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1st Corinthians Overview (Part 1)



Bible Book Overviews - Steve Gregg

In this overview of the book of 1 Corinthians, Steve Gregg highlights the various problems encountered by the church of Corinth such as divisions, sexual immorality, and challenges in accepting Christian purity and holiness. He emphasizes that followers of Christ should align themselves with Christ alone, and discusses Paul's defense of the doctrine of resurrection. Furthermore, he mentions that Paul clarifies the decision made at the Jerusalem Council that Gentile believers do not need to be circumcised or follow Jewish customs. The book covers a wide range of topics, including church discipline, marriage, spiritual gifts, and resurrection.

Transcript

So tonight we're doing 1 Corinthians, and that means I give you a bit of an introduction, and then we go over the whole book at a glance. But for me, a glance isn't real fast. We do dip in and talk about every chapter.

So it's not a light treatment, but it is a rather rapid treatment for a book this large. The Corinthian correspondence is the most bulky correspondence to any church in the Bible. Paul wrote more chapters to the Corinthians, more verses and chapters than to any other church.

And that's not because it was his favorite. It's because it was the most troubled. It was, if not the most troubled, it certainly had the widest variety of problems that needed to be addressed.

The Corinthian epistles, 1st and 2nd Corinthians, there were more. We've lost some of them. We know Paul makes mention of at least one other one that we don't have, and there's probably even another one too.

We'll talk about that. But the Corinthian epistles are what we call occasional documents. They were occasioned by something.

Paul didn't just decide to sit down and write a book and have another book in print. He had concerns about things going on in this church. And this church, I think, was one of

the most high-maintenance, troublesome churches that Paul wrote to, which is why he wrote more to them than to others.

Interestingly enough, Paul never indicated that there were elders in this church or any leadership that was technically, officially leaders. And that's strange because he talks about such things as church discipline and heretical doctrine that needs to be corrected and things like that. You'd normally think he'd write to the elders and say, are you leaders? You should address this.

But instead, when he talks about church discipline, he doesn't say, you elders get on this. He said, when the whole church comes together in my spirit with you, deliver this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so his spirit might be saved in the day of Christ Jesus. Very strange.

He doesn't speak to leaders. And I think the reason is because this church was so carnal. I don't think he trusted more than one or two people in it to even take leadership.

And Paul, as far as we know, never set up a church with a single man leading. That's more common in our day. But in biblical times, Paul tended to set up elders, a group of elders, to kind of shepherd and oversee congregations.

We see that as basically a repeated pattern in Paul and Acts. He appointed elders in every church. He told Titus to appoint elders in every city and so forth.

We typically would have a church in our day that has a pastor, even if there weren't elders. And if there are elders, there's still usually one who's also a pastor. Corinth, not so much.

We don't read any evidence that they had a leadership body or a pastor. We do read that there was a family that Paul highly recommended. And he mentions it in 1 Corinthians 16.

And this is the family of Stephanas. It is also mentioned in chapter 1 that Stephanas is one of the few people in his family that Paul himself baptized in Corinth. He baptized the family of Crispus, Gaius, and the family of Stephanas.

And he said he didn't baptize any others that he could recall. Now, that doesn't mean the other Christians weren't baptized, but apparently Paul baptized the first converts and then set them to baptizing whatever converts came afterwards, because there were no converts there when Paul arrived. Paul planted this church in Greece.

After he had left both Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea, he came down to Corinth and he planted that church there. Now, I won't get into detail about the geography of Corinth. Some commentators like to do that.

One thing about it, though, is that it was on this Isthmus, the Greek peninsula, there was this little, very, very narrow part where the sea on each side of the peninsula were only, I don't remember the number of miles, five miles, six miles, some very small number of miles between one side of it and the other. And it was so treacherous to steer ships down around the bottom of that peninsula that they often would portage boats across this little narrow connection. And it's interesting because, I mean, they'd empty the ships and they'd carry the ships across the land because the southern tip of the Chia, which was the southern part of Greece, the waters there were very dangerous.

It was a very dangerous place. And so most merchant ships would prefer to just carry their ship across land at that narrow point. Now, that's where Corinth was.

And therefore, a lot of business was done in Corinth, a lot of trade, a lot of, you know, different nationalities of sailors and merchants and so go through there. So it was a very busy city. It was also a very corrupt city, by the way.

And you do find this alluded to, frankly, in Paul's letters, but you find it also in quite a few of the Roman plays and so forth. The Corinthians in Roman plays were always depicted as drunkards, womanizers, you know, people who thought they were philosophically profound when they're really stupid. This is the caricature or the stereotype of Corinthians, that the Roman world had.

They thought they were very philosophical. Of course, they were Greeks. They were not really that far from Athens, for example.

I mean, philosophy and wisdom in the Greek society was something Greeks were famous for. But the Corinthians were not really as smart as they thought and everyone knew it. And Paul sometimes talks to them about that, about, you know, not being concerned about men's wisdom, that the wisdom of God's foolishness to men and don't, you know, Paul didn't care to try to sound wise when he came.

So this is the culture of that place. It was a very immoral place. We have to realize the whole Greek and Roman world was immoral by standards.

