

God's way
a study of 1 Corinthians 11-15

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Objective (what we hope to see God accomplish in us through the study): That we follow God's ways.

Statements of the objective: Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. [1 Corinthians 11:1 ESV]

Paul was suggesting that he attempted to pattern his own life after the inoffensive behavior of our Lord, sometimes refusing to take advantage of the liberties that properly belonged to him in order to satisfy the demands of the kingdom. The Corinthians were to do the same. – Paige Patterson, *The Troubled Triumphant Church*, 176

Premise (why we are studying this): We live in a world where unity is assumed to require a lessening of holiness; that is, standards must be lowered if unity is to be experienced. The opposite is actually true. It is in following the holy God that we experience astonishing communion. Of course, we also inhabit Christian communities where holiness can be used as an unholy bludgeon. Instead, God calls us to *agape* love as the greatest possible expression of right.

Statements of the premise: For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. [1 Corinthians 12:12-13 NASB]

Now these three remain:
faith, hope, and love.

But the greatest of these is love. [1 Corinthians 13:13 HCSB]

The great reason that Christian thought fastened on *agape* is that *agape* demands the exercise of the whole man...*Agape* has to do with the *mind*: it is not simply an emotion which rises unbidden in our hearts; it is a principle by which we deliberately live. *Agape* has supremely to do with the *will*. It is a conquest, a victory, and achievement. No one ever naturally loved his enemies. To love one's enemies is a conquest of all our natural inclinations and emotions...Christianity does not ask us to love our enemies and to love men at large in the same way as we love our nearest and dearest and those who are closest to us; that would be at one and the same time impossible and wrong. But it does demand that we should have at all times a certain attitude of the mind and a certain direction of the will towards all men, no matter who they are. – William Barclay, *New Testament Words*, 20-21

Theme of the study (what the study is about): God, existing in perfect unity, calls His people to emulation. He shows us that our unity in Jesus is a fact and teaches us to apply that unity in our divisions, our sinful disobedience, our marriages or singlehood, and our moral freedom. The result of living out our unity in Christ is holiness, using our God-given powers for good. This holiness is expressed through a life of worship – which is the subject of this second part of the book (11-16).

Statements of the theme: Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. [1 Corinthians 12:27 NRSV]

The unifying member in the spiritual body is Christ. As the Head (Eph. 1:22; cf. 1 Cor. 11:3) He possesses the body and sovereignly expresses His will. His command is that love should prevail among the members (John 15:12). This was the force which would maintain unity within the diversity (1 Cor. 12:31b 13:13). – Lowery, *I Corinthians* (BKC vol. 2), 534

Textual background:

