

A large, dynamic splash of blue water with various shades of blue and white, creating a sense of movement and energy. The splash is centered horizontally and occupies the upper half of the page.

CORINTHIANS

Welcome to the book of 1 Corinthians!

To begin your study of 1 Corinthians, meditate upon the contents of the book reflected in the overview below. Use these as guideposts to unlock the message of 1 Corinthians. The key verses we have chosen are 3:1,3 because they amplify the reasons behind the divisions and disorders in the Corinthian church. It is no mistake that a definite contrast is drawn early in the book between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of men. Wise believers who wish to please God will do well to pray and learn to discern the difference between these two kinds of wisdom! (1:24)

1 CORINTHIANS Carnality's Consequences

DIVISIONS Because of Childish Distinctions 1:10,11; 2:13; 3:13	DISORDERS Because of Immature Perspectives 5:1,2,11; 6:20	DIFFICULTIES Because of Self-centered Practices 10:1-3
1-4	5-6	7-15

"Are you not walking like mere men?" 3:1,3

Open Your Heart as You Read!

The book of 1 Corinthians gives us in-depth insight into the fact that believers are far from perfect and far from being unaffected by sin. A Christ-follower who chooses to practice a carnal or fleshly lifestyle will inevitably defile others. Carnality divides us because of our inborn desire to be first. Carnality produces disorder because in our desire to be first we often begin to make our own rules that will eventually conflict with God's order. Carnality then brings difficulties because of our inability to combine spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. How can we know for sure we are walking according to the wisdom of God? How would you compare your religious condition with that of the Corinthian believers? How would your local fellowship compare with the standards applied to those in Corinth?

ABOUT CORINTH

In order to adequately understand the content of this letter and the nature of the church located in the city, it is necessary to be aware of some historical data concerning Corinth itself. Corinth was a flourishing commercial center in Greece. It contained the temple of Aphrodite (the Greek Goddess of love), where 1,000 sacred prostitutes were made available to its followers. Being a seaport there would naturally be many sailors coming in and out of the city. With this type of cultural backdrop, the city of Corinth has rightly been described as the place where "the sinner met the sea" in its practices. In this setting, the church sprang up under the preaching of Paul during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-17).

Why study the book of 1 Corinthians?

One of the chief struggles among the Corinthian believers was the insidious tendency to think like mere men (1 Corinthians 3:3). This resulted in disorder in the administration of church life, divisions based on personality traits (and probably quirks), and general difficulties when it came to being effective disciples of Christ. In short, the Corinthian believers had been unable to adapt in practical ways to the kingdom of light (2:13-16) and their light was at best, burning dim.

How can we avoid carnality and its consequences? We should first of all not be ignorant of the many schemes of Satan to tempt us to continue to live like mere men (2 Corinthians 2:11). We must also learn to agree with Isaiah the prophet when he differentiated between the lofty mind of God and the earth-bound thoughts of men (Isaiah 55:6-9). Finally, we must appropriate the new mind that has been given to us: the mind of Christ! (1 Corinthians 3:16), combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words applied in an indestructible life (3:13).

SATAN'S SCHEMES

Just by sheer weight of experience we are out-manuevered in this arena. He will attack us with three time-proven tools to divide and conquer our heart. We must learn to discern the earthly, the sensual, and the demonic (James 3:15).

The earthly:

What kinds of things pre-occupy your thought energies and consume your passions? What are your "natural bents" toward being earthly-minded?

The sensual:

What thoughts and activities drain your mind through sensual preoccupation? In what areas do you allow a foothold for the Devil by walking the fence between that which is good and that which is evil?

The demonic:

What are the current overt and covert demonic influences in our culture, and what are the principle carriers for demonic philosophies? Where are you susceptible as a mere man?

Questions	Chapter	Title	Verse
Summarize what you feel to be Paul's discernment of the basic Corinthian problem. What does Paul's consideration of the two types of wisdom have to do with the issues being experienced?	1		
How does one discern true wisdom in a believer?	2		
What was the milk to which Paul was referring? The solid food? A man's work? What tipped Paul off to the Corinthian's immaturity?	3		
Did Paul think that he was perfect? What problem was he experiencing from some at Corinth?	4		
What is the arrogance involved here? What does 9-13 have to do with our relationship with unbelievers? With believers?	5		
What does this discussion of law courts teach us about dealing with problems between brothers?	6		
Summarize Paul's teaching on how relationships are impacted by the issue of immorality.	7		
What attitude can make liberty a destructive force?	8		
How does Paul deal with these apparent criticisms?	9		
This chapter addresses the core of Paul's feelings about the Corinthian's issues. In your own words - what was wrong? How could it be corrected?	10		
in Paul's mind what traditions were profitable? To what had the Corinthian's public gatherings degenerated?	11		
How do these one another teachings reflect core needs?	12		
Why is this chapter so central to the Corinthian solution? How does one recognize true love?	13		
Paul addresses the apparently spiritual in 14:37-38. How does one discern God's order in a community?	14		
What practical significance does the resurrection have for the believer in this life? In the life to come?	15		
What do these closing remarks tell you about Paul's feelings regarding the Corinthians?	16		

WHAT ABOUT TODAY?

