

NT 16 2.04

The BIBLE PROJECT

Corinthian Difficulties

& NT Exceptionalism 2 Cor 6.14-18

1 & 2 Corinthians New Testament Exceptionalism Presented



WHERE IS CORINTH?



Background: Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey 49-53 AD Acts 15.40 -18.22

Now Paul moves south, leaving Macedonia and enters Achaia—Greece proper. Paul arrives in Corinth after having left Athens.

Acts 17 gives a description of Paul in Athens. Apparently no church was founded at Athens the city where Paul observes how everyone is so very “religious” that they were afraid to leave out any god and therefore built an altar to “the unknown god.” Paul spends his time in the “marketplace” aka the FORUM. Paul's message is a synopsis of the OT up to Jesus. It ends with his warning about judgment to come and the Good News that Christ has risen. Luke mentions in Acts 17.34 that some believed including a woman named Damaris and a man Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus—that was the governing council of Athens. The Council met on Mars Hill—also known as the “Areopagus.”

From Athens, Paul moves west to the Isthmus that leads to the Peloponnese in about AD 50. Corinth sits right where a canal had been built to allow travel and commerce to move East and West without having to go down into the sometimes dangerous and deadly Mediterranean. So from Rome to Asia Minor (Turkey) most of the traffic moved through Corinth. You can imagine what kind of seaport city this was. It's been called the Sodom of the Roman Empire. Of course, it had competition, but Corinth was a place which passed along every possible thing!

Paul's travels take him next to Caesarea Maritima, Jerusalem and then to his home base at Antioch. Next he returns to Asia Minor and arrives at Ephesus (Acts 19.1). Meanwhile Apollos has come to Corinth after he was instructed by Priscilla and Aquila at Ephesus. Apollos was a “great help” to the believers there. (Acts 18.27)



1. Unbounded idolatry, immorality, paganism, materialism was the culture of Corinth in which believers were planted. I'm told you can get a flavor of Corinth from the first Animal House movie.
2. These two letters encourage courageous and virtuous living despite the encroachment of the culture.

FIRST CORINTHIANS

Paul & Sosthenes—Remember Sosthenes? To the SAINTS—NLT translates those sanctified. Were the Corinthians very sanctified? [Here is my translation quibble: Sainthood is given; sanctification develops. NIV does a little better—“called to be holy people.”]

Outline Corinthians by the difficulties and questions that are raised by the congregation.
“Some from Chloe’s household have informed me of quarrels among you.” 1 Cor 1.11

BIG IDEA 1 SECTION 1: DIVISIONS AND “WISDOM” 1 Cor 1-4



The “bema” opportunity for travelling sophists and philosophers to preach.

Corinthian Question #1: Is Christ divided? 1 Cor 1.13

Cliques, Parties, Factions, Denominations, Worship Styles, Age Groupings, Ethnic groups? What are the modern equivalent in our congregations? Charismatics? Bible Scholars? Traditionalists, Modernists? Millennials? Boomers? Conservatives? Liberals? Others?

Corinthian Question #2: Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 1 Cor 1.21.

I follow Paul, Apollo, Cephas (Peter), Well, I trump that--I follow Jesus!!!

Corinthians are proud of their “wisdom”. Therefore,

Think of what you were: Not many wise, not many influential, not many of noble birth: God chooses the foolish things of this world to confound the wise, the weak things to shame the strong, the lowly things to nullify whatever is high. **EXCEPTIONALISM: Do not be like the culture that focuses on human wisdom and signs: Christ crucified will be the means of salvation.**

God was pleased through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe. 1 Cor 1.21

Paul talks about his ministry in light of the divisions over super-leaders and super-sophistication – whether Jewish or Greek. The word wisdom in Greek is *sophia*. From which we get sophistication. We might call this “worldly wise.”

It was not wisdom but the power and demonstration of the Spirit of God proclaimed through Jesus Christ and him crucified. 1 Cor 2.2.