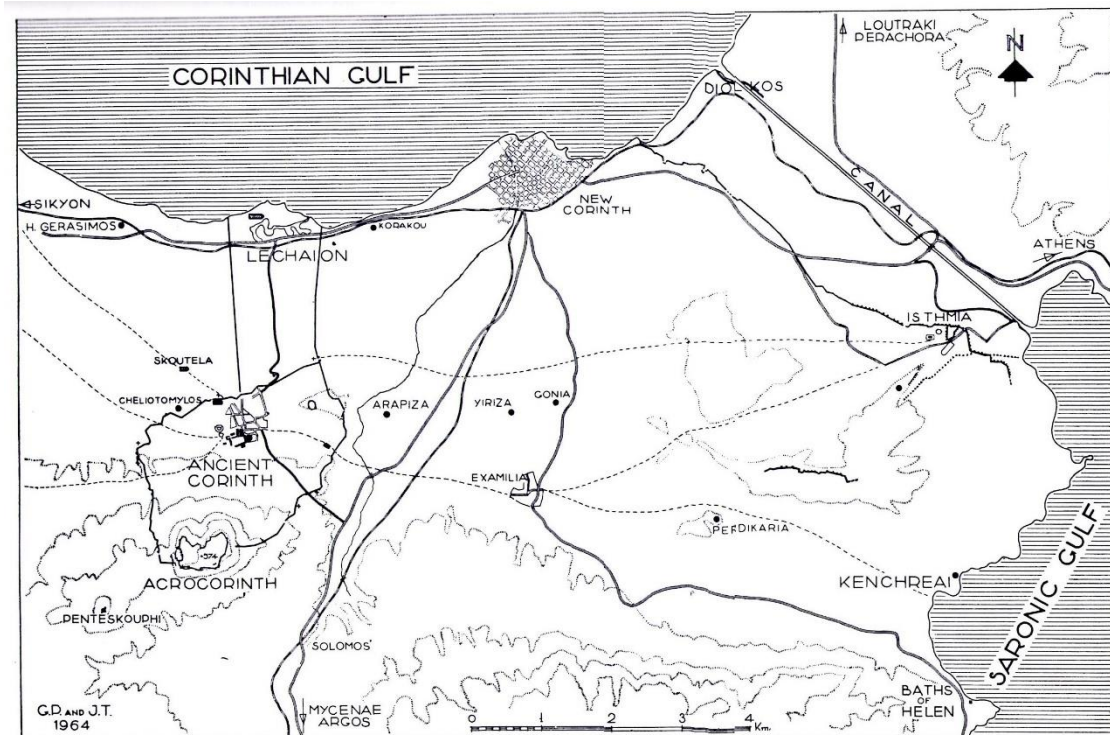
1. Authorship. There is no doubt that Paul wrote this letter. Even the most wild-eyed textual critics present no strong argument. The uncovering of the Erastus' inscription in Corinth (ERASTUS PRO. AED. S. P. STRAVIT – Erastus the aedile [commissioner of finance/public works] bore the expense of paving this road) lent great weight to the historical veracity of Paul's visit to and writings about Corinth. (For more on Erastus, see Acts 19, Romans 16, and 2 Timothy 4.)
2. Composition. Some scholars have posited that this is a collection of various Pauline writings to Corinth, possibly fragments including the "lost" letters mentioned. Guthrie argues quite convincingly that such reasoning is forced and ignores the pastoral nature of answering situations in a particular church.

Historical background:

1. Corinth. Sisyphus was the legendary first king of Corinth, a man so enamored with his own cleverness that the gods sentenced him to spend eternity rolling a bolder up a hill, only to have it roll back down before cresting. This eternal torment is a fair image of the many phases of Corinthian history, given the city-state's continual self-congratulations and continuous slavery to sin. Below are a few tidbits of Corinthian history that directly impact Paul's metaphors and topics in this letter:
 - In the archaic period, Homer described the city as "wealthy Corinth." (Iliad 2.570) The city's wealth was attained via its strategic shipping location, controlling the land pass between Attica to the north and the Peloponnesus to the south as well as the Saronic Gulf to the east and the Corinthian Gulf to the west.
 - In the pre-classical and classical eras of Greece, the writers continue to speak of Corinthian wealth – "rich" (Thucydides *Histories* 1, 13, 5), "prosperous" (Pindar *Olympian* 13.4), "affluent" (Herodotus 3.52 "Tyrants of Corinth"). Aristophanes

added the term *Korinthiazomai* – to live like a Corinthian – as a description of sexually immoral lifestyle. (*Fragmenta* 354)

- Periander ruled Corinth ca. 600 B.C., establishing the Diolkos – a train-like series of ramps that could move goods or even small ships from one gulf to the other. This made Corinth’s harbors incredibly busy as it saved ships time sailing around the Peloponnesus. [Note: the Diolkos ran roughly the same path as the modern canal.]



