1 CORINTHIANS

An Overview of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians
Centering a Divided Church on the Cross and Resurrection







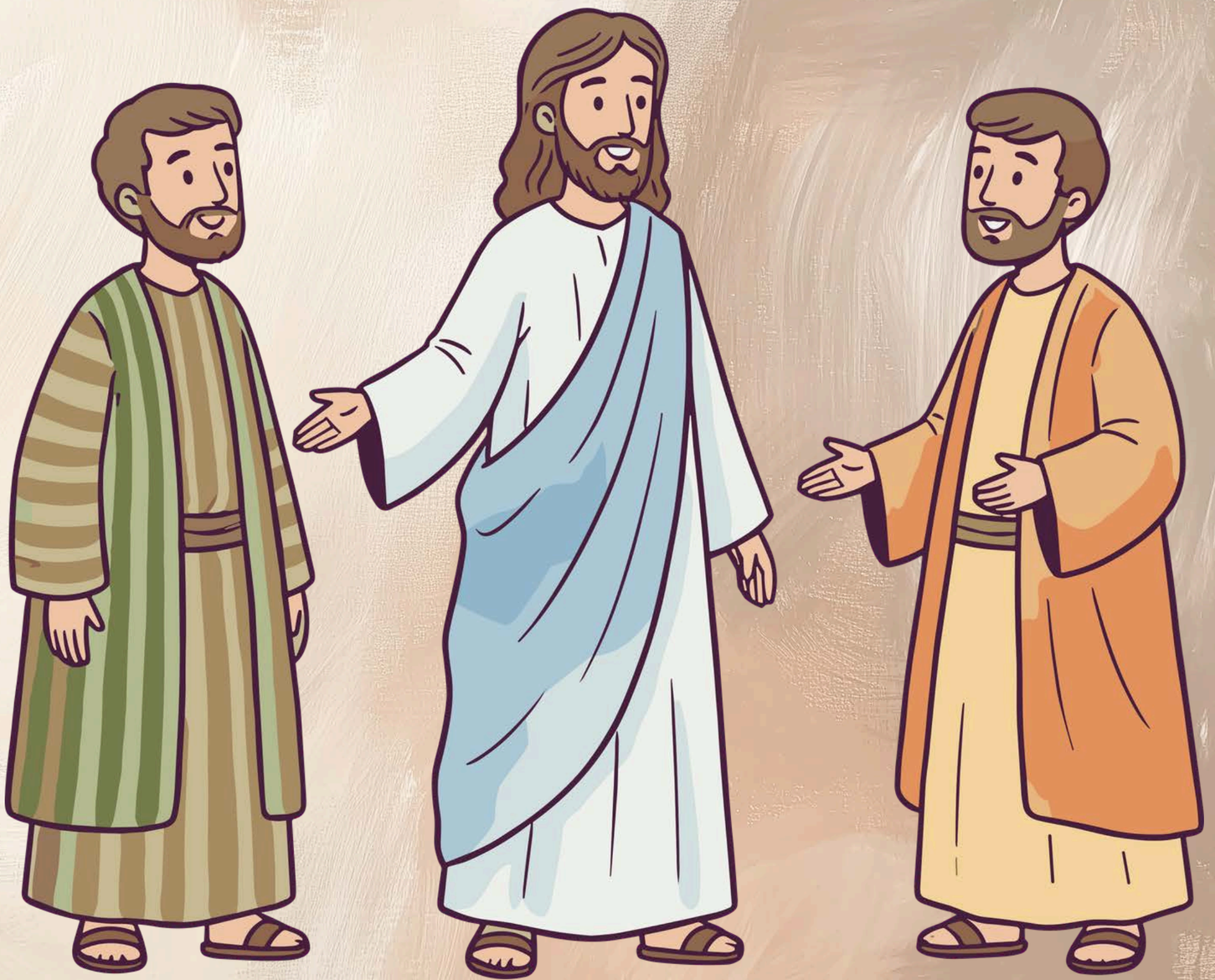
Core Background Information

- Author: The Apostle Paul (with Sosthenes), writing around A.D. 53-55.
- Origin: Written from the city of Ephesus during Paul's third missionary journey.
- Audience: The diverse, newly established Christian church in Corinth.
- The Setting: Corinth was a wealthy, bustling, and morally permissive Greek trade hub.



