

1 CORINTHIANS

FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC COMMENTARY SERIES

by **J.K. McKee**

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J.K. MCKEE

MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS
messianicapologetics.net

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Cover imagery: J.K. McKee/personal photo

Published by Messianic Apologetics, a division of Outreach Israel Ministries
P.O. Box 516
McKinney, Texas 75070
(407) 933-2002

www.outreachisrael.net
www.messianicapologetics.net

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ABBREVIATION CHART AND SPECIAL TERMS

The following is a chart of abbreviations for reference works and special terms that are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as *TWOT* for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

Special terms that may be used have been provided in this chart:

ABD: <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>	<i>halachah</i> : lit. "the way to walk," how the Torah is lived out in an individual's life or faith community
AMG: <i>Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament</i>	HALOT: <i>Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Koehler and Baumgartner)
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)	HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament	Heb: Hebrew
Ara: Aramaic	HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)	ICC: <i>International Critical Commentary</i>
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)	IDB: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
b. Babylonian Talmud (<i>Talmud Bavli</i>)	IDBSup: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement</i>
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.	ISBE: <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>
BDAG: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)	IVPBBC: <i>IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)</i>
BDB: <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>	Jastrow: <i>Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature</i> (Marcus Jastrow)
BECNT: <i>Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament</i>	JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)
BKCNT: <i>Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament</i>	JETS: <i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.	KJV: King James Version
CEV: Contemporary English Version (1995)	Lattimore: <i>The New Testament</i> by Richmond Lattimore (1996)
CGEDNT: <i>Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words</i> (Barclay M. Newman)	LITV: <i>Literal Translation of the Holy Bible</i> by Jay P. Green (1986)
CHALOT: <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>	LS: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Liddell & Scott)
CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)	LXE: <i>Septuagint with Apocrypha</i> by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition	LXX: Septuagint
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls	m. Mishnah
ECB: <i>Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible</i>	MT: Masoretic Text
EDB: <i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i>	NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)
eisegesis: "reading meaning into," or interjecting a preconceived or foreign meaning into a Biblical text	NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)
EJ: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>	NBCR: <i>New Bible Commentary: Revised</i>
ESV: English Standard Version (2001)	NEB: New English Bible (1970)
exegesis: "drawing meaning out of," or the process of trying to understand what a Biblical text means on its own	Nelson: <i>Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words</i>
EXP: <i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>	NETS: New English Translation of the Septuagint (2007)
Ger: German	NIB: <i>New Interpreter's Bible</i>
GNT: Greek New Testament	
Grk: Greek	

NIGTC: *New International Greek Testament Commentary*
NICNT: *New International Commentary on the New Testament*
NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*
NIV: New International Version (1984)
NJB: New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic (1985)
NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)
NKJV: New King James Version (1982)
NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)
NLT: New Living Translation (1996)
NT: New Testament
orthopraxy: lit. "the right action," how the Bible or one's theology is lived out in the world
OT: Old Testament
PME: Practical Messianic Edition of the Apostolic Scriptures
PreachC: *The Preacher's Commentary*
REB: Revised English Bible (1989)
RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)

t. Tosefta
Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament
Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*
TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TEV: Today's English Version (1976)
TLV: Messianic Jewish Family Bible—Tree of Life Version (2014)
TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)
TNTC: *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*
TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition
v(s). verse(s)
Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*
Vul: Latin Vulgate
WBC: *Word Biblical Commentary*
Yid: Yiddish
YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)

PROLOGUE

2013-2014 was an important year for Outreach Israel Ministries, as our family finished the transition into this new season of our lives living back in the Dallas-Ft. Worth Metroplex, and began a period of consolidation, as we reach out into new spiritual frontiers. Our Wednesday Night Bible Study conducted a lengthy study of Paul's letter to the Romans, which in terms of the production of commentary volumes in the *for the Practical Messianic* series, also marks an important point—as the bulk our examinations now, will mainly involve books of the Bible that have not often been touched by Messianic people.ⁱ This is most especially true of the examinations that we will be conducting over the next two years, as we reach toward completing an important benchmark in having Messianic commentaries released on all of the Pauline letters, with 1&2 Corinthians remaining.