PLAN OF THE CORINTHIA

Courtesy of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens

- It was in this era that the great temple to Apollo was built at Corinth and the Corinthian navy invented the trireme warship – an innovation that would rule the seas for 500 years.
- At some point in the early classical era a massive temple to Aphrodite was built atop the Acro-Corinth, the great fortress hill rising above the city. Thousands of hetaeras (temple prostitutes) worked there, catering to the affluent visitors and men of the city. They made the temple fabulously wealthy and some became rich themselves (especially Lais, the most famous hetaera.) The best meat market in the city was up there, where sacrifices were cooked and sold in the market and restaurant. Apparently, families would dine there and after supper the father would send the family home while he walked through the heavy curtains to the “worship” area. Seems rather similar to 21st c. Las Vegas.
- Corinthian black-figure pottery was world famous and business boomed. By 400 B.C., Corinth expanded to contain an estimated 200,000 free citizens in the city and its many colonies and 500,000 slaves in city, colonies, and navy. 90,000 free

people appear to have lived in the city and suburbs alone. (By comparison, 54,000 live in modern city of New Corinth today.)

- The Isthmian games were incredibly popular. These were held every two years, the year before and after an Olympiad, and conducted at the Corinthian suburb of Isthmia. The Pan-Hellenic truce was sacred, and the unity of all Greeks recognized. In fact, the Athenians were given safe conduct to the 412 B.C. games even though Corinth and Athens were at war. The Corinthians were thus very familiar with sports motifs, and great athletes were lauded. In his *Description of Greece* (16.15.3) Pausanias describes Kleitomachos of Thebes, who won wrestling, boxing and pankration on the same day at the 216 B.C. Isthmian games. [He would have received a fragrant pine bough crown, which replaced the earlier celery wreath.]
- Not too long after Kleitomachos' astounding feat, the Romans conquered the Hellenic heartland, supposedly liberating Greece from Macedonia. Corinth was utterly destroyed, though the Isthmian games continued. Moved by the kind of 100-year-later guilt often felt by conquerors, Rome rebuilt Corinth in 46 B.C. at the insistence of Julius Caesar. Augustus and his succeeding dynasty lavished wealth on the city, granting citizenships and tax-free construction bonuses.
- Corinth grew wealthy again as a major city in the Roman republic of Achaia. The rebuilt Acro-

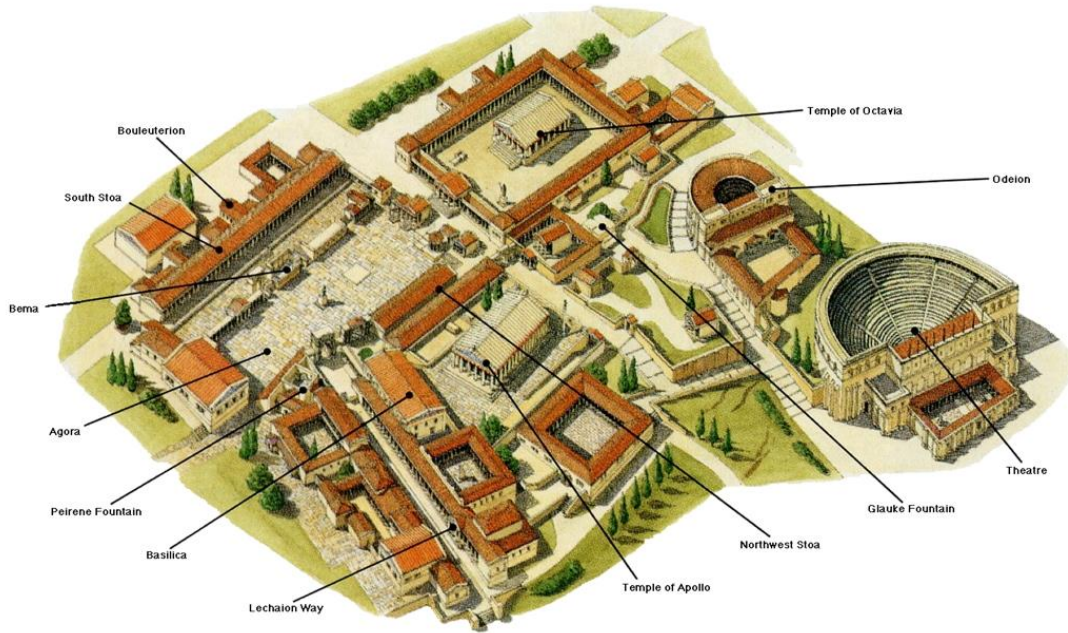
Corinth, temples, Dialkos, and military presence brought stability and income. People flocked to the city, especially appreciating the modern updates to the agora and springs. The Romans were at pains to reestablish the "good old days" at Corinth, and Emperor Nero