I mean, America has become very immoral in the past generation or two, but there's still, you know, a memory in America of Christian culture and morals that still, some people still follow them, and the ones who don't still remember them and are trying to forget them as quickly as they can. But in the Greek world, until the gospel got there, and Paul's the one who brought it to this part of the world, they didn't have any Judeo-Christian morals. They had Jews.

There were synagogues, and a few Gentiles were attracted to Judaism, either as proselytes or as God-fears. But for the most part, Jews were insular. They had their, you know, they kept apart from Gentiles.

They didn't want to be defiled by contacts. So Gentiles knew there were these synagogues here and there, and they knew there were some pretty separatist-type people in there, but they weren't exactly influenced in their culture. But when Paul came, of course, he introduced Christian ideas, and you have to, you know, when you think of how difficult it is for young people in America when they are converted to Christianity as young people, how hard it is to keep them morally pure because of how bad the culture has run us.

It was much worse then, and that wasn't just young people. Everyone in Greece, everyone in Corinth was morally impure. They had a temple to Aphrodite in Corinth that had a thousand priestesses, and that's a euphemism for prostitutes.

The worship of Aphrodite was done by sexual intercourse with a priestess, and that's the temple was supported by people paying a prostitute who was in the employment of the temple, and they had a thousand of them in Corinth. That's how big the city was. That's how immoral it was.

I mean, in America, there's still some memory of the idea that, you know, sex is supposed to be within marriage, and when sex is outside of marriage, at least Americans used to think that was a bad thing. But in a place like Corinth, no one had ever thought that was a bad thing. There was no stigma.

I mean, imagine trying to get Christians, new Christians who've been raised all their life, in an idea where sex with a prostitute was a sacrament in their religion. Absolutely no moral stigma attached to it, and Paul did have trouble with the Corinthian Christians misunderstanding and apparently compromising in the area of sexuality. He brings that up in chapter six, especially, well, chapter five too.

So there were cultural challenges in Corinth. Again, Corinthians tended to think they were smarter, more philosophically profound than others, when in fact they really weren't. No one else thought they were.

They had morality problems, and they had all kinds of cultures coming through with the merchants and their ships coming through and so forth. And this is the kind of place it was. Now, Paul came there on his second missionary journey, and this is in Acts chapter 18.

It's the first church that Paul stayed as long, or first city that he evangelized, that he stayed as long as 18 months in. In fact, we don't know if Paul ever lived more than 18 months in any city in his adult life, after he left Tarsus, his hometown. We don't know if he spent as much as 18 months even in Jerusalem before he became a Christian.

And when he went to Antioch, he was only a year there. And when he went places like Galatia and, you know, Thessalonica and Philippi, he was sometimes only a few weeks in

each of those places. But when he came to Corinth, he camped out there for 18 months, and then he had to go.

But I don't think they were really ready for him to go yet, because they were a church that really had a hard time getting established in Christian purity and holiness and doctrine. Even after Paul ministered there in person for 18 months, they still had people, after he left, wondering if the resurrection of the dead is a doctrine that they should embrace or ridicule. Now, of course, we might think, of course, unbelievers ridiculed the idea of rising from the dead, but that wasn't really their problem.

The Corinthians accepted the idea that Jesus had risen from the dead when they became Christians, it was the future resurrection of all the dead that they had problems with. Because Greek philosophy believed, from Plato on and maybe before him, that physical matter, the physical universe, is evil because it is physical. Not because it's sinful, not because of corruption, but just because it's physical.

Physicality itself was evil. Only pure spirit is good. And so the Greeks believed that all spirit is good, even demons, because their spirits were good as far as they're concerned, angels, gods, whatever.

If they're spirit, they're good. Whereas all physicality, the world, human bodies, whatever, is evil. And the philosophers believe that when you die, you finally escape this physical prison of your body and your pure spirit lives on forever disembodied.

And when Paul preached that there's a resurrection of the dead, well, remember when he came to Athens in Acts 17, just before he came to Corinth, on Mars Hill, he was preaching the gospel and the people listened attentively until he said, and God has confirmed this, in that he raised Jesus from the dead. You read this, the closing parts of chapter 17 of Acts. As soon as Paul said he raised Jesus from the dead, the Greek philosophers started mocking and scoffing and he couldn't even finish his sermon.

He just, he left the pulpit humiliated by their mockery. And what they were mocking was this idea that the dead would rise. And it wasn't so much the problem that modern seculars would have.

Modern secularists would just have a prejudice against all miraculous things and the raising of the dead being a particularly miraculous thing that they would laugh at, but only because it's a miracle. The Greeks didn't have so much problem with the supernatural, with miracles. It was their philosophy.

They believe the body is a necessary evil during this lifetime that our spirits are imprisoned in. But when you die, you escape it. And what God in heaven would ever require you to go back into your body again, once you've escaped, I mean, once you're free.

And I actually, this mentality has infected some American Christians I know, because I, from time to time, have people ask me, well, if we go to heaven when we die, doesn't the Bible say we're going to rise from the dead at the end? So why would we need to rise from the dead if we've already gone to heaven? Well, the answer is because God never intended for us to be disembodied spirits forever. He created the earth for man. It says in Psalm 115, verse 16, heaven, even the heavens are the Lord's, but the earth he has made for the sons of men.

And he made Adam and Eve to live on earth. If they had not sinned, they would be still living on earth today and forever. They'd be eating of the tree of life and living forever.

