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THE HOLY BIBLE **NKJV** REFERENCE GUIDE

NEW TESTAMENT

BOOK 46

1 CORINTHIANS



The Resurrection Of Christ by Noel Coypel

SUMMARY

The city of Corinth, perched like a one-eyed Titan astride the narrow isthmus connecting the Greek mainland with the Peloponnese, was one of the dominant commercial centers of the Mediterranean world as early as the eighth century BC.

No city in Greece was more favorably situated for land and sea trade. With a high, strong citadel at its back, it lay between the Saronic Gulf and the Ionian Sea, with ports at Lechaion and Cenchrea.

A diolkos, or stone road for the overland transport of ships, linked the two seas. Crowning the Acrocorinth was the temple of Aphrodite, served, according to Strabo, by more than 1,000 pagan priestess-prostitutes.

By the time the gospel reached Corinth in the spring of AD. 52, the city had a proud history of leadership in the Achaian League, and a spirit of revived Hellenism under Roman domination after 44 BC. following the destruction of the city by Mummius in 146 BC.

Paul's lengthy stay in Corinth brought him directly in contact with the major monuments of the agora, many of which still survive.

The fountain-house of the spring Peirene, the temple of Apollo, the macellum or meat market and the theater, the bema, and the unimpressive synagogue all played a part in the experience of the apostle. An inscription from the theater names the city official Erastus, probably the friend of Paul.

Paul is acknowledged as the author both by the letter itself and by the early church fathers. His authorship was attested by Clement of Rome as early as AD. 96, and today practically all NT interpreters concur.

The letter was written c. 55 toward the close of Paul's three-year residency in Ephesus. It is clear from his reference to staying at Ephesus until Pentecost that he intended to remain there somewhat less than a year when he wrote 1 Corinthians.

Corinth was a thriving city; it was at the time the chief city of Greece both commercially and politically. Located just off the Corinthian isthmus, it was a crossroads for travelers and traders.

It had two harbors: (1) Cenchrea, six miles to the east on the Saronic Gulf, and (2) Lechaion, a mile and a half to the north on the Corinthian Gulf.

Goods were transported across the isthmus on the Diolkos, a stone road by which smaller ships could be hauled fully loaded across the isthmus, and by which cargoes of larger ships could be transported by wagons from one side to the other.

Trade flowed through the city from Italy and Spain to the west and from Asia Minor, Phoenicia and Egypt to the east.

Although Corinth was not a university town like Athens, it was characterized nevertheless by typical Greek culture. Its people were interested in Greek philosophy and placed a high premium on wisdom.

SUMMARY Continued

Corinth contained at least 12 temples. Whether they were all in use during Paul's time is not known for certain. One of the most infamous was the temple dedicated to Aphrodite, the goddess of love, whose worshipers practiced religious prostitution.

About a fourth of a mile north of the theater stood the temple of Asclepius, the god of healing, and in the middle of the city the sixth-century B.C. temple of Apollo was located. In addition, the Jews had established a synagogue; the inscribed lintel of it has been found and placed in the museum at old Corinth.

Like any large commercial city, Corinth was a center for open and unbridled immorality. The worship of Aphrodite fostered prostitution in the name of religion. At one time 1,000 sacred (priestess) prostitutes served her temple.

So widely known did the immorality of Corinth become that the Greek verb to Corinthianize came to mean to practice sexual immorality. In a setting like this it is no wonder that the Corinthian church was plagued with numerous problems.

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.

There were three individuals -- Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus -- who had come to Paul in Ephesus to make some contribution to his ministry, but whether these were the ones from Chloe's household we do not know.

Some of those who had come had brought disturbing information concerning moral irregularities in the church. Immorality had plagued the Corinthian assembly almost from the beginning.

From 5:9-10 it is apparent that Paul had written previously concerning moral laxness. He had urged believers not to associate with sexually immoral people. Because of misunderstanding he now finds it necessary to clarify his instruction and to urge immediate and drastic action.

Other Corinthian visitors had brought a letter from the church that requested counsel on several subjects. It is clear that, although the church was gifted, it was immature and unspiritual.

Paul's purposes for writing were:

- (1) to instruct and restore the church in its areas of weakness, correcting erroneous practices such as divisions, immorality, litigation in pagan courts and abuse of the Lord's Supper.
- (2) to correct false teaching concerning the resurrection.
- (3) to answer questions addressed to Paul in the letter that had been brought to him.

The letter revolves around the theme of problems in Christian conduct in the church. It thus has to do with progressive sanctification, the continuing development of a holy character. Obviously Paul was personally concerned with the Corinthians' problems, revealing a true pastor's (shepherd's) heart.

SUMMARY Continued

This letter continues to be timely for the church today, both to instruct and to inspire. Christians 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 misuse of spiritual gifts. Yet in spite of this concentration on problems, Paul's letter contains some of the most familiar and beloved chapters in the entire Bible on love and on resurrection.

