

## THE “PREVIOUS LETTER” TO THE CORINTHIANS

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### List of Views

- A. There was no previous letter.
- B. There was a previous letter.
  - 1. Now lost
  - 2. Partially included in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1

### I. There was a Previous Letter: 1 Corinthians 5:9-13.

- A. Ἐγραψα [*egrapsa*, “I wrote”] is a normal past-tense aorist in 5:9.
- B. “*My letter*” (5:9) sounds like a more distant reference (literally “*I-have-written/I-wrote to you in the[my] letter*”; ἔγραψα ὑμῖν ἐν τῇ ἐπιστολῇ [*egrapsa hymῖn en tēi epistolēi*]).
- C. “*In the[my] letter*” would sound superfluous if he means his present writing.
- D. Ἐγραψα in 5:9 is a normal past tense, but 5:11 may be an epistolary aorist.
- E. Grosheide (*New International Critical Commentary on Corinthians*, p. 127) says, “*One looks in vain for an admonition in 1 Corinthians against having fellowship with sexually immoral people. But that has been the point of the preceding paragraph—withdrawing the church’s fellowship. Paul simply generalizes the specific case.*”

### II. There was no previous letter before 1 Corinthians.

- A. 1 Corinthians 5:9 is an epistolary aorist.
  - 1. New Testament examples of epistolary aorists (obvious example \_\_)

Romans 15:15

1 Corinthians 5:9,11; 9:15

2 Corinthians 2:3, 4, 9; 7:12; 9:3

Galatians 6:11

Philemon 19, 21

1 Peter 5:12

1 John 2:14, 21, 26; 5:13

3 John 9

ἔγραψα "wrote"

1 Corinthians 4:17

ἔπεμψα [*epempsa*] “sent”

Philemon 11 (?)	ἀνέπεμψα [ <i>anepempsa</i> ] "sent"
Ephesians 3:3	προέπεμψα [ <i>proepempsa</i> ] "sent"
Acts <u>23:30</u>	
Ephesians 6:22	
Philippians <u>2:28</u>	ἔπεμψα "sent"
Colossians <u>4:8</u>	
Philippians 2:25	ἡγησάμην [ <i>ēgēsamēn</i> ] "considered"

#### Probable examples

2 John 4; 3 John 3	ἔχαρην [ <i>echarēn</i> ] "rejoiced"
Philippians 4:10	
1 Corinthians 4:17	ἔπεμψα "sent"
Note Philippians 14	
Epistolary imperfect: Galatians 4:20; 3 John 13 (or unattainable wish?);	
2 Corinthians 9:3	
Aorist participles: Romans 16:22	

2. The inclusion of ἐπιστολή [*epistolē*] as a reference to the letter where it appears: Romans 16:22; Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27; 2 Thessalonians 3:14.

3. Epistolary aorists were a phenomenon in Greek, in New Testament Greek, in Paul, and in this letter (9:15). They were probably more natural in the ancient world, where the postal system was slow, or messages had to go by personal delivery.

4. Some usages of *write* in letters do not employ an epistolary aorist in the original Greek. The authors of the New Testament letters do use present tense *write* as in 1 Timothy 3:14. The usage of epistolary aorist rather than present tense might reflect differences in the occasions of writing where a longer or shorter time period intervenes between time of writing and time of reading. Use of epistolary aorists may be a function of distance from the readers or inefficiency of the delivery mechanism in given cases.

#### B. The meaning of the comment

1. The fornicator statement originates from the example of the incestuous man and the church discipline Paul recommends.

2. Paul clarifies the matter relative to non-Christians in anticipation of being misunderstood.

3. In 5:13 Paul reverts to the incestuous man of 5:1-8; so the intervening verses (9-12) are most naturally relates the matter at hand instead of some unknown situation.

4. What happens in 5:1-8 cannot result from misunderstanding previous communication, which now is corrected by further explanation (9-13).