SO THEN NO MORE BOASTING ABOUT HUMAN LEADERS! All things are yours and you are of Christ and Christ is of God. 1 Cor 3.21-23

BIG IDEA 2 SECTION 2—REPORTED SEXUAL IMMORALITY AMONG YOU

1 Cor 5.1-13 & 6.9-20

EXCEPTIONALISM—You cannot ignore sexual immorality—the church has to be different from the culture.



Aphrodite—goddess of Love

Corinthian Question #3 (unasked): What were they supposed to do about the member who openly slept with his father’s wife?

Again, Paul is responding to reports and questions about what to do with the internal struggles of a new-formed “church” without a grounding in Scripture and biblical practices.

The open and admitted immorality Paul specifies: A man is sleeping with his father’s wife. (His “stepmother”?) And you are proud! 1 Cor 5.1-2 A kind of immorality not even pagans tolerate. The Corinthian church not only permitted such behavior, but put it on display. What did that say to the Corinthians outside the church?

Paul tells the church: Separate from that person and that kind of behavior. Use that “discipline” to save that man’s spirit on the day of the Lord. Make sure the world knows the standard to which the followers of Jesus hold. Yes, they will think you fools.

2 Cor seems to indicate that this discipline actually did what discipline was supposed to do—righted that person’s behavior and allowed him to come back into fellowship. 2 Cor 7. 8-11—“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”

Caution: Church does not judge those outside its fellowship (membership). It does discipline its own in order to keep a distinction between the church and the world: THINK EXCEPTIONALISM. A SECOND SECTION ON SEXUAL IMMORALITY 1Cor 6.9-20. This may also be relevant to the counsel and instruction regarding marriage beginning in Chapter 7.

Paul names sexual and other sins specifically declaring that those who do these things will never inherit the kingdom of God and here is what is significant: He actually says that some of the Corinthians did those things. But **you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified** in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God. 1 Cor. 6.11.

To be joined with Christ means you cannot be joined to Aphrodite and her prostitutes.



Statutette of "Modest Aphrodite" Istanbul Archeological Museum (jrt)

Corinthian Question #4: What about using the prostitutes? Then he goes on to take on a false view of Christian freedom: Apparently the Corinthians were saying God gave me these appetites, what's wrong with using them? "Food for the stomach, the stomach for food." Apparently they were visiting the temple prostitutes associated with the Temple of Aphrodite which dominated the landscape both geographically and morally. They after all were "Corinthians." Being "Corinthian" was synonymous with being licentious. What happened in Corinth was reported around the world. Paul says without hesitation: **Flee from sexual immorality**. Your body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

BIG IDEA 3 SECTION 3—LAWSUITS IN PAGAN COURTS AGAINST OTHER BELIEVERS 1 Cor 6

Remember Paul had his own experience in a Roman courtroom. The Jews in Corinth accused him of violating the law with his teaching and Gallio (the brother of the Stoic philosopher Seneca) basically threw the case out of court and Sosthenes received a beating at the hands of the Jews. Gallio turned a blind eye. Gallio was a highly respected person throughout the empire. His ruling is thought to have set a precedent that Christian teaching was not tantamount to promoting an illegal religion.

Live so that pagan courts have no jurisdiction over the church: **EXCEPTIONALISM IN LAW**.

Corinthian Question #5: How do we handle disputes within our fellowship?

1 Cor. 6.1-8 Distinguish between church matters and civil matters. If you don't like something someone does or if you think it wrong, what do you do? Go to civil court. No, Paul says, suffer wrong rather than take a brother to court. The background assumption is not that a believer has committed a civil crime, but has a grievance over something that happens in church. Apparently the Corinthians were a bunch of lawyers!

Should we take this to mean that Christians never go to civil court?

What about an offense caused by a non-believer?

Remember Matthew 18: Jesus says there are three steps:

1. Go to the offender and try to work it out.
2. If that does not gain relief or reconciliation take one or two others believers with you to work on the issue.

3. And if that does not work, take it to the church.
4. And if that does not work—treat them as outside the church and leave them alone.

How do you think that would work?

BIG IDEA 4 SECTION 4—MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, SINGLENES



Husband and Wife from Greek sarcophagus

1 Corinthians 7—the whole chapter.

Corinthian Question #6: Is sex always bad? The statement is whether it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman. Interesting question, given the general Corinthian scene and the specific issues Paul has already addressed.

