



A Course

*In*

**I CORINTHIANS,  
STUDIES IN**

Prepared by the  
Committee on Religious Education  
of the  
**American Bible College**

Pineland, Florida 33945

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# INTRODUCTION

As you study the Scriptures you will find that it is of the greatest importance to approach the Bible in a reverent attitude of mind, looking upon it as the inspired Word of God, and not just an ordinary piece of literature. If the Bible is studied in the same manner as one studies Shakespeare, Milton or some historical work, it may be found interesting and profitable. But by this approach, the Bible student, persistent though he may be, will never find its rich treasures. The Apostle Paul says: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (I Cor. 2:14) For the profitable study of the Word of God, the right spiritual attitude is indispensable.

The Scriptures should be studied as eagerly as a hungry person seeks for food. The formal reading of a portion of the Bible may have some worth as a religious exercise, but in order that the complete benefit may be obtained from its truths, they must be appropriated to personal needs. A milkman may deliver thousands of quarts of milk each day and yet go home thirsty. The Bible student may read large portions of the Bible with little benefit, unless he makes it his own by personal appropriation and feeds upon it.

In your studies of the Bible will you appropriate the riches thereof to your own personal use, or will you read as you would read a book of fiction, a mystery, etc? In order to make full use of the pearls of wisdom contained in the Bible readings, it is suggested you reread them. Go into its wonderful fields of truth; go down into its valleys; climb its mountain peaks of vision; follow its streams of inspiration; enter its halls of learning. Many Bible truths do not appear on the surface; they must be dug up and be brought into the light by toil and effort.

There are various methods of Bible study, such as the topical method, the study of books, the study by chapters, the study of important passages, the biographical method, the exegetical method, and the expository method. In our approach we are following the study of topics by chapters. Due to the limited time, not all verses will be explained; however, we will consider the main subjects in their context.

I Corinthians is pointedly concerned with the local church. If anyone thinks his church has more than its share of ruffraff and woe, he need only turn to this letter (and its companion, 2 Cor.) to put his problems in perspective. First Corinthians provides a glimpse of life inside one first-century church, and far from saintly it was. Yet that is the reason Paul wrote this letter—to make positional sanctification practical.

The spirit of the world seemed more influential in the Corinthian church than the Spirit of God, despite the splendidly evident gifts given by the Spirit, Paul wanted to change that. He directed his message along three lines:

1. The first six chapters were an attempt to correct the contentions in the church brought to his attention by Chloe's servants (1:11) and to bring about unity in perspective and practice.

2. Beginning in chapter 7, Paul addressed himself to certain questions (introduced by the phrase *peri de*, ["now concerning"]) about marital issues (7:1, 25), liberty and responsibility (8:1), spiritual gifts and church order (12:1), money for impoverished saints in Jerusalem (16:1), and the availability of Apollos (16:12).

3. In chapter 15 he reaffirmed and defended the doctrine of the Resurrection, which some denied. It is possible that Paul saw this as a fundamental ill affecting all the preceding discussion, so he placed it at the climax of his letter.<sup>1</sup>

The Studies In First Corinthians course is formatted in the chapter by chapter method in order that the student will see the Corinthian church problems in their historical setting and also apply their relevance to our day. Although the American Bible College believes the King James Version is the preserved Word of God, this method of study allows the writers to occasionally condense a passage in their own paraphrase. This should not be construed to imply that A. B. C. is correcting God's Word.

In this study, the Holy Spirit's original inspiration and preservation for today's believers is a reality; however, this study will seek to focus on the Holy Spirit's intended use for the early church.

I Corinthians will be examined in topics as found in succeeding chapters. Brackets, "[ ]" will note quotes by B. H. Carrol (*Interpretation of the English Bible*, Vol. 13, Chap. 21). Stars "\*" will note additions by the compiler. The standard commentary will be quotes from Millard J. Berquist (*Studies in First Corinthians* (Nashville, TN., Convention Press, 1960). All other quotes will be footnoted.

During this course the student is required daily to read through the entire Book of I Corinthians.

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<sup>1</sup> David K. Lowrey, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament Edition*. (Colorado Springs, CO.: Chariot Publishing Co., 1983), p. 506.