While I am consciously quite aware of how today's broad Messianic community often has difficulty understanding passages within the letters of Paul (cf. 2 Peter 3:15), in my experience there are some letters we have more ease approaching (i.e., Romans, Ephesians) than others (i.e., Galatians, Philippians, Colossians). Yet when we open our Bibles, there is little denying the fact that the Apostle Paul wrote more to the Corinthians, than any other group of ancient Believers, as two letters (the first at sixteen chapters, and the second at thirteen chapters), have been preserved for us as Messiah followers. While there are for certain many verses and important passages we turn to, in order to be guided or find encouragement—1 Corinthians 13:13 being a significant one, as it says, “But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love”—there are also many places in Paul's Corinthian correspondence which completely confound and bewilder today's Messianic people. I know this, because even though we are beginning what is likely to be the only extensive Messianic commentary on 1 Corinthians (and later 2 Corinthians) for quite some time—that almost every time I have had to explain passages such as 1 Corinthians 6:12-20;ⁱⁱ 7:17-24;ⁱⁱⁱ or 10:14-33,^{iv} I have had to do so with probably giving more information than some thought was necessary, given the complexity of this letter and its original audience.

ⁱ As things stand today in 2015, *for the Practical Messianic* volumes have been released on: Acts 15, Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon, 1&2 Thessalonians, the Pastoral Epistles, Hebrews, James, as well as the survey studies of the Tanach and Apostolic Scriptures.

Beyond the selective commentary appearing in David H. Stern's *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, and the above mentioned texts, there have been, to the author's knowledge, Messianic volumes composed on the Gospel of Matthew, Gospel of John, the General Epistles (James, 1&2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude), as well as a wide selection of Torah and Haftarah resources.

ⁱⁱ Consult the examination of 1 Corinthians 6:12 in *The New Testament Validates Torah* (2012), and the examination of 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 in the *Messianic Kosher Helper* (2014).

ⁱⁱⁱ Consult the FAQ, “1 Corinthians 7:17-24.”

^{iv} Consult the examination of 1 Corinthians 10:14-33 in the *Messianic Kosher Helper* (2014).

How much of our relationship with 1 Corinthians has been disjointed from a reading of the complete letter, and has been associated more with “cherry picking” verses, as it were? 1 Corinthians certainly has some good things to say! The supremacy of God is uplifted in Paul’s exclaim, “Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” (1:20). Messianic people often love Paul’s direction, “Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened. For Messiah our Passover also has been sacrificed” (5:7). And for certain, the unity and diversity of people within the Body of Messiah, and their gifts and talents and skills, is represented in Paul’s assertion, “For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Messiah” (12:12). Even Paul’s firm declaration, “if Messiah has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain” (15:14), is most imperative.

Beyond these kinds of passages—which are most useful and quite edifying—how much do you really understand Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, or what is at least listed as his first letter to them? Are you aware that 1 Corinthians is not the first actual letter Paul wrote to the Corinthians (5:9)? How much of what Bible readers encounter in 1 Corinthians, involves reading the other side of an ongoing conversation, and with it some theorizing of what is being responded to? This was a group of First Century Believers which were confused at best, disjointed and fractured for certain, and licentious at worst. This has led to many different opinions, interpretations, and applications to emerge among Christian examiners of 1 Corinthians—many of which are quite good and useful for our consideration, and then some others which are not so good. And for certain, as today’s Messianic people should be most aware, a letter like 1 Corinthians does have various translation issues present from Greek into English, some of which are definitely rooted in theological value judgments and presuppositions.

I have been blessed over the past four to eight years, between my studies at Asbury Theological Seminary (2005-2008) and working on various other writing projects, to have widely reasoned through the bulk of the “difficult” passages that 1 Corinthians tends to present to today’s Messianic people. Surprisingly for some, this does not just include those passages that concern the relevance of God’s Torah in the post-resurrection era (i.e., 6:12; 10:13), but also concern the place of Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in the Body of Messiah (7:17-24; 9:20-22; 10:1). 1 Corinthians is a letter which presents our faith community with both external *and* internal challenges. Only a complete examination of Paul’s letter will help us to truly appreciate and inculcate those principles and ideals, enabling us to better understand the challenges that this group of First Century Believers, in a very wicked and sinful city, encountered.

What are we going to learn by *fully going through* the letter of 1 Corinthians? Each of us, being a part of a still-emerging and steadily maturing Messianic movement, probably brings a series of different expectations to Paul’s letter. Some of us just want some answers to those passages that strike us as perhaps being anti-Torah. Others of us want a better appreciation for the situation of the Corinthians, perhaps making connections and witnessing parallels with some sort of Messianic fellowship or assembly present on the scene today. Still, what a number of us probably do not want, is to be admonished from 1 Corinthians—in seeing that

we have misinterpreted and misapplied some of Paul's direction. And beyond this, there might even be one or two of us, who have just flat forgotten what Paul said in some parts of 1 Corinthians. All in all, we need to be aware of how—in spite of each of us having an under-developed, and even under-informed approach to 1 Corinthians—Paul himself acknowledged how this letter was difficult for him to write: “I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children” (4:14). So, in the event that any of us are admonished, convicted, or rebuked in some way—it is all with the explicit intention that we might grow as men and women of faith.