God never made them to die or to leave this planet. That was something that came up because they sinned and they died. And now God's eventually going to raise the dead on the last day, the Bible says.

And when that happens, of course, the spirits that have departed and been with Christ since they died will come back with him, Paul says in 1 Thessalonians, and they'll be in the resurrected bodies. But to the Greek mind, that was ridiculous. Once you've gotten out of your body, you're free.

Why would God even contemplate forcing you to live in a body again? Of course, the Bible tells us the body will be in what would be like Christ's glorified body. It's not going to have all the problems of this body, but it would still be physical. When Jesus rose from the dead, he said to his disciples, see, a spirit does not have flesh and bone as you see I have, he said.

Jesus had flesh and bone. He was not a spirit. He was a body.

That's why his tomb was empty. The body was gone. It was on his feet again.

It was glorified, but it was not vaporized. And so when Paul came to the Greek world and Corinth being one of those Greek cities, the Greeks, and certainly in Athens, they did have serious problems with the idea of resurrection, though the Corinthians who received Christ accepted the idea that Jesus had risen from the dead. But later they wondered whether this doctrine of all of this resurrection, that makes sense or not.

And so Paul had to write a whole chapter, one of the longest chapters in his writings, 1 Corinthians 15, to just defend that one doctrine. So even when he had been there that long, they still had, you know, lots of basic problems in their theology, their morality, and things like that. And so this letter is a long one.

And what's more, he had to write another one which had just another long one, dealt with a bunch of other problems. But here's the background of this. So he planted this church and stayed there for 18 months during his first missionary journey.

When he came there, he met Priscilla and Aquila, according to Acts chapter 18. Priscilla and Aquila were Jews from Rome. But as Luke tells us in Acts, and as actually Roman historians also tell us, Emperor Claudius had banished all Jews from Rome, and that included Christian Jews.

We don't know if they were Christians before they came to Corinth or not, but Paul met them in Corinth. And they were tent makers, which is what he did for a trade also. So he lived with them and worked with them.

And they already either were Christians or else he converted them. That's never made clear. It's not clear whether they had been converted in Rome and they came down to Corinth because they were banished by Claudius, or whether they were just Jews that Paul evangelized among his early converts there.

But they became his partners in ministry. Later he left Corinth and went to Ephesus and then back to Antioch. They went with him to Ephesus and they settled in Ephesus for a while.

Then later they were back in Rome when Paul wrote Romans. Priscilla and Aquila had moved back there now because Claudius had died. But they moved around and they were in Paul's circuit.

But he met them there. After he was kicked out of the synagogue in Corinth, he started holding meetings in apparently the rented school of somebody. And then he worked with Priscilla and Aquila.

All of this stuff you can get from Acts. But when he left, he went back to Antiochus Home Church and to Jerusalem. Then he went on his third missionary journey.

And on his third journey, he spent three years in Ephesus, which is the only place besides Corinth that we know of Paul spending such a long time. He spent twice as long in Ephesus. But he was evangelizing all of Asia Minor when he was there.

It says in the three years he spent there, all of Asia heard the gospel. That's all of the land mass we now call Turkey was evangelized those three years. In Corinth for 18 months, we don't know if anyone was evangelized outside Corinth by Paul.

They were high, high maintenance people, high maintenance church. Anyway, when he was in Ephesus, he apparently wrote both first and second Corinthians for Ephesus. So he left Corinth, he left Corinth, pretty much as his second missionary journey had ended.

Then as he began his third missionary journey, he camped for a long time in Ephesus and he had to write first and second Corinthians. Now in first Corinthians five, nine, he mentions a previous epistle that he'd written to them. It apparently was not a long epistle dealing with many subjects, although we don't know the complete range of

subjects he wrote about, but he does say he, he warned them about fornication, which we can see would be one of the things that that church, you know, needed to be informed about more than once.

It's in first Corinthians five, nine. He says, I wrote to you in my epistle. Now this is in what we call first Corinthians, but it's actually his second letter to them.

They had an, they received an earlier epistle. That epistle has been lost. If it were found, I suppose it would have as much right to be in the Bible as the other two, but it's, it's lost.

It's not ever going to be found. So really the, the epistle we call Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, really his second one. And he says, I wrote to you in an epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.

Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral, immoral people of the world or with the covetous or extortioners or idolaters, since you would then have to go out of the world. He said, I'm only talking about people who call themselves Christians and live immoral lives. You don't even meet with them.

He says, so we see there was an earlier letter. He may have written that one from Ephesus also. Maybe he sent it to them before he got to Ephesus.

We have no idea about the timeframe or very much about that epistle, except that he says he had written one. So this is his second one. We also have a book in our Bible.

It's called second Corinthians, which we'll take next month, but there seems to have been a letter between first and second Corinthians is lost also. Not every scholar would agree with that, but almost all do, because Paul in second Corinthians refers back to a letter he had sent them, which apparently was at the time his most recent letter, which he describes in terms that does not sound like first Corinthians to us. So it looks like we may have second and fourth Corinthians and first and third Corinthians are missing forever, possibly.

So this is the nature of the Corinthian correspondence. Paul wrote more letters to them than as far as we know anyone else, longer letters than he wrote to anyone else and had more problems with them in many respects. By the time he wrote second Corinthians, leaders in the church of Corinth were doubting that Paul was even an apostle and were criticizing him and he had to defend his apostleship very vehemently in second Corinthians.