# Contents

I.	HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION.....	5
	A. The City of Corinth in Paul’s Day	
	B. The Church at Corinth	
	C. Authorship of the Epistle	
	D. Occasion and Date	
	E. Outline	
II.	SALUTATION AND THANKSGIVING.....	11
	A. Salutation 1:1-3	
	B. Thanksgiving 1:4-9	
III.	ECCLESIASTICAL DISORDERS (FACTIONS IN THE CHURCH).....	14
	A. A Plea for Unity 1:10-31	
	B. Christian Wisdom 2:1-16	
	C. Carnal Christianity 3:1-8	
	D. Christian Service 3:9-23	
	E. Defense of Christian Servants 4:1-21	
IV.	MORAL DISCIPLINE .....	23
	A. Incest in the Church 5:1-13	
	B. Secular Lawsuits 6:1-8	
	C. Deliverance from Immorality 6:9-12	
	D. Sexual Immorality 6:13-20	
	E. Marriage and Divorce 7:1-40	
	F. Accepting Fatherly Admonition 4:14-21	
V.	CHRISTIAN LIBERTY WITH RESPONSIBILITY.....	34
	A. Eating foods Offered to Idols 8:1-13	
	B. Paul’s Example 9:1-27	
	C. Israel’s Example 10:1-15	
	D. The Lord’s Table 10:16-22	
	E. Liberty in Eating and Drinking 10:23-33	
VI.	PUBLIC WORSHIP.....	42
	A. The Veiling of Women 11:2-16	
	B. The Lord’s Supper Observance 11:17-34	
VII.	SPIRITUAL GIFTS.....	46
	A. The Ministry of Spiritual Gifts 12:1-31	
	B. The Foundation of Spiritual Gifts 13:1-13	
	C. The Abuse & Misuse of Spiritual gifts 14:1-40	
VIII.	THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD.....	58
	A. The Fact of Christ’s Resurrection 15:1-11	
	B. The Denial of Christ’s Resurrection 15:12-19	
	C. The Consequences of Christ’s Resurrection 15:20-28	
	D. The Arguments for the Resurrection 15:29-34	
	E. The Nature of the Resurrected Body 15:35-58	
IX.	CONCLUDING REMARKS 16:1-58.....	67

## CHAPTER 1

### I. THE CITY OF CORINTH IN PAUL'S DAY

- A. *Beginnings*
- B. *Strategic Location*
- C. *Complex Population*
- D. *Corrupt Morals*

### II. THE CHURCH AT CORINTH

### III. AUTHORSHIP OF THE EPISTLE

### IV. OCCASION AND DATE

### V. OUTLINE

# 1

## HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

WHAT ARE SOME of the pitfalls which beset a church with a number of spiritually immature members who must be taught how to apply Christianity to their own lives in the midst of a corrupt social order? Such was the situation in Corinth. Such is the situation in many churches today. The specific circumstances differ; the principles involved are the same. In his letter to the Corinthian church, Paul deals with such matters as disunity, intellectual pride, sensualism, perversion of the marriage relationship, misuse of Christian liberty, impropriety in public worship, the abuse of the Lord's supper, the misuse of special spiritual gifts, and wrong concepts about the resurrection. How does the apostle, writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, deal with the problems which arose in a cosmopolitan church, located at the crossroads of the world's trade, and infested with sensuality, pride, paganism, and worldliness?

First Corinthians is without question one of Paul's foremost writings. From the standpoint of material covered, it is one of the most varied and extensive. It provides an insight into the church life and activity of that day such as is not to be found anywhere else. It deals with localized problems of church conduct and discipline in such a way that eternal principles, applicable to all ages, emerge.

Throughout the epistle basic doctrinal teaching is spontaneously interwoven; but in two portions, chapters 13 and 15, Paul attains heights of classic grandeur and eloquence. These two chapters stand out like twin mountain peaks, as with great warmth of spirit and keenness of mind, Paul portrays immortal truths concerning Christian love and the resurrection of the believer.

To get the most out of the study of this epistle, one must know something about the church—the people to whom it was directed and the community of which they were a part. It is true that Christians are to be leaven, leavening the lump to which they belong. But it is also true that the lump often affects the leaven. The task of

leavening is much easier in some communities than in others.

### I. THE CITY OF CORINTH IN PAUL'S DAY

The church at Corinth was beset with manifold problems which were an outgrowth of the environment. Paul's suggestions for the solution of these problems are best understood after a glimpse at the ancient city and the new company of Christians which sprang forth in it.

