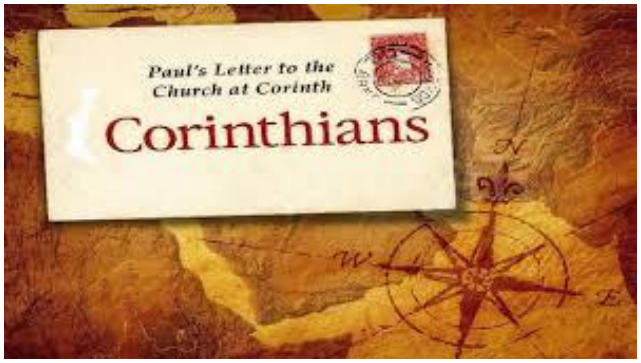
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# First Corinthians from a Messianic Jewish Perspective

*To Jerry Hombs, good friend and fellow believer. "Mama" would be proud of you.*




There is something about a letter. Something personal, yet remote; something intimate, yet formal; something urgent and unavoidable, yet much easier to deal with than a finger in the face. And, if you were a frequent traveler throughout the known world of some two thousand years ago, it could also be just about your only reliable form of communication with those you loved when you could not be there in person. If you were also a teacher, a guidance counselor, and a spiritual leader for the people in several separate congregations, you might have to depend on letters even more. For all those reasons, **Paul's** letters to the church **he** founded in **Corinth** are among the most fascinating in the Bible. But they are also hugely instructive, not only for what they tell us about basic theology, but also for what they tell us about ourselves. Yet in spite of that, people sometimes claim that the Bible is no longer relevant today. They claim that we have somehow "moved beyond" any kind of meaningful application to our lives here in the twenty-first century. But on the contrary, **Paul's** letters to **the Corinthians** make it so very plain, though many things have changed in the last twenty centuries, the nature of mankind and the main function of letter-writing have not. If people are messing things up, and you have something you really need to say, and if you want to make sure the folks on the other end will get the point, you need to write it down![1]

**Author and Date:** **Paul** is acknowledged as the author both by the letter itself

**(1:1-2** and **16:21)**, and by the early church fathers. **His** authorship was attested by Clement of Rome as early as 96 AD, and today practically all interpreters of the B'rit Chadashah agree. The letter was written in 55 AD (see the commentary on **Galatians Ae – Dates of Books in the B'rit Chadashah**), toward the close of **Paul's** three-year ministry in **Ephesus 16:5-9**. It is clear from **his** reference to staying in **Ephesus** until **Shavu'ot (16:8)** that **he** intended to remain there somewhat less than a year when **he** wrote **First Corinthians**.

**Occasion and Purposes: Paul** had received information from several sources concerning the conditions existing in the church at **Corinth**. Some members of **the household** of **Chloe** had informed **him** of the factions that had developed in the church **(1:11)**. There were three people – **Stephanas**, **Fortunatus** and **Achaicus** – who had come to **Paul** in **Ephesus** to make some contribution to **his** ministry **(16:17)**, but whether these were the ones from **Chloe's household** is unclear.

Some of those who had come to **Paul** in **Ephesus** had brought disturbing news concerning blatant sin and divisions in the church at **Corinth (Chapters 5** and **6)**. Immorality plagued the **Corinthian** congregation almost from the beginning. It is apparent that **Paul** had written them previously concerning moral laxness: **In my earlier letter I wrote you are not to associate with people who engage in sexual immorality (5:9).** But because the **Corinthian** believers didn't fully grasp what **he** was saying, **Paul** found it necessary to clarify **his** instruction **(5:10-11)** and to urge immediate and drastic action **(5:3-5** and **13)**.[2]

Other **Corinthian** visitors to **Ephesus** had brought a letter from the church that requested counsel on several different issues **(7:1, 8:1, 12:1** and **16:1)**. Dispatching, receiving, and responding to practical and theological matters were Jewish means of properly ordering the affairs of Jewish faith communities. **First Corinthians** is in keeping with common rabbinic *responsa* literature, or written decisions and rulings given by legal scholars in response to such questions. The letter addresses a wide spectrum of issues and has long been considered as the casebook for pastoral theology. **Paul's** rabbinic background was clearly the basis to **his** responses on the issues raised by members of the congregation.

Jewish values regarding sex, marriage, and the adjudication of claims between disputants form part of the foundation of Rabbi **Sha'ul's** letter, but clearly something new had had an impact on his Jewish world and worldview: **He** had experienced **Yeshua** (see the commentary on **Acts Bc – Sha'ul Turns from Murder to Messiah**). **His** experience , and the congregation's experience, made

room for **Messiah's** presence, requiring **the rabbi** to note the problems and possibilities when they came together. But human and spiritual differences aside, love and acceptability are always the most important thing to keep in mind.[3]

It was clear that although the church was gifted **(1:4-7)**, it was immature and unspiritual **(3:1-4)**. **Paul's purposes** for writing were: **(1)** to instruct and restore the church in its areas of weakness, correcting divisions **(1:10 to 4:21)**, immorality **(5:1-13; 6:12-20)**, litigation in pagan courts (6:1-8), and abuse of **the meal of the Lord (11:17-34)**; **(2)** to correct false teaching concerning **the resurrection (15:1-58)**; **(3)** to answer questions addressed to **Paul** in **the letter** that had been brought to **him earlier (5:9)**; and perhaps also **(4)** to call the church to obedience in the light of a growing challenge to **Paul's** authority – an issue that would provide the immediate context for **Second Corinthians**.