Chapters 1-4: Church Divisions & True Wisdom

- The Problem: The church fractured into rival cliques following favorite leaders (Paul, Apollos, Cephas).
- Paul's Counter: Allegiance belongs to Jesus Christ alone, not human personalities.
- True Wisdom: God's wisdom is found in the 'foolishness' of the cross, destroying worldly pride.
- Ministry Roles: Leaders are simply servants and stewards, not lords over faith.



Chapters 5-7: Morality, Lawsuits, & Marriage

- Sexual Integrity: Paul confronts severe misconduct (incest) and demands accountability.
- Secular Lawsuits: Rebukes believers for dragging church grievances before pagan judges.
- The Body as a Temple: Teaches that physical actions matter because our bodies belong to the Holy Spirit.
- Marriage & Celibacy: Provides practical guidance on singleness, devotion, and mutual respect.



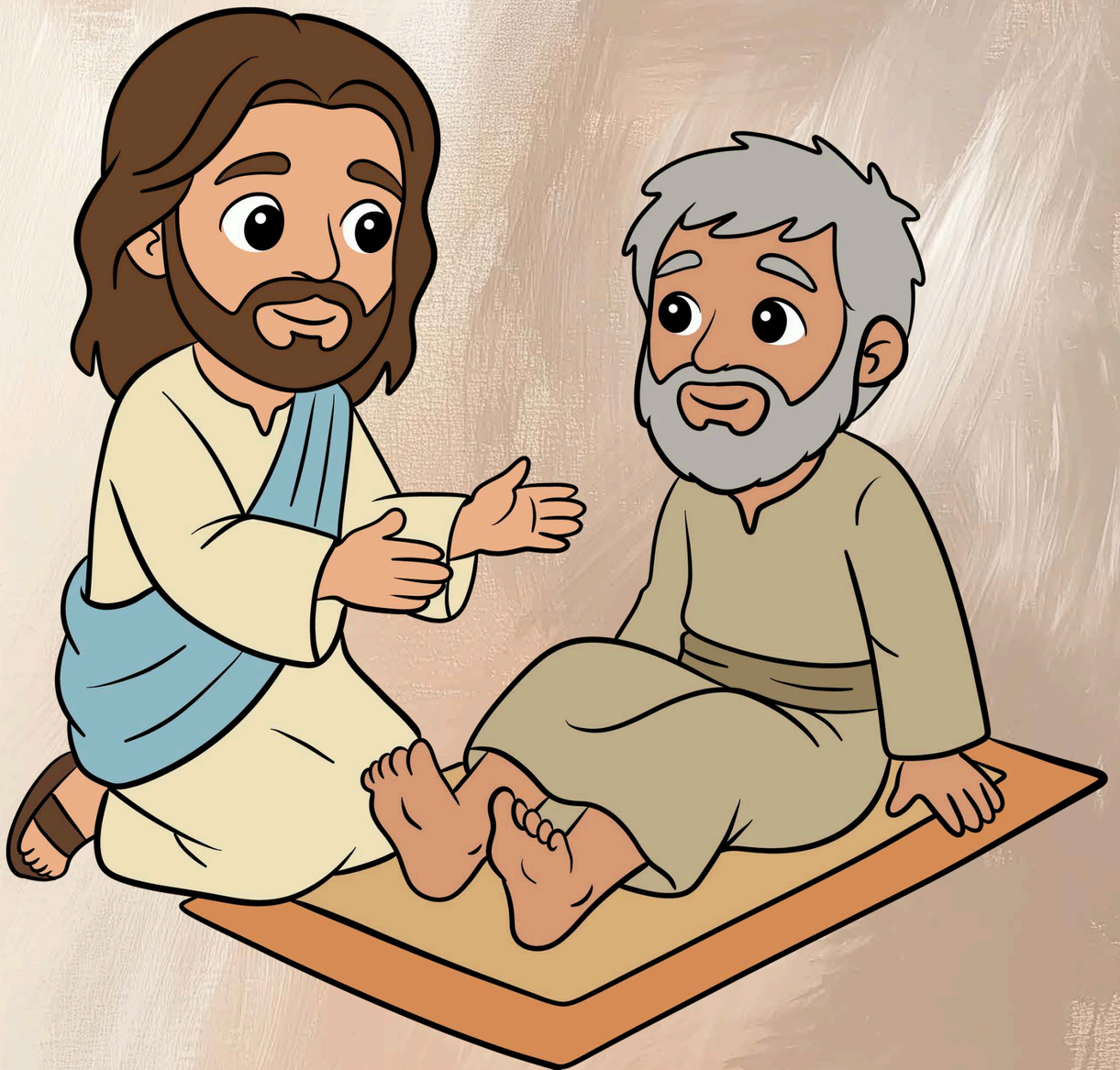
Chapters 8-10: Christian Freedom & Love

- The Dilemma: Arguing over whether it is permissible to eat meat sacrificed to pagan idols.
- Knowledge vs. Love: 'Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.' Personal rights are secondary.
- Stumbling Blocks: Believers must lay down their liberties if exercising them harms another's conscience.
- The Goal: Do not participate in demonic idolatry, and do 'all to the glory of God.'



Chapters 11-14: Worship & Spiritual Gifts

- Orderly Worship: Rebukes chaotic gatherings and the selfish abuse of the Lord's Supper.
- Spiritual Gifts: Diversified by one Spirit for a single purpose: to build up the church body.
- The Way of Love (Ch. 13): All miraculous gifts are empty noise without sacrificial love.
- Prophecy & Tongues: Establishes clear boundaries so that everything is done decently and in order.



Chapter 15-16: Resurrection & Final Call

- The Core Gospel: Christ died for sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day.
- Bodily Resurrection: Defends the future physical resurrection against those who claim it is purely spiritual.
- Victory Over Death: Because Christ rose, our labor is not in vain and death has lost its sting.
- Final Exhortation: Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, and let all be done in love.



1 CORINTHIANS

A Chapter-by-Chapter Breakdown of Paul's Letter





Divisions & True Wisdom