It wasn't so much necessary in first Corinthians, but there were other problems. Now, while he was in those, in Ephesus for those three years, he received a letter from the Corinthian church. It was brought to him by Stephanas, who is, as I say, one of the earliest converts in Corinth.

And I had alluded, but I didn't mention, I didn't read first Corinthians 16:15. At the end of first Corinthians, Paul mentions the household of Stephanas and urges the Corinthians in general to submit to people like him. Not submit to your elders, submit to the bishops, submit to people like this.

Like what? He said the household of Stephanas are the first fruits of Achaia, I mean the first converts in that region. He said they have addicted themselves to the serving of the saints. Submit to people like that.

So instead of having an eldership at that point, there are some good examples among the older Christians, the family of Stephanas. When you meet people like that, you know, submit to people like that. So it would appear that Paul didn't have confidence in a large number of people in Corinth to appoint them as official leaders, but he did recommend as good examples to follow, you know, the oldest Christians in the town.

Now Stephanas, who's mentioned in first Corinthians one and in first Corinthians 16, in the ways we've mentioned, was also mentioned as bringing Paul a letter. It was Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus. They are mentioned in first Corinthians 16-17.

And apparently when Paul was in Ephesus, these three came as a delegation from Corinth with a letter from the Corinthians to Paul. They had some questions they wanted him to address in writing since he wasn't there to speak to him. They were written questions.

And he begins addressing these questions in chapter 7, verse 1, and through the rest of the book. It's at that point that he says, Now concerning the things about which you wrote to me, and he begins to address certain issues. One is whether it's better for people to remain single or to get married.

And that's what he discusses in chapter 7. He also touches on the divorce question there. When you get to chapters 8 through 10, he's dealing with something else they asked him in their letter. Should we or should we not eat meat sacrificed to idols? And we'll discuss the context for that question when we get to it tonight.

And then in, that's in chapters 8 through 10. In chapter 11, there was a matter of women trying to decide whether they should wear head coverings now or not. And he addresses that.

There's also problems in their communion service, also in chapter 11, where they were unruly at the communion meal. And some people were going home drunk, and others were not getting enough to eat. And he rebukes them for that and gives instructions.

Then the chapters 12 through 14, there was disorderly conduct in the church service with reference to the use of the gifts of the spirit. Apparently, it was, you know, too many people wanted to speak at the same time. Too many people wanted to speak in tongues.

Too many people wanted to prophesy, and they weren't waiting for each other. And there was no interpretation to the tongues, and sort of like many Pentecostal churches today, frankly. And Paul had to, you know, reel them in and tell them how to conduct themselves in those areas.

That's chapters 12 through 14. And then in chapter 15, which is really the last chapter that deals with anything serious. I mean, chapter 16 is kind of a closing chapter, but chapter 15 is that chapter where he talks about the resurrection of the dead, which some people were denied as a doctor.

So the first six chapters, he deals with things prior to addressing their letter. But a letter had come to him. And in that letter, they had asked about these subjects.

And Paul, in chapter 7, begins saying, now concerning the things about which he wrote to me, here we go. And he answers those things one by one. Now, on the other hand, in the first parts of the letter, he's addressing things he's heard about.

Mainly, there's a couple things he's heard about. And apparently, it was from the household of Chloe that he first heard about the divisions in the church. Because he says in chapter 1, verse 11, it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you.

Now, we don't know who Chloe was, but apparently some people from Chloe's household, one of the families in Corinth, had come to Ephesus, either to visit Paul or run other business and had made a point of talking to Paul. And he heard the rumor from them that the church is beginning to get divided. Some were saying, I'm of Paul.

Some were saying, I'm of Paulus. Some were saying, I'm of Cephas. And a few were saying, I'm of Christ.

Now, how does a Paulus come into this? When Paul left Corinth in chapter 18 of Acts and went through Ephesus and then on to Jerusalem for the feast, he left Priscilla and Aquila to sort of manage things in Ephesus, where he had preached to a few people, apparently. And there was a small group meeting there. Now, while Paul was away, Apollos, who was an evangelist from Alexandria, a Jewish man, had come to Ephesus.

And there was something deficient in his understanding of the gospel. And so Priscilla and Aquila had taken him aside to instruct him more perfectly. We don't know exactly what the nature was of his error.

We're only told that he only knew the baptism of John the Baptist. Well, okay, well, compared to what? You know, he obviously didn't know about being baptized in the name of Jesus. But how much of the gospel he knew, we don't know.

In fact, we would suggest he wasn't even a Christian at all, except that Luke says he was

well instructed in the ways of the Lord, but that he only knew the baptism of John. The ways of the Lord might mean Jewish ways. Maybe he doesn't mean Christian ways.

He was a Jewish man from Alexandria. But since he knew of John the Baptist, how much he knew about Jesus, we don't know. We won't worry about that right now.

But Acts tells us that he got, you know, his views got adjusted through contact with Priscilla and then he left Ephesus and went to Corinth. Now Paul had left Corinth and had left Ephesus and had gone to Jerusalem. And now Apollos comes to Corinth in Paul's absence.