1 Corinthians is a difficult letter, because of the history that sits behind it, the complex spirituality of its original recipients, as well as the diverse interpretations and applications that are derived from it. 1 Corinthians presents many puzzles to be solved by its readers, but they are not impossible puzzles. 1 Corinthians also provides a venue for some significant growth and maturation for each of us. For as Paul wanted of its original readers, and would certainly also tell us today, “Be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love” (16:13-14, RSV). A fair and thorough Messianic approach to 1 Corinthians is well-needed in this hour, especially as the mid-2010s is now upon us!

J.K. McKee
Editor, Messianic Apologetics

INTRODUCTION

The letter of 1 Corinthians (Grk. *Pros Korinthious A*, ΠΡΟΣ ΚΟΡΙΝΘΙΟΥΣ Α) is widely known among today's Bible readers for a variety of very positive and edifying statements, most especially with 1 Corinthians 13 being known as the proverbial "love chapter."¹ But while 1 Corinthians has many uplifting remarks, on the whole it can probably be said that not enough people approach Paul's letter with his assertion, "Now concerning the things about which you wrote..." (7:1), in mind. When Bible readers sit down to really read through 1 Corinthians, they encounter a piece of work transcribed to a group of First Century Believers—some of them *purported Believers*—who needed some serious and severe help. Not recognizing some of the complicated background behind the composition of 1 Corinthians, contemporary readers are often at a loss regarding what to do with the complex series of topics addressed—much less how to apply a correct interpretation of them in the Twenty-First Century. Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner are correct to acknowledge, "It is, in fact, one of Paul's most difficult letters...It is far removed from our world...To make matters worse, far from arriving at a consensus, modern biblical scholarship throws up rival interpretations of the letter."² **And if this is true regarding Christian examination of 1 Corinthians, then the limited Messianic examination seen from 1 Corinthians is not immune to this either.**

The Apostle Paul was informed as to events that had transpired among the Believers in Corinth (1:11; 16:17-18), particularly in terms of the factionalism that had arisen. A previous letter had been written to these people (5:9), which they apparently had misunderstood (5:10-11). The piece of correspondence that we call 1 Corinthians tries to offer some clear direction and admonition to a group of people riddled with a whole host of problems—which is why it can be so difficult for contemporary readers and examiners. Stephen C. Barton properly asserts, "It has been well said that reading 1 Corinthians is like reading someone else's mail,"³ and it is precisely in the areas of trying to posit what was being said on the other side of the conversation, as well as the circumstances that transpired, why there can be a diversity of views present surrounding this letter.

¹ Please note that in spite of the common reference to 1 Corinthians as "the Book of 1 Corinthians," I am going to purposefully refer to the text as either the Epistle of 1 Corinthians or the letter of 1 Corinthians, and not use this reference. By failing to forget that this text is a letter written to a specific audience in a specific setting (and not Paul's first letter to the Corinthians at that; cf. 5:9), we can make the common error of thinking that this was a text written *directly to us*. Our goal as responsible interpreters is to try to reconstruct what this letter meant *to its original audience first*, before applying its message in a modern-day setting.

² Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 1.

³ Stephen C. Barton, "1 Corinthians," in James D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, eds., *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 1314.

On the whole, to a commentator like F.F. Bruce, the correspondence of 1&2 Corinthians together, “is full of allusions to persons and incidents well known to Paul and his readers, but (apart from these allusions) quite unknown to us. In reading them, we often find ourselves in the position of people listening to one end of a telephone conversation and trying, not very successfully, to reconstruct what is being said on the other line.”⁴ He also mentions how “There are many interpretive problems in the Corinthian correspondence the solutions to which can hardly be more than intelligent guesses.”⁵ Yet, while 1&2 Corinthians—1 Corinthians in particular—do have difficult statements in them, postulating a conversation and/or debate between Paul and his audience, is not at all an impossible task.

A definite thrust of the letter of 1 Corinthians, is that this audience needed to remember who the Apostle Paul was as their spiritual father (4:15). The Corinthians had to be directed to the proper way in emulating Paul (4:16), notably as he emulated Yeshua the Messiah (11:1). The Corinthians were regarded as widely being infants in the Lord (3:1-4), meaning that most of them were not where they needed to be in terms of spiritual maturity.