#### A. Beginnings

The Corinth which Paul knew was only about a hundred years of age. In 146 B.C. the original and very ancient Corinth had been leveled to the ground by the Roman hordes as they overcame the Greeks. For a century it had lain waste and desolate. Then in 46 B.C. Julius Caesar rebuilt the city. He resettled it with Romans, making of it a Roman colony, with Roman military and political officials in charge. In the ten decades that ensued, Corinth had grown and prospered, until in Paul's day it was a thriving city of approximately 600,000 inhabitants.

#### B. Strategic Location

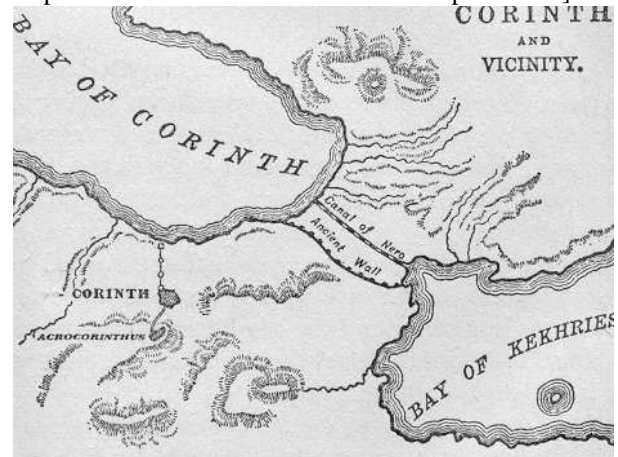
Corinth was strategically located. It lay on a narrow strip of land only a few miles wide, connecting the mainland of Greece with the Peloponnese, the peninsula to the south, jutting out into the Mediterranean Sea. Thus, the city was situated at a land bridge, or isthmus, across which all travel between northern and southern Greece had to pass. As a result, though a Roman colony, Corinth had again become predominantly Grecian.

[The city is on a rock over 200 feet above the sea level, and on a hill over 1,600 feet higher is the citadel, or *Akro-Korinthos*. In the study of history we find that straits and isthmuses are the world's strategic points. More exploring of them is done, more fighting for them, and attempts to hold mastery of them than for any other parts of the world. As the Isthmus of Suez, or Panama in modern times, so in the ancient world was the famous isthmus commanded by the city of Corinth.]

Then, too, the city was at the crossroads of the sea traffic between the East and the West, Asia and Europe. Sailors dreaded Cape Malea at the southernmost point of the peninsula and the treacherous waters offshore. They much preferred to come into harbor at one of Corinth's ports, on the east or the west, unload their cargo, and have it carried across the four-mile isthmus and reloaded on other boats on the other side. Smaller vessels were dragged across the isthmus on especially prepared ways. Today a canal makes all of this unnecessary; the ships pass through the canal and continue on their way.

[The advantages of the position are evident. First, it commands the passageway from Macedonia, Achaia,

and Thrace into the Peloponnese, or lower Greece. It was dangerous navigation around the lower points of the Peloponnese, hence, merchants would take their ships to this isthmus, where there was a way to drag the ships across to the other sea – a crude ship railroad.]



[Old classic Greek tells about Sparta and Athens – Athens the intellectual and political head, and Sparta the military head of the Greek world. Corinth contended neither in intellect with Athens nor in martial spirit with Sparta. It devoted itself to commerce, so that the Lacedaemonians rebuked them for worshipping the almighty dollar. When the Spartan power fell before Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great, these great cities – Athens and Sparta – decayed. Corinth came to the front, and was the chief city of Greece under Philip and Alexander, his son. It was a city of great importance until the Roman general captured and destroyed it. It lay desolate for over a hundred years. Julius Caesar, the first Roman emperor, then rebuilt it. Through the centuries Corinth has gradually dwindled until it is now but a small town of little consequence save for its history. But in Paul's day it was a great cosmopolitan center, the capital of Achaia, the number-one city of Greece from the standpoint of size, commerce, and significance.]

#### C. Complex Population

[Rome conferred great privileges on it, by making it a free city. At the time of Christ it was one of the most important cities in the world. Here the Isthmian games constituted the glory of all the world, so that Corinth was "Vanity Fair." Corinth was Paris; Corinth was London.]

The population of Corinth was complex. Strong Roman and predominant Greek elements have already been mentioned. In addition vast trade had brought great numbers of Jews and various Orientals from the East. The streets and docks were always crowded with merchants and sailors from every known country and sea. Here were the milling multitudes. Here were the teeming tens of thousands.