Now we are told in Acts that Apollos was a very eloquent man, apparently a very, you know, convincing debater, just the kind of person that would impress Greeks with their philosophical bent. And so apparently after Apollos left Corinth, some of the Corinthians who were Christians said, well, I kind of like Apollos. I kind of like his style.

He's my man. I'm Apollos. And others no doubt were saying, no, I'm Apollos.

He's the guy who planted the church. We're going to be, we're going to stand with Paul. Now there must have been a third group because Paul mentions them that said, we are of Cephas.

Now Cephas is the Aramaic name for Peter. As far as we know, Peter had never even been to Corinth. We have no record of him going there.

But Peter was in fact the leader at that particular time of the church in Jerusalem, or at least it was a very important leader in Jerusalem. And it's very possible that some Judaizers from Jerusalem claiming to be representative of what Peter taught had come to Corinth. I say that because when you read 2 Corinthians, there's some Judaizers that Apollos to address.

So Judaizers were people who were Christians, Christian Jews, who wanted to force Gentile Christians to become Jewish too, try to force them to be circumcised and stuff. And these Judaizers apparently sometimes claimed as they came to these Gentile churches, oh, we're from Jerusalem where Peter is, you know, we're, we're, this is what Peter teaches. They were probably misrepresenting Peter, but nonetheless, Jerusalem was the mothership.

You know, it's like the mother church and Peter was prominent there. And so for someone to come into Corinth and say, oh, you guys don't know what they teach over there in Jerusalem. That's where the real church is.

You know, that's where Peter is. And, and they may have been kind of tending to Judaize a little bit. And, and the group that wasn't saying I'm of Paul or the, or I'm of Apollos were saying, I'm of Cephas, I'm of Peter.

We don't, we all, I'm only deducing because we have no evidence that Peter ever visited Corinth. We don't know how a group in Corinth came to identify themselves with him, but most likely it's through someone who came from the Jerusalem church and gave the impression that what they were teaching is what Peter preaches. Now, of course, there was a third group, a fourth group that said we are of Christ.

And that's of course, what people should say. A lot of preachers say, even they were sectarian. You know, when Paul says, one of you says, I'm of Peter, one of you says, I'm of Paul, one says I'm of Hosn, one of you says I'm of Christ.

Many preachers, they were all wrong. I mean, the ones who say we're of Christ, they were just being superior. You know, oh, you guys are of those guys, but we are of Christ, you know, but there's no indication in Paul's writing that those who are saying we are of Christ were in any sense saying it with a smug attitude.

The truth is when Paul rebukes them for having these different branches, he says, what was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? Of course not, but they were baptized in the name of Christ. He was crucified for them. So there's nothing wrong with saying I'm of Christ.

That's the very point he's making. If Paul was crucified for you, then you'd be a Paul. If you're baptized in the name of Paul, then you'd be a Paul, but you weren't because he didn't, but Jesus did.

So you're Jesus. I mean, that's the point he's making. They got to be of someone, and Jesus is the guy.

You know, later on in 1 Corinthians 11, 3, Paul says the head of every man is Christ. Certainly not Paul or Apollos or Cephas. Now, what we find in the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians is Paul is talking about himself and Apollos.

Now, I've read something into this I've never seen a do, and I could be mistaken, but I don't think I am. I think I read in Paul a little bit of an edge in his attitude toward Apollos, but Paul doesn't want to contribute to the division. He doesn't want to badmouth Apollos.

He doesn't want to, you know, there's already division. Some say I'm the Paul, some say I'm the Apollos. He doesn't want to cause a bigger rift, but he wants to in some way adjust their thinking with reference to Apollos.

And in chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4, he is discussing himself and Apollos primarily. And you can see this, for example, in chapter 4 when he's in chapter 4 verse 6, he's referring to what he said prior to this in the book. Now, these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one another.

Now, we can see, therefore, and we'll see it in chapter 1, 2, and 3 as well, that Paul is a little bit upset that when he, as soon as he left his children in the faith, Apollos comes in and maybe Paul didn't intend to. Apollos may have been totally innocent of that, but he kind of, there was a rivalry between people who liked Apollos better than him. Now, what was so great about Apollos? He was a great orator.

He was a great debater. And we find Paul in the first four chapters saying, when I came, I didn't come with enticing words of men's wisdom. I didn't want your faith to rest in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God.

And he says, you know, the wisdom of man, that's foolishness to God. And the foolishness of God is, you know, the wisdom of God is foolishness to men. And, you know, he's kind of making this big contrast in the first, especially the first three chapters, that wisdom, such as the Greeks think of it, is not really to be put on the pedestal that you people tend to put it on.

And I didn't take that approach when I came to you. He doesn't say, like Apollos did. He doesn't have to say that.

If, in fact, Apollos did, then the contrast would be obvious. And Paul is definitely talking in the context of this perceived rivalry between Paul and Apollos, which he's saying, we don't have a rivalry here. You people are making a rivalry between us, but we don't.

Because he says, Apollos and I were on the same team. I planted the seeds, Apollos watered, God gave the increase. I built the foundation of the church, Apollos and others have built on it.

You know, we're not building rival churches. The foundation I laid is the only foundation that can be laid. No man can lay another foundation than that which I've laid, which is Christ Jesus.