To be a "Corinthian" we merely need to act like mere men. Take away the spiritual dimension of a believer's life and you will be left with what all men possess. The Holy Spirit (in concert with the Living and Written Word) were given to us that we might be more than mere men when it comes to true devotion. What have you learned from Corinthians that indicates a need to change any of your perspectives? What have you learned that reinforces how you can know God is at work in your life?

GOD'S WAYS

God's ways have been clearly revealed. Do you want to avoid carnality? If you avoid the Scriptures you sweep the room and prepare your heart for carnality. God's ways do not come naturally to us, they are spiritually taught, learned, and discerned from our spiritual Teacher!

Do you take the time to interact with God through a seeking relationship with His Word and through warm communication through prayer?

Do you dialogue with God or only find yourself going to God when you want something?

Do you find yourself more interested in the Scriptures versus other preoccupations?

Have you become rooted and grounded in the truth at any point in your life?

Are you confident in knowing your way around the Bible and comprehending the critical aspects of how God thinks?

Have you investigated the teachings of your faith in Christ in light of other people's belief systems and other prominent religions? Do you have an adequate understanding of world philosophies, history, and current events and their relationship to Truth?

THE MIND OF CHRIST

The mind of Christ is based upon an understanding of the truth of Scripture. But the Holy Spirit is the One who wields the sword of the Word for the piercing of our heart (Hebrews 4:12).

Can you discern between the voices of others, the voice of your heart, and the Voice of the Spirit?

Do you feel confident you are experiencing the mind of Christ? How is this evidenced among the community of believers you know?

TIME FOR A CHANGE!

Christ desires to impact the very inner rooms of our heart. He is not an afterthought or an added-on room, or someone to be manipulated for our own advancement or pleasure, even if we seemingly have the best of intentions! The consequence of carnality is spiritual futility. If we persist in walking like mere men we have achieved our earthly reward. If we seek to experience the mind of Christ our reward will be beyond our wildest dreams! The true warrior leaves little room for a carnal mind.

The subject of spiritual gifts is an intriguing and practical one. There are basically three "listings" of gifts in the New Testament. These listings by no means need to be considered as comprehensive, as the Spirit who gives them is as diverse as the infinite God who created our amazing universe! We outline four main passages for your consideration. Take the time to list the gifts from each letter.

Romans 12:3-8

1 Corinthians 12, 13, 14

Ephesians 4:1-16

1 Peter 4:7-11

The Gifts and the Corinthians

The Corinthians were a very gifted local church, but they were also very carnal. By improper use of gifts they were developing a very disorderly church household. We see, then, the principle that the presence of gifts in no way insures maturity. Because these believers met for self-exaltation and personal edification, their reasons and motives were called into question by Paul (1 Corinthians 11:17,18). They were apparently so carnal that they even flaunted the gifts they had in order to "be approved" or establish their status in the church (1 Corinthians 11:19-22), and in so doing, shamed those who were not similarly gifted. When Paul said that they met together in an unworthy manner, what do you think he meant?

There are many positive influences when gifts are being exercised in the body, but here we focus on Paul's guidelines for gifts which clearly place the existence and use of gifts in God's light, so we will not make the same carnal mistakes the Corinthians made.

GUIDELINES FOR GIFTS

1. Belief in Christ supersedes the importance of gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1-3)
2. Gifts, ministries, and effects are all subservient to love (12:4-6)
3. The sole purpose of gifts is to benefit one another for the common good (12:7)
4. There is only one Distributor of gifts, and He does so by His own will (12:8-11,18)
5. Arrogant use diminishes the effectiveness and impact of gifts...
By promoting superiority...12:21,23
By feeding inferiority...12:15-16
6. Earnest desire for gifts is desirable (12:31)
7. There is a more central focus which gifts must serve (13:8-12).