[The Jews, of course, came on account of its commercial advantages. About the time that Paul got there, there was an unusual number of Jews in Corinth, because the Roman emperor Nero (A.D. 37-68) had just banished them from Rome.

Aquila and Priscilla, that noted Christian man and wife, had just come from Rome under that decree, and were living in Corinth. The Greeks, of course, were there, and there were vast multitudes of Romans. There were more slaves than in any other place in proportion to the population. Many slaves were among Paul's converts.]

#### D. *Corrupt Morals*

Corinthian morals were corrupt. These multitudes brought with them their commerce and their customs, their cultures and crudities, their faiths and faithlessness, their gods and godlessness. Religion and vice were intertwined. High on the fortress hill, the celebrated Acrocorinthus overlooking the city and the seas, stood the pagan temples. Here was one to Aphrodite, the goddess of love and lust. A thousand temple prostitutes were an integral part of its worship exercises. Corinth was known around the Mediterranean world for its sensuality. To "Corinthianize" came to stand for engagement in drunkenness and debauchery.

Corinth was a polyglot city. Here many tongues were known and spoken. It was also a proud city. There were many Corinthians who, by reason of their Greek backgrounds, prided themselves on their wisdom and sophistry. From the days of the city states, the Greeks were a people of independent thought and action. Yet they were also a people inclined toward faction. Some here in Corinth liked nothing better than to debate and dispute for the sheer joy of disputation and contention.

With this little glimpse of first century Corinth, it is easy to see how the problems Paul confronted at this place could arise. One can see why he came "in fear, and in much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3). E. F. Scott has said: "It seemed like madness to come with the Gospel of Christ into this center of heathen materialism and immorality."<sup>1</sup>

But all men everywhere need and needed the saving message of Christ. Paul went to Corinth, under the Spirit's direction, because it was at the crossroads to everywhere. It proved to be perhaps his most difficult field of labor. But what a legacy he left for posterity in his letters to that church! They did the work at Corinth. They have been of untold value to succeeding ages.

Thank God the gospel of Christ is for all men, regardless of class, culture, or condition.

There is a clear theme running throughout 1 Corinthians, spiritual problems, as there is in most of Paul's other writings. He moves from problem to problem as one suggests another, or as in unrelated order he deals with questions previously presented by the Corinthians. Some of these problems are foreign to our contemporary culture. Nevertheless, the timeless principles which under divine guidance Paul offers as solutions are applicable to many of our situations today.

## II. THE CHURCH AT CORINTH

All that we know about the church at Corinth is what we learn from the brief record in Acts 18:1-18 and what is revealed through the two letters of Paul (to the Corinthians, and then the letter to the Philippians.\*). [Briefly, Paul visited Athens where he seemingly failed after he left Berea.\*]

After Paul's disappointing experience in Athens on his second missionary journey, he came to Corinth "determined not to know any thing. ...save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). As his custom was, Paul went to the synagogue. Always he found in the synagogue those who were ready to listen, or at least to engage in discussion. Everywhere the Jews went they took their Septuagint (Old Testament in Greek) with them. As a consequence there were numerous proselytes, Gentiles who had embraced Judaism. These often were very responsive to the message of the Christian gospel, and some were numbered among Paul's chief converts.

Here in Corinth the apostle found a Jew named Aquila, a tentmaker like himself, who with his wife Priscilla had recently come from Rome when Claudius the emperor decreed the expulsion of the Jews. With these fellow craftsmen Paul made his home, and they were among his first converts.

With the synagogue as a base of operations, Paul reasoned with both Jews and Gentiles and evidently achieved such success that pressure was exerted against him so that he felt it expedient to leave. But God provided a new and better open door, and Paul moved his preaching headquarters out of the synagogue and into the home of a proselyte, a Roman named Titus Justus, next door to the synagogue. Justus became another new convert and a very significant and useful one.

God had still another great reward with which to honor the earnest and sincere efforts of Paul. Ere long Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, surrendered and with all his household professed faith in Christ. This had a profound effect upon the Corinthian

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<sup>1</sup> E. F. Scott, *The Literature of the New Testament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), p. 127.

community, and many of them believed and were baptized.