even competed in one of the music competitions at the Isthmian games [wisely, the judges awarded him the pine crown.] Seemingly, Corinth was even more prosperous, debauched, and strategic than ever before. Strabo described the renewed city as "always mighty and wealthy" (*Geography* 8.6.23).

- By the time Paul arrived in 51 A.D., the city center was a rich amalgamation of Greco-Roman life. The closest modern comparison might be a city like Bologna, where the Roman, medieval, and modern structures work together in a bustling center of wealth, industry, and trade. (Mexico City is similar, with Aztec, Spanish,

and modern aspects.) A reconstruction of central Corinth in Paul's day could look like this:



The Lechaion Way today, looking toward the bema (rostrum) with the Acropolis of Corinth in the background:



2. The church. The church at Corinth contained Jews and Gentiles and included some evidently Latin names (indicating Roman citizens). Nonetheless, 1 Corinthians 12:2 indicates that the bulk of the church was Gentile. Acts 18 relates the beginning days of the Corinthian church:

¹ After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, ³ and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. ⁴ And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks. ⁵ When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. ⁶ And when they opposed and reviled him, 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.” 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. 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. 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.” ¹¹ And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. ^{ESV}

The church appears to have begun in the synagogue, and fairly quickly moved into Titius Justus' home. With the conversion of Crispus and Sosthenes, it's possible the church shifted to holding gatherings in the synagogue. While we don't know precisely where the church met, it's clear that tensions between the Messianic Jews and those who rejected Messiah Jesus led to the angry riot where Paul was illegally hauled before Gallio (Seneca's brother) at the Corinthian bema.

Speaking of Gallio, his contempt over Jewish “words, names and law” (Acts 18:14-15) was almost certainly fueled by what he had seen in Rome before taking over his proconsulship in the east. In Rome, there arose riotous division among the Jews over someone our only source names as “Chrestus.” This was almost certainly a serious disagreement over whether Jesus was Messiah and/or whether He rose from the dead. As a result of the disturbance, all non-slave Jews were expelled from Rome by Claudius sometime in or near 49 A.D.

3. Contacts & correspondence. Paul's contacts and correspondence with the Corinthians is subject to much discussion. After his first visit in 51 A.D., Paul's interactions with Corinth must be deduced from various references. I find David Lowrey's reconstruction useful:
 - The length of Paul's stay on this first tour of ministry was one and one-half years, after which he sailed in the fall of A.D. 52 to Ephesus enroute to Jerusalem.

Priscilla and Aquila accompanied Paul to Ephesus where they remained to meet and instruct the gifted Alexandrian Apollos whom they subsequently sent on to Corinth for ministry there (Acts 18:18–28).