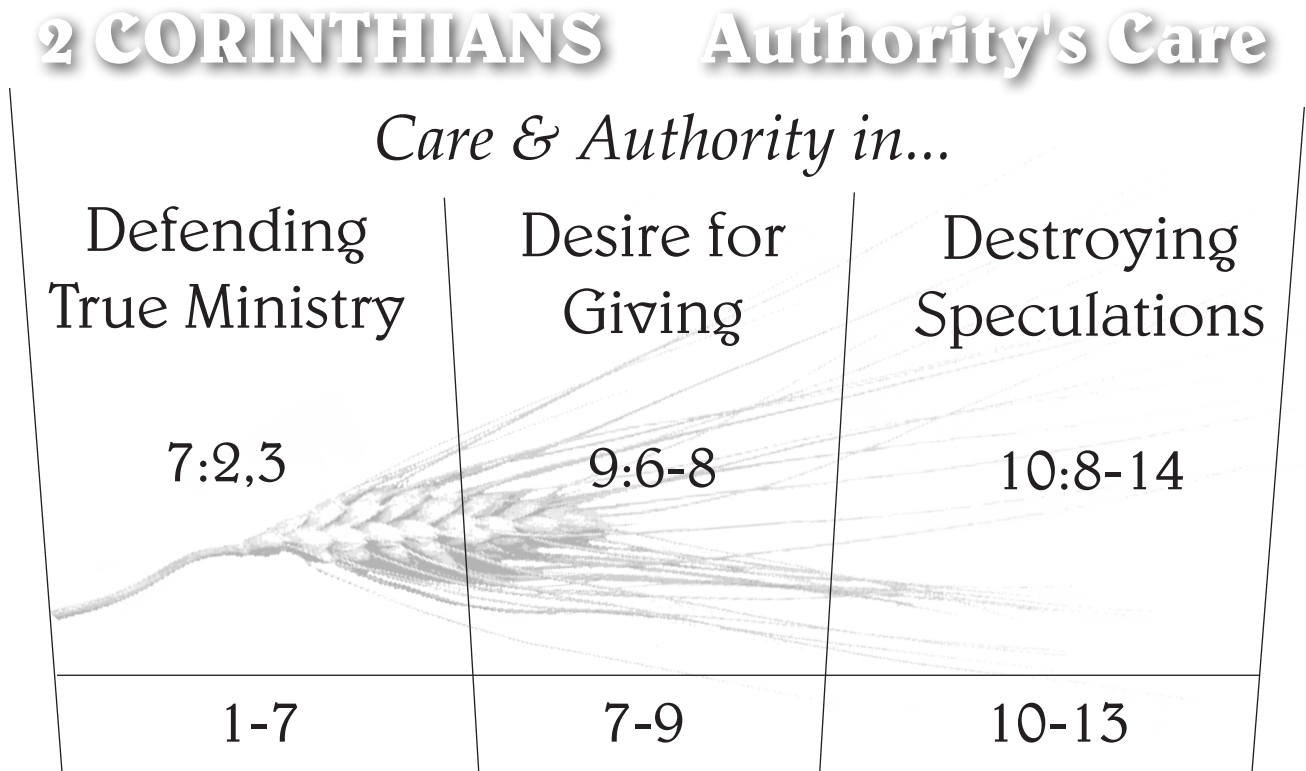
To use spiritual gifts for the exaltation of self among brothers and sisters in Christ was disastrous to the Corinthian church. Gifts were meant to bring the body to maturity (Ephesians 4) but in this case brought only pain and spiritual harm.

What other guidelines for gifts do you see that are not listed above?

What can you do to avoid this carnal use of spiritual gifts?

Welcome to the book of 2 Corinthians!

To begin your study of 2 Corinthians, meditate upon the contents of the book outlined in the overview chart below. Use these as guideposts to point the way to the message of the book. True authority will of necessity evidence true care and concern. Paul's care for the churches is reflected in 2:17, the key verse we have chosen to represent the theme of the book. Paul's desire for this care to be reciprocated is stated in 6:11-13. Take this opportunity to note the references listed for each of the sections, investigating each one as you seek to discover the flow of the book.



"We speak Christ in the sight of God." 2:17

Open Your Heart as You Read!

We live in a society that rejects authority, whether it be righteous or unrighteous. We must take great care not to miss God's mind concerning His loving care and sovereign authority. Just because we see little evidence of righteous authority in our world does not mean that God's authority over us cannot be completely benevolent and pure! Who are in positions of authority in your life? How do you respond and relate to these people? What makes up righteous authority and how does it differ from authority that is unrighteous? Do you practice Paul's instruction on giving? In what ways do you find yourself prone to speculation?

AUTHOR AND DATING

Paul---There can be little doubt that this letter was written on Paul's third missionary journey (57 A.D.) some months, or possibly a year, after 1 Corinthians. It was probably written from Philippi.

BACKGROUND

The key word in 2 Corinthians is authority. Paul writes a follow-up letter to the church at Corinth to defend this apostolic ministry and authority. Apparently his teaching, character, and motives were under attack by those in Corinth who resented his influence. He pleads with the rebellious minority to cease their opposition to his authority. The letter is filled with autobiographical details from Paul's life and gives glimpses into the experiences of Paul found nowhere else in Scripture: His pre-conversion background, his visions from God, his thorn in the flesh, his persecution at the hands of his countrymen - and, on top of all this, his daily concern and care for all the churches.