Success after success crowned Paul's efforts. God was honoring his devoted and dedicated service. A firm nucleus for a church had resulted, and many believers were coming into the Christian fold. But Satan cannot stand to see the church of Christ flourish. The Lord knew this, and knew that Paul would soon be confronted with bitter opposition. Christ appeared to his servant in the night and spoke words of comfort and encouragement, assuring Paul that none should hurt him for the Lord had many more people to be garnered from this field (Acts 18:9-10).

The Jews sought to bring trouble upon Paul by falsely charging him before the Roman proconsul Gallio, claiming that he was teaching men to worship contrary to law.

[About this time the new Roman proconsul arrived. All provinces under the Roman senate were governed by a proconsul. This new man is known among the preachers as Gallio.... a brother of Seneca, and devoted to justice....

But shrewd Gallio quickly dismissed the case as not coming under his jurisdiction, and Christianity was indicated as a religion not contrary to Roman law, but permitted and allowed to practice and propagate.

Gallio told his lictors to scatter the Jews out of the house. After the Jews were driven away, the street rabble decided that they would lynch a few Jews, since the governor held them in such contempt. They beat Sosthenes, and it was this treatment of the Jews about which Gallio cared nothing.

Paul stayed there a year and a half, preaching in all the regions round about. He established churches, not only at Corinth but in other places. When he made a visit, on his third tour, to Ephesus, he came back to Corinth for a little while, but we have no history of it except a vague allusion in one of his letters. Then, he wrote a letter to the Corinthians that is lost, for he himself says, "I wrote unto you not to keep company with fornicators." Not everything that Moses, Paul or any other Bible writer wrote did the Holy Spirit think necessary to preserve.]

Paul began to hear some strange reports about Corinth. He had been at Ephesus for a year or two. At last a delegation of the people that he had baptized came to bring him a letter from the church at Corinth, inviting him to come over, paying a good deal of adulation to themselves, and asking certain questions which he answers in his first letter. There had come some Jews from Palestine and raised the old issue against Paul that he was not an apostle, that he had never seen the Lord, that he did not even claim the support of an apostle, but worked for a living, but that Peter was the man to follow. After Paul left Corinth, Apollos, a great Alexandrian rhetorician, a greater

orator than Paul, came there, and they were much taken with him. They began to say, "I am for Peter, or for Apollos, or for Christ, or for Paul." They began to misuse those gifts in a way to bring confusion. Their meetings were disorderly; their women became unseemly. When they celebrated the Lord's Supper they made a regular meal of it, and became drunk. A certain man in the Corinthian church had taken his father's wife, and the church stood up for him. Paul's heart was almost broken. He sent Titus with this letter.]

This summarizes the beginning of the church at Corinth, and all the information we have concerning it, save that revealed in the epistle itself. The great bulk of the church were Paul's converts, both Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and Romans, Europeans and Asians. Of the closing verse of the historical account (Acts 18:18) J. A. Beet has written:

Thus the curtain falls, hiding from our view for some years the church most auspiciously founded in the political metropolis of the most intelligent and enterprising nation of the ancient world.<sup>2</sup>

### III. AUTHORSHIP OF THE EPISTLE

Down through the centuries the genuineness of Paul's authorship of this letter has been almost universally accepted. No New Testament writing has been given more extensive or excellent confirmation than has 1 Corinthians. Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Syria, Polycarp of Smyrna, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian of North Africa, and Irenaeus of Gaul. all quote from it or make reference to it, some actually naming Paul as the source. The epistle is found in all the oldest and best manuscripts.

Furthermore, the epistle reads like Paul; it sounds like Paul. "Style is the man," we are told, and the style is very definitely that of Paul. Here is to be seen in superb fashion Paul's keenness of logic, warmth of heart, firmness of phrase, and on occasion his avalanche-like piling up of words as they flow forth in torrential abandon from the very depths of his disturbed and dedicated soul. The epistle is Paul's!

### IV. OCCASION AND DATE

It is of interest to note that this actually was not Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. 1 Corinthians 5:9 Paul plainly states that he had previously written words of warning and admonition concerning certain unchristian conduct. Some scholars think that at least a fragment of this early letter is seen inserted in 2 Corinthians 6:14 to 7:1. This is possible, but there is no positive proof.

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<sup>2</sup> J. A. Beet, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1892), p. 19.