So Apollos didn't come and find that Paul had built a church here, you know, the first church of Paul on, you know, the corner of Main Street and Fifth, and then two blocks down on the corner of Main Street and there's the first church of Apollos. We don't have competing churches here. This is one field.

It's God's field. I planted in it, Apollos watered it. This is one building, the holy temple of the Holy Spirit, the church is.

I laid the foundation. I left and Apollos and others came and built on the foundation. It's the same project.

We have the same boss. We're not separate owners of separate movements. We are workers on the same crew.

That's his argument. But all the while he's saying it, he's making a contrast, it seems to me, between how the approach he took. I didn't come to try to win you with debate and with clever arguments and stuff like that.

And in my opinion, that is a very subtle contrast he's making between himself and Apollos. And there's one other thing. I don't think he wants them to be against Apollos.

He's not trying to compete with Apollos, but he also doesn't want them to think that the way Apollos did things is really superior to the way he did that. He did things the way that he would recommend to be done. But another reason I think there could have been sort of a little edge there toward Apollos is that in chapter 16, when he's closing things down, and I didn't put this in my notes.

Oh, verse 12, 1 Corinthians 16, 12. He says, Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to come to you with the brethren, but he was quite unwilling to come at this time. However, he will come when he has a convenient time.

Now notice he says, I strongly urged Apollos to come. I feel like I can't come to you so many. I asked Apollos if he'd go, he says no.

He says he's unwilling to come at this time. He didn't say he's predisposed, he's busy, he can't come at times. He was just unwilling to come.

But he'll come when he can. Now that's not really a criticism, but it seems like that could have been said a little more supportive of Apollos' refusal to come. I mean, he could say he had very good reasons not to come.

He's really busy in this area, there's a lot of fruit here, he's not free to leave that and come over to you. Instead he says he was just unwilling to come. You know, that it seems like that should have a little bit of softening, a little bit of explanation.

But you know, Paul doesn't ever come out and criticize Apollos, but there's evidence that he is not as happy as he could be with Apollos. And he doesn't want to undermine Apollos, and he calls him our brother Apollos. And I was encouraging Apollos to come to you, like I endorse Apollos, I'm for him coming to you, I think it'd be a good thing.

But I think, I don't know if Paul ever even met Apollos. We don't read of them ever crossing paths. All he knows is when he heard about the church in Corinth having troubles of division in the time Paul had been away, Apollos had been there.

And now there are people saying, I'm with Apollos, kind of splitting the church. And once again, I'm not suggesting, and Paul doesn't suggest that Apollos tried to do that. I mean, it's just some people like some preachers better than others, and Apollos seemed to have something that appealed to some of them in a different way.

Maybe to all of them, but some of them maybe felt, oh we should be loyal to Paul, he's our father in the faith. And Paul does say that in 1 Corinthians 14, I assume you can tell me, he says, though you have 10,000 instructors in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for I have begotten you through Christ in the gospel. So I mean, Paul makes it very clear, he does have a unique role to play with them as a spiritual founder and father.

There may be lots of teachers, but they should be careful not to abandon what they learned from their father. So this is what I see happening here in the first four chapters. There's a division, Paul's very unhappy about the division in the church, and I think he sees Apollos perhaps inadvertently has caused this.

I don't think he's blaming Apollos, but he's blaming them for allowing themselves to have this divisive reaction. And then you come to chapters five and six, and of course, remember it's after that he says, now concerning things I wrote to you in chapter seven. But the first four chapters, he's talking about this divisiveness of the church, the issue of him and Apollos, how they should view him and Apollos.

And he's trying to, you know, he's trying to make unity here without indicating that necessarily his approach would be the same as Apollos' approach to things. But he doesn't want to undermine Apollos because that would be more divisive still, and Paul was very much against that. But in chapter five, he has to deal with an amazing problem in the church, and that was there was a man living in a sexual relationship with his father's wife.

It could be that it was his father's widow. We don't know. Paul doesn't say his father could still have been living.

It could have been his father's ex-wife. I mean, his father might have been separated or divorced from the woman, but Paul doesn't see there was grounds for divorce, and therefore she's still his wife. But one way or another, the woman in question was the wife of this man's father.

Now, it doesn't say that she was his mother. And I think Paul, there's a good word in Greek to say that this man sleep with his mother, you know, but with his father's wife suggests probably it was a stepmother, which isn't really much better. But Paul is shocked.

He says, I'm amazed. He says, even the pagans with their immorality, they don't look favorably on that kind of incestuous kind of thing. And so he advises that the man be thrown out of the church.

Now, this is a case of church discipline. Church recommended by Jesus himself in Matthew 18. Paul and several other places in the Bible recommends it.

We'll have more to say about that. We're actually going to go through this chapter by chapter, but I'm just looking at the bigger blocks of it right now. And then there is, of course, chapter six.

One of the problems Paul had heard about, and this was also another manifestation of the divisiveness of the spirit of the church, some were taking each other to court just over the kinds of things people go to court over. Someone had injured another person. Instead of solving it peaceably between brethren, the injured party takes him to court before a pagan judge.

And Paul's amazed at that. He's astonished. Dare any of you having a complaint, a matter against another go to law before the unrighteous? And what he basically says is a couple of things.

One, if you're going to have somebody mediate these things, don't go to a pagan. This should be done in-house. Isn't there a wise man among you who can arbitrate in these matters? You should go to another brother.