1 Corinthians is a letter that many have turned to, in order to better understand some of the challenges that contemporary Believers face in allowing the Lord to sanctify their behavior unto Him. Among the Messiah followers of Ancient Corinth, there was an entire litany of moral and religious incidents that had erupted, not to mention a wide degree of confusion among those who were seemingly trying to do the right thing. Alas, while there are connections to be made between the Corinthians and more modern-day Western people, there is a disconnect as well, as we are not the exact same people living in a relatively pagan metropolis. Craig Blomberg notes, “Probably no contemporary church faces this exact cluster of issues all at once.”⁶

One of the things that has surely been repeated across the centuries of Messiah faith, is how various Corinthians, purporting to be Believers, thought that they knew better than an apostolic figure like Paul (4:7), who was a bit firm with them (4:8). The Corinthians were largely a group of people who were significantly affected by their surrounding culture and ungodly lifestyles, although in stark contrast they were called by the Lord to be holy (1:2). Ciampa and Rosner indicate, “the Corinthians were still behaving as if they belonged to their city!”⁷ and as such there are many relevant concepts and ideas communicated to modern people who are influenced more by the society around them, rather than making a difference upon society.

In far too many ways, much of the letter of 1 Corinthians presents a group of ancient Messiah followers, that contemporary Believers are to take serious warnings from—much like the Corinthians themselves being directed in how they were to learn from the errors of the Ancient Israelites (10:11). In the estimation of Richard B. Hays, “No doubt the Corinthian Christians of Paul’s day would have preferred that this correspondence not be broadcast to the ages, for it portrays them in an unflattering light and divulges a number of things that they

⁴ F.F. Bruce, *New Century Bible: 1 and 2 Corinthians* (London: Oliphants, 1971), 23.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Craig Blomberg, *NIV Application Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 17.

⁷ Ciampa and Rosner, 6.

might well, with the wisdom of hindsight, wish to have kept private.”⁸ The letter of 1 Corinthians was indeed preserved for future generations of Believers, but there are many First Century and Corinth-specific issues addressed within it. Challenges and confusion ensue by trying to extrapolate more modern interpretations and applications, but in a general sense, all who examine 1 Corinthians tend to recognize the parameters of a localized faith community trying to grow and mature in the midst of a God-less environment. 1 Corinthians is an extremely relevant letter for all of us, provided we follow the tried and true rule of interpreting it for its original audience first, before extrapolating it for Twenty-First Century situations. As Craig S. Keener appropriately directs,

“We could learn from [Paul] in matters such as mutual support versus competition; humility and sacrifice versus pursuit of status; marital fidelity; caring for the needy and rejecting materialism; spiritual gifts and their appropriate use for serving others; the value and sanctity of the body; and future accountability for present actions.”⁹

Each of us will no doubt be challenged in this examination of the letter of 1 Corinthians on some level. This may involve our approach to First Century historical and religious issues. We might be intellectually stretched with some of the translation controversies present from the Greek of the letter into English. And, a few of us might really be convicted on various attitudes, behaviors, and actions which we know are ungodly and need to change—as we evaluate how such actions can adversely affect others, and our testimony of Yeshua to the world around us.

PAUL AND HIS RELATIONSHIP TO THE CORINTHIANS IN THIS LETTER

The Apostle Paul was the founder of the assembly of Messiah followers in Corinth (4:14-15; 2 Corinthians 10:13-14), with Luke detailing a record of Paul’s visit to Corinth in Acts 18:1-18. All examiners are agreed on genuine Pauline authorship of the letter of 1 Corinthians,¹⁰ even with a Sosthenes (1:1) listed as a co-sender. (This Sosthenes, although largely unknown, is likely the same individual mentioned in Acts 18:17). Only those who would deny Pauline authorship of all of Paul’s letters, would deny 1 Corinthians being written by him.¹¹ The early usage of 1 Corinthians by a late First Century work such as *1 Clement* (37:5 referencing 1 Corinthians 12:14-26; 47:1-3 referencing 1 Corinthians 1:12; 49:5 referencing 1 Corinthians 13:4-7), helps to affirm the epistle’s authenticity. It is true,

⁸ Richard B. Hays, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 1.

⁹ Craig S. Keener, *New Cambridge Bible Commentary: 1-2 Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2.

¹⁰ S.M. Gilmour, “Corinthians, First,” in George Buttrick, ed. et. al., *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 1:688; S.J. Hafemann, “Corinthians, Letters to the,” in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 175; J. Paul Sampley, “The First Letter to the Corinthians,” in Leander E. Keck, ed. et. al., *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 10:789.

¹¹ Leon Morris, “Corinthians, First Epistle to the,” in Geoffrey Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 1:775.