There is no question, however, but that the church received the first letter. They in turn penned one in reply. Just what it said we cannot be sure, but we do know that Paul's original letter proved ineffective. Problems still existed. Some folk became confused by it, as is seen in Paul's effort to explain what he meant by saying in his previous letter "not to company with fornicators" (1 Cor. 5:9-13). Other statements which Paul makes in defense of his position (1 Cor. 4:15-19) imply that the Corinthians had sought to refute him and to belittle and discredit him.<sup>3</sup>

There were numerous problems concerning marriage and divorce, meats sacrificed to idols, Christian liberty, and other matters on which the church had apparently requested specific counsel and help. There were also questions to which they made no references. Hostile factions had arisen, and division had resulted in the church. Messengers had come in person with this disconcerting word (1 Cor. 1:11). Some believers in Corinth were troubled and confused about bodily resurrection.

Paul was at Ephesus (Acts 19) deeply engrossed in the urgent work there. He could not leave. It was the year A.D. 54 or 55. He could not pick up a phone like a modern trouble-shooter and dial a party many miles away. He could not hop a plane and make a quick trip across miles of land and sea to iron out difficulties or solve pressing problems. All he could do was write, and write he did—as he wrote his salutation (16:21) and dictated the remainder to an amanuensis (or scribe)—visualizing people and problems the righteous and the evil, and affording Christian wisdom and counsel that successfully served not only his intended recipients, but all succeeding generations. How grateful we should be that Paul was by necessity compelled to write, and that these matchless writings have been preserved for posterity!

## V. OUTLINE

For the student's interest, the following outline of 1 Corinthians is as presented by John McClintock and James Strong in their *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*; Vol. 2, pp. 125-126:

The epistle consists of four parts. The first (1-4) is designed to reclaim the Corinthians from schismatic contentions; the second (5-6) is directed against the immoralities of the Corinthians; the third (7-14) contains replies to the queries addressed to Paul by the Corinthians, and strictures upon the 125 disorders

which prevailed in their worship; and the fourth (15-16) contains an elaborate defense of the Christian doctrine of the resurrection, followed in the close of the epistle by some general instructions, intimations, and greetings.

The apostle opens with his usual salutation and with an expression of thankfulness for their general state of Christian progress (<460101>1 Corinthians 1:1-9). He then at once passes on to the lamentable divisions there were among them, and incidentally justifies his own conduct and mode of preaching (<460110>1 Corinthians 1:10; 4:16), concluding with a notice of the mission of Timothy, and of an intended authoritative visit on his own part (<460417>1 Corinthians 4:17-21). The apostle next deals with the case of incest that had taken place among them, and had provoked no censure (<460501>1 Corinthians 5:1-8), noticing, as he passes, some previous remarks he had made upon not keeping company with fornicators (<460509>1 Corinthians 5:9-13). He then comments on their evil practice of litigation before heathen tribunals (<460601>1 Corinthians 6:1-8), and again reverts to the plague-spot in Corinthian life, fornication and uncleanness (<460609>1 Corinthians 6:9-20). The last subject naturally paves the way for his answers to their inquiries about marriage (<460701>1 Corinthians 7:1-24), and about the celibacy of virgins and widows (<460725>1 Corinthians 7:25-40). The apostle next makes a transition to the subject of the lawfulness of eating things sacrificed to idols. And Christian freedom generally (1 Corinthians 8), which leads, not unnaturally, to a digression on the manner in which he waived his apostolic privileges and performed his apostolic duties (1 Corinthians 9). He then reverts to and concludes the subject of the use of things offered to idols (1 Corinthians 10-11 1), and passes onward to reprove his converts for their behavior in the assemblies of the church, both in respect to women prophesying and praying with uncovered heads (<461102>1 Corinthians 11:2-16), and also their great irregularities in the celebration of the Lord's Supper (<461117>1 Corinthians 11:17-34). Then follow full and minute instructions on the exercise of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12-14), in which is included the noble panegyric of charity (1 Corinthians 13), and further a defense of the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, about which doubts and difficulties appear to have arisen in this unhappily divided church (1 Corinthians 15).

The epistle closes with some directions concerning the contributions for the saints at Jerusalem (<461601>1 Corinthians 16:1-4), brief notices of his own intended movements (<461605>1 Corinthians 16:5-9), commendation to them of Timothy and others; (<461610>1 Corinthians 16:10-18), greetings

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<sup>3</sup> J. R. Dummelow, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1908), p. 899.

from the churches (<461619>1 Corinthians 16:19, 20), and an autograph salutation and benediction (<461621>1 Corinthians 16:21-24).\*

***END OF SAMPLE***