Paul addresses sex within marriage. In a word Paul says sex in itself is not bad—in fact within marriage it is good. And he goes on to address the single and the question of whether a man who is betrothed has a duty to marry. A man and woman married to each other have a “marital duty” to each other—notice the equality that is expressed. Don’t deprive each other. He does go on to say that he wished all were as he is—apparently single and continent.

He instructs the single to appreciate their singleness, but permits them to marry to give outlet to their passion.

He urges wives not to leave their husbands. And husbands must not divorce wives. This is instruction for believers. But if the unbelieving husband or wife divorces the believer, the believer who is left is then is not bound. The hope Paul expresses is that the believing spouse might be the means of salvation to the other. He does not give this instruction for ALL CIRCUMSTANCES, however. The hyper spiritual in Corinth apparently entered sexless marriages. Paul is not in favor.

Live as you were when you were called circumcision does not matter either way. Don’t change that.

Big picture answer: What matters is keeping God’s commands.

See 2 Corinthians 6: Paul’s model and his teaching that the Corinthians be distinguished from the world, their environment.

A side question: Should believers marry non-believers?

BIG IDEA 5 SECTION 5—THE BOUNDARIES OF LIBERTY

Corinthian Question #7: What about food offered to idols? Can we eat it?



This applies to the meat eaten at the feasts for various idols. It applies to meat prepared, sold or served by the guilds, which were dedicated to one or another of the Roman gods. It may even have applied to meat sold in the meat markets because much of it would have been slaughtered on the Roman gods' temple altars.

The answer is that all things may be lawful, but not all are loving. This anticipates 1 Cor 13.

And 1 Cor 10.14ff. contains this warning: You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too. You cannot have a part in both the Lord's Table and the table of demons. This is so because those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar. This is in the context of participating at the Lord's Table. Paul is calling for clear demarcation between the believers in Jesus and the rest of the world.

But, if you're invited to dinner, do not inquire where the meat came from. But if you're told, "This is idol meat," don't partake. Maybe this is like offerings at church: crooks are free to give. No one asks. But if an embezzler tells the Pastor he's tithing his ill-gotten gains? Then what?

What is Christian liberty?

What morally "neutral" thing or things may be stumbling blocks to other young or new believers in Christ in our culture?

The rule Paul lays down is 1 Cor 10.32: Do not cause anyone to stumble.



BIG IDEA 6 SECTION 6—TEMPTATION AND ITS CONQUEST 1 Cor 10

Corinthian Question #8: How do we deal with the omnipresent social, political, economic, religious and moral pressure of our environment?

[Did you notice that Paul mentions the “cloud”? God had a cloud before IBM, Amazon, Apple or anyone else. Sorry, it must be late!]

Paul cites lessons from Israel’s history—baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. 10.2. Took communion in the manna and water from the rock. 10.4. The Israelites were a warning. They grumbled and they committed sexual immorality and they paid the price.

So be careful not to follow their path.

But God has prepared a way for you to overcome. There is no temptation for which God has not prepared a way out. 1 Cor 10.13.

BIG IDEA 7 SECTION 7—WORSHIP INSTRUCTIONS 1 Cor 11-14

Corinthian Question #9: What is proper in worship?

Remember this church is largely made up of Greek converts. And these people come from all over. They are in a new city: barely 100 years since its refounding as a Roman colony. It’s the 4th largest city in all the Roman Empire at this time. It’s the crossroads of the Empire. It’s dominating feature is the Temple of Aphrodite with her 1000 Temple Prostitutes. It’s like modern Amsterdam. Try founding a new faith there!

So the people do not know how to act in church. There are ways that show respect. Paul’s concern is that worship be done “decently and in order.” 14.40 [This is also how we know he’s a Presbyterian!]

And he’s concerned about making sure that women can lead and preserve the respect of the church. In chapter 11.13, he shows how women can lead appropriately in worship, even if in 14.34 he says women should be silent in the churches. Scripture interprets Scripture: So how do you put these two instructions together?