But then he says, actually, you should just absorb the injury. At least you should do that rather than go to court. Why drag the testimony of Christ through the mud by Christians who should love each other and are supposed to be known for their unity.

You know, going to fight in front of a pagan judge. You know, you could, of course, if you if you can't just absorb the injury, which is a Christian thing to do and let it go, well, then at least argue it before a Christian in the church, a wise Christian. So this is what he's concerned with in the first part of Chapter six and the latter part of Chapter six.

He has to clarify something that they were very confused about and which I think many people who don't know the whole context of this don't don't grasp. Paul's, remember, Paul came to Corinth initially on his second missionary journey. Just between the first and second missionary journey, Paul had been in Antioch and had made a trip to Jerusalem for the Jerusalem Council, which is in Acts Chapter 15.

Why did they go there? They went there because Paul's work on his first missionary journey brought many Gentiles, uncircumcised Gentiles, into the body of Christ. Until Paul's ministry, there really wasn't much in the way of uncircumcised Gentiles coming into the church. And there's some question of whether they should become Jews so that they could they become like like the Jewish believers who were the first tens of thousands of believers were all Jewish and therefore already circumcised from birth.

No one had ever had to get circumcised after being converted because they were all circumcised before they were Christians. And you don't need to get circumcised twice. That's sort of a once in a lifetime deal, thankfully.

But now the Gentiles who were not circumcised coming in, well, it had always been okay

for Gentiles to become Jews from the time of Moses on, even from the time of Abraham, according to Genesis 17. If Abraham had Gentiles in his household, servants and so forth, they could be circumcised and become like Abraham himself. And when Israel was founded at Sinai, it was established that if a Gentile wants to keep the Passover with you, he can be circumcised to become one of you.

And he can become a Jew. And that was always okay through the whole Old Testament, there was never a time when only the Jews were allowed to be saved. Any Gentile who wanted to become a Jew and be saved or be part of the people.

But they had to be circumcised. And when a Gentile got circumcised, he was called a proselyte. The word proselyte just means a convert to Judaism.

Now, that was never controversial. And no doubt in the early church in Jerusalem, there were not only native Jews, but also probably some proselytes in the church, but they were circumcised by definition. A proselyte has been circumcised.

But Paul was bringing Gentiles in who were not becoming proselytes. They weren't being circumcised. They were not joining Judaism.

They were not becoming Jews in any sense. They were just becoming followers of Christ with their uncircumcised, unclean bodies as the Jews looked at it. And this became very controversial.

And so there was the Jerusalem Council, the first ecumenical council of the church in history in Acts 15, where the apostles and elders got together to decide if Paul was okay in bringing these people in uncircumcised or if they should be circumcised and Paul should be overruled. The council ruled in favor of Paul. And because of that, Gentiles have never been required to be circumcised since then in the Christian church.

But at the council, James, who gave the ruling, said, you know, these Gentiles, all the cities where they are, there's Jews. Moses has been preached in the synagogues in every city for generations, he said. That means there's Jews who are inbred with these prejudices of Judaism.

And James didn't want them to be put off by Gentile libertine behavior. And Gentiles were notoriously, of course, immoral and ate things that the Jews found to be disgusting and things like that. And so they said, listen, let's tell the Gentiles they don't have to become Jews.

They don't have to be circumcised. They don't have to keep the law. But let's request that they abstain from a few things to avoid offending the Jewish people and turning them off to Christianity.

And those things he named were eating blood. One of the most disgusting things to a

Jewish mind is eating blood. Gentiles eat blood all the time with their animals, with their meats, just like we do.

I mean, so abstain from blood, from meat sacrifice to idols, a very serious concern to the Jewish people. From things strangled, interestingly, that's not even in the law, but apparently an animal that was strangled, its blood would not be drained properly. You had to get a slit throat, as hard as beating, and the heart beats the blood out, that drains out.

If an animal is dead, its heart stops beating and its body won't drain of blood. So apparently Gentiles would sometimes strangle animals so that probably they could eat them while blood was still infused on all the tissues, all the meat, bloodier meat was appealing to them. They said, no, don't eat things strangled.

And fornication. So there's four things they said, Gentiles, Christians, they would request them out of consideration to the Jews, not to unnecessarily offend the Jews. You don't have to become Jews, don't have to be circumcised, but please abstain from blood, from meat sacrifice to idols, from things strangled, and from fornication.

And they wrote a letter from the Jerusalem Council, and they assigned Paul and Barnabas, who had made the first missionary journey together, to carry this letter to the Gentile churches. And we are told they did so. But on the second missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas separated into two teams.

Barnabas took his nephew Mark on his team, and Paul took Silas on his team, later picked up both Timothy and Luke on his team. But on the second missionary journey, he was traveling without Barnabas, but both Barnabas and Paul were taking this letter from the Jerusalem Council to the churches. So when Paul came to Corinth, a Gentile area, and started a Gentile church, it was his obligation, and I think he did it, to share with them what the Jerusalem Council had requested of the Gentile believers.

You don't have to become Jews, but please abstain from these things. Now, three of those things had to do with what you eat or don't eat. And we know from many things Paul wrote, he didn't think that was an issue at all, unless it was going to offend somebody.

But fornication was on the list too. And apparently, we have to read between the lines here, but I think we can easily do so. When Paul shared the contents of this letter, there was sort of like a caveat.