**Relevance:** This letter continues to be timely for the Church today, both to instruct and inspire. Believers are still powerfully influenced by their cultural environment, and most of the questions and problems that confronted the church at **Corinth** are still very much with us – problems like immaturity, instability, divisions, jealousy and envy, lawsuits, marital difficulties, sexual immorality and the misuse of spiritual gifts. Yet, in spite of these many problems, **Paul's** letter contains some of the most familiar and beloved chapters in the entire Bible, **Chapter 13** on **love**, and **Chapter 15** on **the resurrection**.[4]

**The Use of the Complete Jewish Bible:** Because I am writing this commentary on the book of **First Corinthians** from a **Jewish** perspective, I will be using *the Complete Jewish Bible* unless otherwise indicated.

**The use of ADONAI:** Long before **Yeshua's** day, the word **ADONAI** had, out of respect, been substituted in speaking and in reading aloud for **God's** personal name, the four Hebrew letters *yod-heh-vav-heh*, variously written in English as **YHVH**. **The Talmud (Pesachim 50a) made it a requirement not to pronounce the Tetragrammaton**, meaning the four-letter name of **the LORD**, and this remains the rule in most modern **Jewish** settings. In deference to this tradition, which is unnecessary but harmless, I will be using **ADONAI** where **YHVH** is meant. In ancient times when the scribes were translating the Hebrew Scriptures, they revered the name of **YHVH** so much that they would use a quill to make one stroke of the name and then throw it away. Then they would make another stroke and throw that quill away until the name was completed. **His** name became so sacred to them that they started to substitute the phrase *the Name*, instead of

writing or pronouncing **His** Name. Over centuries of doing this, the actual letters and pronunciation of **His** Name were lost. The closest we can come is **YHVH**, with no syllables. The pronunciation has been totally lost. Therefore, the name Yahweh is only a guess of what the original name sounded like. Both **ADONAI** and **Ha'Shem** are substitute names for **YHVH**. **ADONAI** is more of an affectionate name like *daddy*, while **Ha'Shem** is a more formal name like *sir*.

**The use of TaNaKh:** The Hebrew word **TaNaKh** is an acronym, based on the letters **T** (for "**T**orah"), **N** (for "**N**evi'im," the Prophets), and **K** (for "**K**etuvim," the Sacred Writings). It is the collection of the teachings of **God** to human beings in document form. The term "Old Covenant" implies that it is no longer valid, or at the very least outdated. Something old, to be either ignored or discarded. But **Jesus Himself** said: **Don't think I have come to abolish the Torah and the Prophets, I have not come to abolish but to complete (Matthew 5:17 CJB).** I will be using the Hebrew acronym **TaNaKh** instead of the phrase the Old Testament, throughout this devotional commentary.

**The Use of the phrase, "the righteous of the TaNaKh," rather than using Old Testament saints:**
Messianic synagogues, and the **Jewish** messianic community in general, never use the phrase Old Testament saints. From a **Jewish** perspective, they prefer to use the phrase, "righteous of **the TaNaKh**." Therefore, I will be using "the righteous of **the TaNaKh**," rather than Old Testament saints throughout this commentary.

**Keys to First Corinthians:**

**The Key Idea: Correction of Carnal Living.** The basic theme of the letter is the application of Godly principles to carnal living in the individual as well as the church. **The Good News** is designed to transform the lives of believers and make them different as people and as a corporate body from the surrounding world. However, **the Corinthians** were destroying their testimony as believers because of immorality and disunity. **Paul** wrote this letter as **his** corrective response to the news of problems and divisions among the church in **Corinth**. It was written to promote a spirit of unity among believers in their relationships and worship. Paul's concern as their spiritual **father (4:14-15)** is tempered with love, and wanted to avoid visiting them **with a stick (4:21).**

**The Key Verses: Or don't you know that your body is a temple for the Ruach Ha'Kodesh who lives inside you, whom you received from God? The**

**fact is, you don't belong to yourselves; for you were bought at a price. So, use your bodies to glorify God (6:19-20).**

**Therefore, let anyone who thinks he is standing up be careful not to fall! No temptation has seized you beyond what people normally experience, and God can be trusted not to allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear. On the contrary, along with the temptation he will also provide the way out, so that you will be able to endure (10:12-13).**

**Key Chapter: First Corinthians 13.** Read at weddings and often the text for sermons, **First Corinthians 13** has won the hearts of people throughout the world as the best definition of **"love"** ever written. Standing in stark contrast to the idea that **love** is an emotion, that one can fall into and out of **love**, it clearly reveals that true **love** is primarily a decision. This is why **God so loved the world that He gave His only and unique Son, so that everyone who trusts in Him may have eternal life, instead of being utterly destroyed (John 3:16).**[5]