Paul wrote at least four different letters to the church at Corinth, three of which are included in the New Testament. In what is now called 1 Corinthians, there is a reference to a former letter in which instruction was given concerning the type of conduct that should not be tolerated in a Christian church.

The largest part of Paul's correspondence was with the church at Corinth, for the problems that he encountered in this place were more numerous than he had found in other cities, and if his message could be successful in Corinth, there was good reason to believe that it could have results that would be equally as good in any other place.

Corinth was an important city in Paul's day. Generally known as a city devoted to pleasure-seeking, it was a center for Greek culture and a busy commercial city with a cosmopolitan atmosphere that brought together people and customs from different parts of the world.

Pagan religions with sexual rites and ceremonies existed, and both materialism and immorality were the accepted order of the day. In view of these conditions, no wonder Paul said he began his Corinthian mission with fear. However, his work was successful from the beginning.

He was especially anxious to guide new Christian converts with reference to the many perplexing problems that were bound to arise. In other places, the Jewish element, with its legalistic tendencies, created difficulties, but in Corinth, the moral problem caused the greater anxiety.

The Corinthian church's membership was composed of people from many different quarters, including those whose training and environment were foreign to the Hebrew standards of morality. Paul was deeply concerned that the Christian church in Corinth should make no compromise with the morality or immorality, customary in a pagan society.

The longest of the letters written to the church at Corinth is known in the New Testament as 1 Corinthians. Containing sixteen chapters dealing with a wide variety of topics, the first topic mentioned is that of divisions within the church.

Four distinct factions correspond to the four individuals whose teachings were followed by the respective groups: Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and Christ. Reportedly, the household of Chloe informed Paul that serious quarrels had taken place among these factions.

SUMMARY Continued

The spirit of independent thinking emphasized so strongly by the Greeks evidently was influencing the Corinthian Christians. Paul's manner of dealing with the problem is noteworthy.

He does not insist that all members of the community should think alike on every subject, nor does he advocate that someone with authority should tell others what to believe. What he does insist on is a unity of spirit and purpose that will allow each group to learn from the others.

On the subject of immorality within the membership of the church, Paul is very explicit. Any type of immoral conduct must not be tolerated among the believers. If any of their number persist in following the low moral standards of the pagans, they should be excluded from membership.

Association with evildoers cannot be avoided so long as church members live in a wicked city, but it need not be permitted within the group that is called Christian.

The function of the church is to set a high standard for the society in which it exists, which cannot be done by permitting low standards among their own members: Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast — as you really are.

Disputes arising among members of the Christian community should be settled peaceably without going to a civil court: The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged?

Paul refers to a popular Jewish belief that saints are to have a part in the judgment of the world. Certainly the Corinthians are not qualified to have a part in the judgment of the world if they are unable to settle difficulties among themselves.

Sexual morality was a real problem in the church at Corinth. Neither monogamy nor chastity was regarded as obligatory in the pagan society in which many of the church members were reared before becoming Christians.

Paul's instruction regarding marriage must be considered in accordance with his belief concerning the imminence of the second coming of Christ, as well as with his desire to have the church at Corinth exemplify a high standard of living. The same can be said about his advice concerning the impropriety of women speaking in church.

In the city of Corinth, prostitutes customarily spoke in public, and to protect the reputation of the women in the Christian church, Paul thought it would be wise for them to remain silent. He explains, however, that this is merely his personal opinion; he has received no direct revelation to this effect.

Regarding the eating of meat that has been obtained from animals sacrificed to idols, everyone should follow the dictates of their own consciences, the only condition being that each person should have respect for the conscience of the person who does not agree with him.

One should refrain from needlessly offending another person, even though by doing so it is necessary to curb one's own appetite.

SUMMARY Continued

The Christian churches customarily commemorated the events associated with Jesus' death and resurrection by partaking of a common meal together. Some of the people at Corinth failed to see the significance of this meal and made it an occasion for feasting.

Paul explains that the purpose of this meal is not for the enjoyment of eating and drinking together but rather for a renewed dedication to the spirit made manifest in the life and death of Jesus.

In other words, each individual should examine his own heart and life and bring them into harmony with the Spirit of Christ. Any grievances that people have with one another should be set aside in preparation for the eating of the meal together.

Spiritual gifts among the various members of the church is another topic treated at some length in 1 Corinthians. Using the analogy of the human body, in which each organ has its special function to perform and no one of them can be regarded as more vital than another, the same principle applies within the church, which is the body of Christ.

Some members have the gift of prophecy, others that of teaching, and still others that of offering help in carrying forward the work of the church. Those who are apostles or prophets are not to think of themselves as superior to those who exercise other gifts, for all gifts are necessary, and the church would not be complete if any of them were missing.

To those who boast that they have the gift of tongues and are therefore in a position to exercise lordship over others, Paul writes that this particular gift, like all of the others, should be evaluated in terms of its usefulness in promoting the Christian way of life.

He does not condemn this gift for those who might find it useful, but he says that so far as he is concerned, it is better to speak a few words that will be understood by others than to speak at great length in an unknown tongue that is quite unintelligible to those who might hear it.