Corinthian Question #10: What about the Lord’s Supper?

Your meetings do more harm than good. Your observance of the Lord’s Supper exaggerates your divisions. Some eat and get drunk. Others go hungry. Shall I praise you? NOT.

We get the Apostle’s creedal presentation of the pattern for communion: **“For I received from the Lord what I also passed along to you:”** These words mark the special formula for church wide teaching. And then we get the “words of institution.”

But with a warning: Whoever eats and drinks in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. What constitutes an “unworthy manner” in this context?

So when you gather to eat, all should eat together. This is Paul’s conclusion.

BIG IDEA 8 SECTION 8—SPIRITUAL GIFTS, CONFLICT AND CHURCH UNITY

Corinthian Question #11: What is the best Spiritual Gift?

Church unity was not a strength of the Corinthians. Apparently those with ecstatic gifts were proud of their giftedness. *Charismata* is the Greek word for “Spiritual gifts” and it’s where we get the word for tongues speakers in English—“Charismatics.” We are ONE body with many PARTS.

Paul is at pains to deal with the Charismatics because they seemed to be sucking up all the oxygen in leadership and church attention. He therefore names a long list of other gifts. He asserts that everyone has a part to play. No one is greater or more important than another.

EXCEPT speaking in an unknown tongue is problematical. 1 Cor 14.6ff. So with you: Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church. [not just yourself as he has explained tongues do.] In the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue. 14.19.

Apparently “hyper spirituality” was tending to dominate the Corinthian scene and incoherent leadership and teaching was occurring. We see this in the misunderstanding of the resurrection.

BIG IDEA 9 SECTION 9: AGAPE—GOD’S KIND OF LOVE—IS A BETTER WAY

This continues to address the question about “spiritual gifts”.

But it calls Corinth and us to highest aspiration of the Christian life. If God has one word for us all it is LOVE. Faith and Hope abide. But the greatest is love.

BIG IDEA 10 SECTION 10: THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST AND BELIEVERS

Lots of questions.

Apparently the Corinthians were so caught up in their spirituality that at least some of them thought that the spirituality was evidence that they had already experienced the resurrection. Others had a Roman philosophical disdain for the body—a sort of neo Platonism that will exhibit itself later in church history as Gnosticism. Gnosis is the Greek Word for knowledge. So the “wisdom” of the factions Paul mentions in the early chapters may have adopted the view that the body does not matter—it disintegrates, and all that matters is the spirit. Therefore, Christ’s body never rose. So to be spiritually alive now meant there was continuity between this life and the next. And they were already alive in the next.

Paul almost has to go back to square one.

Again we get the creedal formula: “**what I received I passed on to you**” as of first importance:

- That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures
- That he was buried,
- That he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures
- And that he appear to Cephas and then to the twelve.

After that he appeared to 500+, to James, and last of all to me.

Question for the Corinthians: How can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?

15.17—If Christ is not raised then you are still in your sins: Our salvation depends not only on the death of Christ but also on his resurrection. Rom 4.25—He was crucified for our sins and **raised for our justification**.

In Adam all die; in Christ all will be made alive—each in turn, Christ the firstfruits and then... those who belong to him. 1 Cor 15.23. Death is God's enemy. He's the last enemy to be destroyed. 1 Cor 15.26.

Corinthian Question #12 What about baptism for the dead?

Was baptism magic?

Why did the Corinthians baptize for the dead if they did not believe in the resurrection?

Note: Paul does not condone baptism for the dead. This is the only reference in Scripture on this subject. Paul is merely using their practice to show them the contradictions between what they said and what they did.

Corinthian Question #13 How are the dead raised? What kind of body will they have?

There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body. I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed... 1 Cor 15.52

Corinthian Question #14: What's the point?

Therefore, [dear Corinthians] stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

SECOND CORINTHIANS

2 Corinthians is a letter written by a troubled Apostle Paul. He has been under attack and in this letter he defends himself. Some of the letter is quite defensive. (2 Cor 6.1-7. Chapter 4 & 10.1-13.10)

Nevertheless, The Apostle also notes some progress in reducing the divisive spirit in Corinth. Progress has been made. 2 Cor 2.1-11; 7.5-6.

