THE LORD’S SUPPER AND REBUKE OF THE STATUS DISTINCTIONS IN CORINTH

Divisions in Corinth are destroying more than just congregational unity.

**Read 11:17–34.**

**Q 17: What does it mean to “discern the body” in Holy Communion?**

A 17: First, to recognize Jesus’ true body and blood are actually present in, with, and under the bread and wine; second, to desire the forgiveness His precious body and blood brings; and third, to desire an end of the divisions as they reach true unity in the Body of Christ.

**Q 18: How does verse 30 reveal the loving concern behind “closed Communion”?**

A 18: We close our altars to Christian brothers and sisters who do not confess the biblical teaching that Christ’s body and blood are truly present in Communion. We do this not in selfish pride, but because of genuine concern to protect them from the judgments suffered in Corinth; including weakness, illness, and death.

## 3. THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT FOR SERVICE IN LOVE

The Holy Spirit provides a wide variety of gifts to God’s people, not to divide them, but to build up and unite the Church.

**Read 12:1–11.**

**Q 19: What is the Holy Spirit’s purpose in giving such diverse gifts to His people?**

A 19: So they will use these gifts together in loving service to one another, for the common good of the Bride of Christ.

## 4. THE UNITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

The way God designed the various parts of our body to work together provides us a beautiful picture for how Christ intends His Church to work together.

**Read 12:12–31.**

**Q 20: Why is the body such a fitting way to describe the Church of God? What role do you play in your congregation?**

A 20: God provides for all of our individual needs, so we can focus on glorifying God by loving and serving one another selflessly, just as the various parts of the body work together to enable us to accomplish our goals.

## 5. THE “GREATEST” WAY: LOVE

Paul wraps up his plea for unity by highlighting the great value of love.

**Read chapter 13.**

**Q 21: Why is Paul’s description of love so vital in the context of 1 Corinthians? What difference can such selfless, Christlike love make in your life, your family, and your church?**

A 21: The divisions within the Church in Corinth were based on spiritual immaturity and selfish pride. Paul shows the divine qualities of selfless love in such a way that every believer would be stirred to strive and pray for it from Jesus Christ, who perfectly demonstrated this love in His sacrifice for all of us.

## 6. LOVE FOR OTHERS AND THE USE OF GIFTS

Even the spiritual gifts the Corinthians desire and their worship practices reveal selfishness, immaturity, and division.

**Read chapter 14.**

**Q 22: Why does Paul consider prophesy superior to speaking in tongues within worship?**

A 22: Prophesying (or preaching) instructs, encourages, and builds up the faith of all those who hear. Speaking in tongues only benefits the individual and any who understand that particular tongue or language. The Corinthian use of tongues in worship was selfish.

# THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD (CHAPTER 15)

## 1. THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

Paul turns the Corinthians' attention from side issues to the central issue of Christianity: the saving Gospel.

**Read 15:1–11.**

**Q 23:** After providing a basic summary of Christ's death and burial, why does Paul spend so much time listing the witnesses to the resurrection?

A 23: In raising Jesus from the dead, God the Father was vindicating all His words and actions in His ministry and assuring us of the forgiveness of our sins and everlasting life with Him. He is also reminding us to shift our focus from this earthly life to the eternal life to come.

## 2. THE CONSEQUENCES OF DENYING THE RESURRECTION

Some Corinthians argued that life after death was illogical. So Paul uses the rules of logic and rhetoric to demolish their arguments.

**Read 15:12–34.**

**Q 24:** Why did the Corinthians need Paul to highlight the necessity of Jesus' resurrection? Why do we need that reminder too?

A 24: The Corinthians were so preoccupied with earthly concerns that they treated Jesus' resurrection as a matter of idle curiosity, something that was not all that important. But without the resurrection, Jesus' sacrifice was in vain and we are lost in our sins—making everything the Corinthians considered important to be of no importance whatsoever.

## 3. THE BODILY RESURRECTION

A comparison between our current body and our resurrection body should clearly turn our heart and desire to Christ and the new life He will give us on the Last Day.

**Read 15:35–58.**

**Q 25:** How does Paul's discussion show the folly of setting all our hopes and dreams on this earthly life?

A 25: He reminds us we are perishable and weak because of sin. We age, grow frail and sick, and will finally die no matter how wealthy, powerful, or influential we may be on earth. Jesus turns our hearts and minds to the eternal life where we will never grow old, sick, or frail.

# FINAL MATTERS (CHAPTER 16)

## 1. THE COLLECTION FOR CHURCH IN JERUSALEM

Paul makes arrangements for the Corinthians to contribute toward a large collection from Gentile Christians in Asia Minor for the impoverished Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.

**Read 16:1–4.**

**Q 26: Why does Paul want the collecting to be done before he arrives? How can we make our offerings more free and voluntary?**

A 26: This will allow the Corinthians to give freely, voluntarily without feeling compelled to do so against their will.

## 2. PAUL'S TRAVEL PLANS

Paul shares his missionary travel plans—including his hope of an extended visit in Corinth.

**Read 16:5–11.**

**Q 27: What is the value of a congregation making plans for the future?**

A 27: Under God's guidance and blessing, clear planning can make the ministry of sharing God's Word and Sacraments more effective, make more efficient use of the financial resources God entrusts to us, and reach more people with the Gospel.

## 3. CONCLUDING EXHORTATIONS AND GREETINGS

Paul gives final instruction to the Corinthian leaders, urging them to see themselves as part of a unified team working together to serve Christ and His people.

**Read 16:12–24.**

**Q 28: What benefit comes to a congregation when the leaders see themselves as brothers and sisters working together for the common good?**

A 28: Selfish division ceases, the spiritual needs of more people are met, and the congregation is more open to sharing the Gospel with their community—and more welcoming to those neighbors the Holy Spirit brings to faith.