Following the discussion of spiritual gifts is Paul's immortal hymn to Christian love, which is one of the great classics of Christian literature. The hymn makes love the foundation for all Christian conduct. What wisdom was for the Greeks, love is for Christians: And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

After the discourse on love, Paul discusses resurrection. For him, the subject is of primary importance, for he considers resurrection the basis upon which the whole structure of Christianity rests. If Christ is not risen, then our hope is in vain. Christ's resurrection is attested to by a large number of witnesses, of whom Paul counts himself one of the last.

The significance of the resurrection, more than a vindication of the Messiahship of Jesus, assures us that what happened in the case of Jesus can and will happen to all those who believe in him. The resurrection of the righteous will be associated with the second coming of Christ.

SUMMARY Continued

For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true.

Death has been swallowed up in victory. The letter closes with an appeal for a contribution to help provide for the poor among the Christians in Jerusalem. Paul will stop at Corinth on his way to Jerusalem and take the gift with him.

Although the Corinthian letters were addressed to a single church and were concerned primarily with local problems existing at that time, they are of special interest to readers of the New Testament.

One reason for this interest is that the letters were written at an early date; therefore, they throw considerable light on the character of the Christian movement prior to the writing of any gospel account of Jesus' life.

Paul's statements concerning the resurrection of Jesus constitute the earliest preserved record of that event. The same is true of his account of the institution of the Lord's Supper.

His remarks concerning the gift of tongues, along with the other gifts of the spirit, help us to understand the way in which these manifestations were viewed by the early church. Finally, the many problems discussed in 1 Corinthians tell us a great deal about the conditions that prevailed at that time.

Paul's account of the resurrection enables us to see how his view differed from those of the ancient Greeks and also from the view found in certain portions of the Old Testament.

The Greeks believed in the doctrine of the soul's immortality. According to this doctrine, souls do not have a beginning or an end. They are eternal realities capable of existing apart from the bodies in which they were incarnated.

This view was contrary to the Hebrew conception, which viewed man as a single unit including body, soul, and spirit; the soul was not something that existed apart from the body. After death, all went down to Sheol, a cavern below the earth, but no memory or consciousness of any kind attended this state of existence.

In contrast to these views, Paul believed in a genuine resurrection from physical death in which a person's individuality and moral worth would be preserved. But this preservation was not to be a reanimation of the corpse and a continuation of life as it had been before. Flesh and blood, Paul tells us, will not inherit God's kingdom.

The body that is raised will not be the natural body but rather a spiritual body. Paul does not tell us what this spiritual body will be like, but he is sure that it will be a body of some kind, for the personality includes body, soul, and spirit, and salvation is not achieved until all three have been transformed together.

The Gnostics of Paul's day, who believed that only spirit is good and that all matter is evil, taught that Jesus did not possess a physical body but only appeared to do so. For Paul, this position was untenable.

SUMMARY Continued

Unless Jesus possessed a body in common with other human beings, his triumph over evil would have no significance for humans. Jesus' resurrection means a triumph of the entire personality over the forces of evil; what it means for Jesus it also means for all those who put their trust in him.

NKJV SELECTED SCRIPTURE

- 2:7** But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory,
- 2:8** which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.
- 2:9** But as it is written: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.
- 2:10** But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.
- 2:12** Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.
- 2:13** These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.
- 2:16** Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?
- 2:17** If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.
- 5:11** But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner--not even to eat with such a person.
- 5:13** But those who are outside God judges. Therefore put away from yourselves the evil person.
- 6:9** Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,
- 6:10** nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.
- 6:11** And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.
- 6:18** Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.
- 6:19** Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?
- 6:20** For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.
- 7:8** But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am;
- 7:9** but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

NKJV SCRIPTURE Continued

- 7:19** Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters.
- 7:20** Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called.
- 8:6** yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.
- 10:31** Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
- 11:3** But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.
- 12:4** There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.
- 12:5** There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord.
- 12:6** And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.
- 12:7** But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all:
- 12:8** for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit,
- 12:9** to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit,
- 12:10** to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.
- 12:11** But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.
- 13:2** And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.
- 13:4** Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;
- 13:5** does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;
- 13:6** does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;
- 13:7** bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
- 13:8** Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.
- 13:9** For we know in part and we prophesy in part.
- 13:13** And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.
- 14:1** Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.
- 14:2** For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.
- 14:5** I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.
- 14:13** Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.
- 14:14** For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.

NKJV SCRIPTURE Continued

- 14:39** Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues.
- 14:40** Let all things be done decently and in order.
- 15:24** Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.
- 15:25** For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.
- 15:26** The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.
- 15:33** Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits.
- 15:34** Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.
- 15:39** All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds.
- 15:40** There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.
- 15:51** Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed--
- 15:52** in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.
- 15:53** For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.
- 15:58** Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

BIBLE TIMELINE

54 AD

Paul Writes to the Corinthians

1 Corinthians 1 - 16

MAP REFERENCES