We note these contrasting tensions not to resolve them, but to understand that the church then was not that different from our church today. Not all problems get a definite resolution, but the church goes on in its fellowship and mission in spite of the tensions.

But four themes deserve attention:

BIG IDEA 1: GOD'S GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR ALL THINGS

- Comfort in affliction: 2 Cor 1.3-4
- Confident trust in God's deliverance: 1.10
- The power of forgiveness: 2.5-11—Restore the person you disciplined
- We are captives in Christ's triumphal procession 2.14

- We are being transformed into his image 3: 18
- God's grace is sufficient for you; my power is made perfect in your weakness 2 Cor 12.9

BIG IDEA 2: DO NOT LOSE HEART—MORE ETERNAL LIFE TEACHING

- We do not lose heart—twice in 1 Cor 4—verses 1 & 16
- Treasure of Christ in these “jars of clay” shows God's glory, not our strength 1 Cor 4.7
1 Cor 4: ⁸We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.
- Confidence that God has prepared for us: The earthly tent will be destroyed, but we have an eternal house in heaven—to be absent from the body is to be present with the LORD. 2 Cor 5.1-10

BIG IDEA 3: RECONCILIATION AND NEW CREATION 2 Cor 5.11-21

- If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation—the old has gone and the new has come.
- God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.
- God made him to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

BIG IDEA 4: CHRISTIAN GIVING

- Paul is taking up an offering to present to the Mother Church at Jerusalem.
- He is teaching the Corinthians the meaning of making an offering that is significant.
- The other churches have exceeded Paul's expectations for their giving.
- He then urges the Corinthians:
But since you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in the love we have kindled in you—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.
 Do you detect a little sharpness in his comment?
- The motivation for Christian giving is spelled out here:
For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.
- The measure of our giving is to compare ourselves with our Master—not with each other.
- He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. Do not give out of compulsion or grudgingly. God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly so that you will have all you need and abound abundantly.

BIG IDEA REVIEW

1 Corinthians

BIG IDEA 1 SECTION 1—DIVISIONS AND “WISDOM” 1 Cor 1-4

BIG IDEA 2 SECTION 2—REPORTED SEXUAL IMMORALITY

BIG IDEA 3 SECTION 3—LAWSUITS

BIG IDEA 4 SECTION 4—MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, SINGLENES

BIG IDEA 5 SECTION 5—THE BOUNDARIES OF LIBERTY

BIG IDEA 6 SECTION 6—TEMPTATION AND ITS CONQUEST 1 Cor 10

BIG IDEA 7 SECTION 7—WORSHIP INSTRUCTIONS 1 Cor 11-14

BIG IDEA 8 SECTION 8—SPIRITUAL GIFTS, CONFLICT AND CHURCH UNITY

BIG IDEA 9 SECTION 9: AGAPE—GOD’S KIND OF LOVE—IS A BETTER WAY

BIG IDEA 10 SECTION 10: THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST AND BELIEVERS

2 Corinthians

BIG IDEA 1: GOD’S GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR ALL THINGS

BIG IDEA 2: DO NOT LOSE HEART—MORE ETERNAL LIFE TEACHING

BIG IDEA 3: RECONCILIATION AND NEW CREATION 2 Cor 5.11-21

BIG IDEA 4: CHRISTIAN GIVING

The Bible Project 2.04

Consider the following if you choose to prepare for the next class:^[1]_[SEP]

REVIEW ALL THE LESSONS SINCE THE RESURRECTION NT 10.
LIST ALL THE BIG IDEAS AND MAKE NOTES AS TO WHAT THEY INCLUDE.

Read Acts 17-19 and EPHESIANS. We now go on toward the conclusion of the NT with the completion of the Letters. Fill in the sections on the study sheet.

MARKERS

1 Corinthians 1-2	Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God
1 Corinthians 7	Marriage
1 Corinthians 12	Spiritual gifts
1 Corinthians 15	Resurrection
2 Corinthians 9	God loves a cheerful giver
2 Corinthians 12	My power is made perfect in your weakness