Chapter 1: Factions & The Cross

• Paul addresses divisions over church leaders (Paul, Apollos, Cephas).
• The wisdom of the world vs. the 'foolishness' of the cross.
• God chooses the weak and humble to shame the wise.



Chapter 2: The Revelation of the Spirit

• Paul's preaching relied on the Spirit's power, not human eloquence.
• Secret wisdom of God is revealed exclusively through the Holy Spirit.
• The natural mind cannot accept or understand spiritual truths.

Spiritual Maturity & Apostleship

Chapter 3: Foundations & Stewardship

• Sectarianism indicates spiritual infancy and worldliness.
• Leaders are merely co-workers; God alone gives the growth.
• The church is God's temple; individual work will be tested by fire.



Chapter 4: The Ministry of the Apostles

• Apostles are servants and stewards accountable only to Christ.
• Paul warns against pride, contrasting Corinthian arrogance with apostolic suffering.
• He speaks as a spiritual father warning his children.

Moral Purity & Christian Liberty

Chapter 5: Judgment of Immorality

• Paul confronts a scandalous case of incest ignored by the church.
• The church must practice discipline to preserve community holiness.
• Metaphor of yeast: a little sin leavens the entire batch.



Chapter 6: Lawsuits & Sexual Ethics

• Believers should resolve disputes internally, not before secular courts.
• Wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God.
• The physical body is a temple of the Holy Spirit bought at a price.

Marriage & Christian Freedom

Chapter 7: Principles on Marriage

• Comprehensive guidelines on sexual relations, marriage, and celibacy.
• Encouragement to remain in one's current state if possible due to present distress.
• Singleness allows undivided devotion to the Lord.



Chapter 8: Food Offered to Idols

• Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.
• Idols are nothing, but not all believers have this mature understanding.
• Personal freedom must be limited if it causes a weaker brother to stumble.

Rights, Endurance, & Idolatry

Chapter 9: Surrendering Personal Rights

• Paul defends his apostolic authority and right to financial support.
• He voluntarily surrenders these rights for the sake of the Gospel.
• Metaphor of the athlete running to win an imperishable crown.