- While Apollos was ministering in Corinth (Acts 19:1), Paul returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey in the fall of A.D. 53 for a period of about two and one-half years (Acts 19). It was probably during the early part of Paul’s ministry in Ephesus that he wrote the letter mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9, a letter misunderstood by the Corinthians (5:10–11) and later lost.
- Paul learned of this misunderstanding and of further problems in the church at Corinth from the household of Chloe (1:11). Then an official delegation—Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (16:17)—brought Paul specific questions on issues dividing the church. First Corinthians was written, probably in A.D. 54 or 55, to address these matters.
- But apparently this did not resolve the problems in the church. It is possible that Timothy was the bearer of this news (4:17; 16:10). Paul then decided to revisit the church which he called in 2 Corinthians 1:15 and 2:1 the “painful” visit (cf. 2 Cor. 13:1, which speaks of a third visit, the last leg of Paul’s third missionary journey), because of the action of the man referred to in 2 Corinthians 2:5 and 7:2.
- After his second visit and return to Ephesus, Paul sent a letter borne by Titus, which it grieved him deeply to write (2 Cor. 2:4) apparently because of its disciplinary nature (2 Cor. 7:8–9).
- After the silversmiths’ riot, Paul left Ephesus bound for Troas to meet Titus. Because Paul could not find him there, he anxiously pushed on to Macedonia, apparently with grave concern about Titus’ safety (2 Cor. 2:12–13; 7:5). There he met Titus who brought good news about the general well-being of the Corinthian church but bad news about a group opposed to Paul.
- From Macedonia Paul wrote 2 Corinthians and followed it up with his third visit during the winter of A.D. 56–57 (Acts 20:1–4). – D.K. Lowrey, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 504–506).

4. Particular situations. There are ten serious problems Paul addresses within the Corinthian church. Each continues to plague local churches to this day:

<i>Difficulty</i>	<i>Text</i>	<i>Seen today especially in</i>
Divisions	1:10-17; 3:1-23	Identity politics; pastor worship
Sexual immorality	5:1-13; 6:12-20	Nearly everything
Lawsuits b/w brethren	6:1-11	Lawsuits against churches
Marriage/divorce	7:1-17	Marriage/divorce; lack of Elder Care
Meat sacrificed to idols	8:1-13	“Secular” vs. “sacred” music; health
Freedom & responsibility	9:1-11:1	Licentiousness; entitlement mindset
Order in church	11:2-16	Unbiblical pentecostal expressions
Selfish agape feasts	11:17-34	Church seen as all about my desires
Loveless use of gifts	12:1-14:40	Abuse of gifts and positions
Confusion re: resurrection	15:1-58	Uncertainty about biblical truth

Derek Prime has a great summary re: the central core issue in each of these specific problems. He writes:

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. – Derek Prime, *Opening Up First Corinthians*, 12.

Bibliography: Barclay, *Letters to the Corinthians*; Blomberg, *1 Corinthians (NIVAC)*; Braudrick, “The Unifying Argument of 1 Corinthians;” Brooks, *Order in the Church*; CBMW, “The Nashville Statement;” Dawn, *A Royal “Waste” of Time*; Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah*; Getz, *Life Essential Study Bible*; Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*; Guthrie, *NT Introduction*; Hays & Duvall, *Baker Illustrated Bible Handbook*; House & Price, *Charts of Biblical Prophecy*; Ironside, *1 Corinthians*; Jamieson, Fausset, Brown, *1 Corinthians (JFB)*; Kunz & Schell, *1 Corinthians: Challenge to Maturity*; Lencioni, *The Advantage*; Lofquist, “Christ’s Premillennial Return;” Lowrey, *1 Corinthians (BKC)*; Mare, *1 Corinthians (EBC)*; MacArthur, *1 Corinthians (MNTC)*; Martin, *1 Corinthians*; Patterson, *The Troubled Triumphant Church*; Pentecost, *Things to Come*, unpublished class notes; Pratt, *1 & 2 Corinthians (Holman)*; Prime, *Opening Up 1 Corinthians*; Rainey, *Rekindling the Romance*; Rawicz, *The Long Walk*; Shelley, Dobson, Leas, *Mastering Conflict & Controversy*; Ryrie, *Protestants*; Toussaint, unpublished class notes; Swindoll, *Strong Reproofs, Practical Helps*; Wiersbe, *Be Wise*