You know, they've asked that you don't do these four things, but really the things you eat, that doesn't, it's not what goes into a man's mouth that makes him unclean, it's what comes out of his mouth, as Jesus said. Or Paul said to the Romans in Romans 14, nothing is unclean of itself, but to him who thinks it's unclean, it's unclean to him. And I

mean, Paul's position was very clear.

God doesn't care what you eat. He does care about whether you're acting unlovingly toward your brother, and if you're doing something to rub it in the face of somebody who'll be offended by it, that's not loving, and you shouldn't do that. And that was James's concern of the Council too.

We're concerned that the Jews will be offended by this outrageous, what they would consider to be outrageous, unrestrained Gentile behavior, like eating blood. And so Paul had apparently told the Corinthians, you know, yes, these things have been requested by the Jerusalem Council, but just between you and me, this food business is not an issue to God. Now when he left, in fact, I think Paul actually used the phrase, all things are lawful, speaking about food.

Now when he left, there were some in the church seeking to justify their temptations to fornicate, who said, you know those things on that letter, Paul said all things are lawful. He said these guys from Jerusalem, they had their opinion, but Paul didn't share their opinion. All things are lawful, so we can eat and we can fornicate if we want to.

And when Paul heard this, he had to write the second half of 1 Corinthians 6 to them and say, wait a minute, food is for the belly and the belly is for food and God will destroy both of them. They're not eternal, they're not the big, but the body is not made for fornication. He said, and he had to clarify to them that when he said all things are lawful, he didn't mean all behavior is lawful, like fornication, but all foods are clean, all foods are lawful.

And this is the argument he makes in the latter part of chapter 6. He's assuming, because he quotes, they're saying all things are lawful. He says, yes, all things are lawful, but not everything edifies. All things are lawful, but I don't want to be in bondage to anything.

Everything is lawful, but there's other things to consider too. But he said, all food is certainly lawful, but the fornication is not. And by the end of that chapter, he says, you know, all manner of sin you do is outside the body.

He that fornicates is sinning against his own body. And that's not just concern that, you know, you're hurting yourself because he says, don't you know, your body's the temple of the Holy Spirit? The body you're sinning against is God's temple. You are defiling the temple if you fornicate.

He says, do you not know that you're one flesh with Jesus? If you fornicate, are you making Jesus one flesh with a prostitute? That's what he says. And so it's very clear that Paul is trying to make a stark division between restrictions about what you eat, which are not an issue to him, and restrictions on unrestrained moral, you know, sexual

behavior. That was a big issue.

And but they had not made that connection themselves because all four of those things were in the same letter. And I do believe that Paul had downplayed when he was present with them, the eating restrictions. And they had illegitimately or dishonestly in their own minds extended that to the fornication, which was on the same list.

He says, no, that's a different category there. The belly is made for food, food is made for the belly. What you eat is not a moral issue, but the body is not made for fornication.

And so that's what we got. So we're going to take a break in just a minute, brief break, and then I'm going to go through each chapter rather quickly. But I you might think I just did.

No, I just gave you the overview. So let me let me remind you. When Paul writes to them, the first thing he brings up is these divisions.

Some say I'm a Paul's, I'm of a Paul's, I'm of Cephas. And he spends the first four chapters trying to correct them on that. The main correction he wants to make is that the body of Christ must not be divided and you shouldn't have loyalties between one teacher and another, even if you like one better than another.

There's no loyalty issues there shouldn't be. No teacher owns you. God does.

And and he, of course, deals with the Apollo's and him thing, too, and tries to, I think, while trying to indicate that we're on the same team here, we're partners on the same project, still say, but you remember what I preached to you. I had the power of God. I didn't come with those enticing words of wisdom.

I think I think that they would in their own head see a contrast between him and Paul's in that respect. And then in Chapter five, he deals with the incestuous relationship of the church and requires the church discipline. Chapter six.

At the beginning, he's talking about them going to court against their brothers, rebuking them for that. And then in the latter part of the chapter, clarifying that food is clean, but fornication is not clean. And that gets you up through Chapter six, then Chapter seven is where he turns the course is now concerning the things about which you wrote to me.

And he deals with marriage, divorce, singleness issues in Chapter seven. He's got three chapters, chapters eight, nine and ten about meat sacrifice to idols and the ramifications of that. Then he's got he's got Chapter 11, deals with two subjects.

One is the women wearing head coverings and the other is people misbehaving at communion. Then chapters 12, 13 and 14 are about the gifts of the spirit, how they should be re reined in somewhat more than they were doing. They're being a little

chaotic and he wanted to regulate that.

And then Chapter 15 is talking about the the people who are denying the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead and correcting them. Chapter 16, then like like some of the final chapters of Paul's longer epistles, just kind of gathers up loose ends and doesn't have a doesn't have an individual topic that dominates it, but just exhortations and greetings and things like that. Pretty much.

So that's what we're going to find. That's an overview of the book. But I'm going to we're going to take about 10 minute break and then we'll come back and I will do I'm going to go through each chapter somewhat quickly, but but more focused than I just did.

I focused on sections more just now. I want to clarify some things, anything that's a hard passage I'm going to try to clear up. And that's the best we can do short of an actual verse by verse treatment of the whole book.