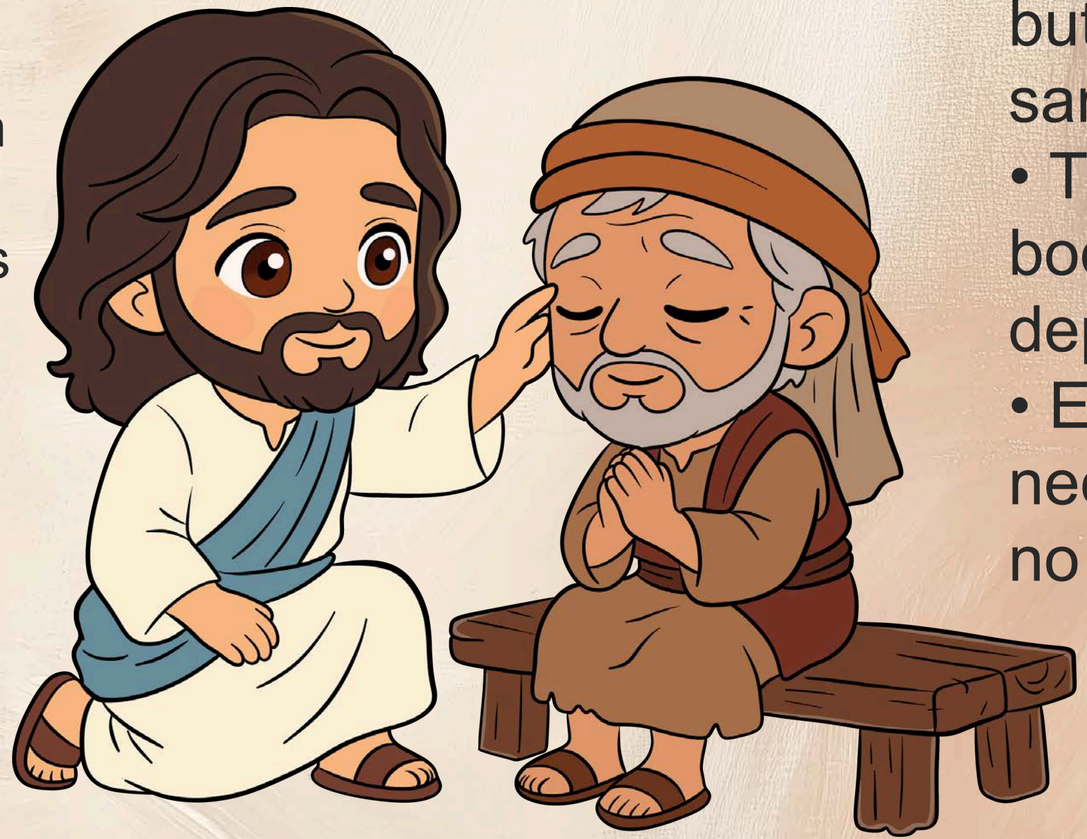
Chapter 10: Warnings from Israel's History

• Israel's wilderness failures serve as warnings against overconfidence.
• God always provides a way of escape from temptation.
• Flee from idolatry; everything is permissible, but not everything builds up.

Worship Order & Spiritual Gifts

Chapter 11: Head Coverings & Communion

• Instructions on propriety, roles, and head coverings in public worship.
• Rebuke of selfish practices and divisions during the Lord's Supper.
• The history and serious spiritual nature of communion.



Chapter 12: One Body, Many Parts

• Spiritual gifts are diverse but originate from the same Spirit.
• The church is a unified body with mutually dependent organs.
• Every individual part is necessary; there should be no division.

Love & Orderly Gatherings

Chapter 13: The Supremacy of Love

• Spiritual gifts are useless and empty without love.
• Characteristics of love: patient, kind, not proud, enduring.
• Gifts will pass away, but faith, hope, and love remain forever.



Chapter 14: Prophecy & Tongues

• Prophecy is preferred over tongues because it edifies the whole church.
• Tongues require interpretation in public assemblies.
• God is not a God of confusion; worship must be orderly.

The Resurrection & Closing Directives

Chapter 15: The Centrality of Resurrection

• The historical reality and eyewitness accounts of Christ's resurrection.
• If Christ is not raised, faith is futile and believers are still in sin.
• The promise of the future bodily transformation and victory over death.



Chapter 16: The Collection & Greetings

• Instructions for regular financial contributions for the Jerusalem church.
• Paul outlines his personal travel plans and mentions coworkers.
• Final exhortations to stand firm, act in love, and closing greetings.

THE END OF 1 CORINTHIANS

Now we go to 2nd Corinthians!