The need for Paul to write 2 Corinthians becomes clear when you count the number of ways in which his character and conduct were under attack. Paul was charged with: fickleness (1:17-23), pride and boasting (3:1), weakness (10:10), unskilled speech (11:6), meanness (7:8-10), dishonesty (12:16-19), and unsoundness of mind (5:13).

Yet, in all these accusations, Paul did not use his authority to condemn but to care for these wayward believers. This is why he was able to speak with authority yet without becoming authoritarian.

WHY STUDY the book of 2 Corinthians?

1. To show us how to deal properly with rebellion or antagonistic feelings toward God's chosen leaders.
2. To gain some important insights from Paul about leadership and to map out a strategy to model these insights in home, school, office, or dorm.
3. To show the proper and necessary relationship between leading and caring. If you engage the life of a Christ-follower you lead by giving lavish love to others.

Questions	Chapter	Title	Verse
What part did comfort play in the ministry of Paul? What is Paul defending in this chapter, and why?	1		
Paul now speaks of sorrow, a real contrast to the previous chapter. What sorrow was being inflicted? What can define a person's insincerity about the Word? How did doors open for Paul?	2		
What does it mean to have an unveiled face? How is the veil removed? What liberty is being mentioned in verse 17? What does it mean to be transformed?	3		
What is the ministry Paul is speaking of in verse 1? What does Paul desire not to happen to this group?	4		
How do you think that these words would have encouraged the Corinthian believers? What does it mean to recognize no man according to the flesh?	5		
What was causing the restrained affections being spoken of here? How is one bound together with unbelievers?	6		
Describe the desire of Paul for his relationship with the Corinthians. Describe the feelings Titus indicated.	7		
What relationship do you see between God's grace in our lives and our personal choice to give back to God?	8		
What do you see as the fruit of generous giving? What other giving principles can you find?	9		
What is Paul's motive in defending his authority? Why does he use the approach that he does?	10		
Why was it important for Paul to preach the Gospel without charge to this particular group? What does Paul mean by another Jesus or another Gospel ?	11		
What was Paul fearful of being humiliated by? Why does he reveal this fear to the Corinthians?	12		
How would you describe the tone of this chapter? How would you describe the tone of the book?	13		

WHAT ABOUT TODAY?

Paul moves between stern statements to comforting words throughout the book. When you "give yourself the test" (13:4) how do you feel that you respond to Paul's authority? To other authority in your life? Do you feel cared for by those spiritual authorities in your life? In what ways do you feel you balk at responding to authority? A mature believer recognizes true authority when it is present and is compelled to respond to the voice of wisdom!

When a person, a group, or any authority figure is in my life, how can I know if I am under care and authority which originates from God?

Here are some principles of authority and care from 2 Corinthians that can help us recognize true authority. It is abundantly clear from Scripture that we are to obey any authority that is delegated by God (1 Peter 2:11-17; Romans 13:1-7).

PRINCIPLES OF AUTHORITY

Examine each reference and jot down what principle you feel is reflected in each.

1:8;2:4

2:7,11;1:23,24

3:12

7:3

10:5,6

12:7,10

13:10

PRINCIPLES OF CARE

1:6

1:23; 24:7,8

3:2,3

4:1,16,18; 5:6

6:3-10

8:12; 13:5

13:11-14

We must be careful to respond to authority based upon biblically objective criteria.

Does God establish the observed authority in Scripture? Is there strength of character, fruit of the Spirit, perseverance, devotion, encouragement reflected in the authority and care that is being evaluated?

The relationship between our generosity toward God and the condition of our faith is an interesting encounter. Today we focus on the teaching of 2 Corinthians concerning giving, and answer the question, "How Should We Give?" You must answer the question "Should I give?" for yourself. It is a much more basic issue and has great implications for your life of faith.

We offer a passage from 2 Corinthians and give you the opportunity to assign an adequate adjective to describe that particular principle. The first principle is given as an example.

<i>Reference</i>	<i>Adjective</i>	<i>Principle</i>
8:2;9:7	Joyfully	With abundance of joy despite our circumstances. Not grudgingly or by being forced, but with cheer.
9:8		
8:3		
8:4		
8:11		
8:2;9:6		
8:7-15		
9:7		
8:20		
8:8,9		
9:14		
9:2-5		
8:12		
9:13		

These are the keys to effective giving outlined in the book of 2 Corinthians. Are they practiced principles by you? How could embracing or rejecting these principles impact someone's spiritual life? Our stay upon this earth?