

A CHURCH WITH PROBLEMS

A Study Of 1st Corinthians

HISTORY OF THE CITY:

“Although the apostle Paul did not establish the church in Corinth until about A.D. 51 (Acts 18:1–18), the city’s history dates back to prehistoric times, when ancient tribesmen first settled the site. Always a commercial and trade center, Corinth was already prosperous and famous for its bronze, pottery, and shipbuilding more than 800 years before Christ. The Greek poet Homer mentioned “wealthy Corinth” in 850 B.C. In the following centuries Corinth competed for power with Athens, its stronger neighbor across the isthmus to the north. And in 146 B.C. invading Roman armies destroyed Corinth, killing the men and enslaving the women and children. Only a token settlement remained until 44 B.C., when Julius Caesar ordered the city rebuilt. Not only did he restore it as the capital city of the Roman province of Achaia; he also repopulated it with freed Italians and slaves from every nation. Soon the merchants flocked back to Corinth, too. The city soon became a melting pot for the approximately 500,000 people who lived there at the time of Paul’s arrival. Merchants and sailors, anxious to work the docks, migrated to Corinth. Professional gamblers and athletes, betting on the Isthmian games, took up residence. Slaves, sometimes freed but with no place to go, roamed the streets day and night. And prostitutes (both male and female) were abundant. People from Rome, the rest of Greece, Egypt, Asia Minor—indeed, all of the Mediterranean world—relished the lack of standards and freedom of thought that prevailed in the city.” (Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary)

CITY DURING THE DAYS OF PAUL:

Taken from Melvin Curry’s commentary on 2 Corinthians in the Truth series, pages 17–29.

Cosmopolitan city: “No community of the ancient world had a greater diversity of people than Corinth. Local Greeks and the descendants of Roman colonists swelled the city’s population.

Visitors traveled to the city from all over the world. Also, Jews flocked to Corinth in such numbers that a synagogue had been built there before Paul’s arrival (Acts 18:1–4). Witherington suggests that such ‘diversity of socioeconomic levels and religious and ethnic backgrounds among Corinthian Christians’ may have been ‘an underlying cause of several of the issues and problems that Paul addresses in 1 and 2 Corinthians.’ (17)

Religious community:

» Various pagan cults, “the pagans attached a religious significance to almost everything.” (18)

» Aphrodite: located on top of the acrocorinth and housed 1000 temple prostitutes. “Because the stereotypical Corinthian ‘recognized no superior and no law but his own desires,’ Aristophanes (ca. 450–35 B.C.) coined the expression ‘to live as do the Corinthians’ which became a byword throughout the ancient world for shockingly unrestrained immorality. Plato even described a prostitute as ‘a Corinthian girl’.” (19)

» Apollo: “In Corinth, there was a temple of Apollo, the god associated with prophecy. If some of the Christians there had formerly worshiped at his shrine, this fact would help to explain the perverted practice of speaking in uncontrollable, irrational, ecstatic tongues.” (19)



Apollo temple (foreground)
Acrocorinth (background).
Todd Bolen

»**Imperial cult:** “The imperial cult was quite strong in the city of Corinth. Thus, devotion to Caesar and his family would have been expected there. Even Christians would have been required to honor the emperor as divine, and the refusal to do so would have eventually lead to their severe persecution.” (19)

»“Other sanctuaries at Corinth included those of Asklepios, Athena (Minerva), Hera Argaea (Juno), Hermes (Mercury), Poseidon (Neptune), Tyche (Fortuna), and even shrines dedicated to the Egyptian deities Isis and Serapis. The meat sacrificed to idols in many of these shrines could be bought in the market.” (19-20)

Commercial crossroads:

»“Strategically located, about two miles south of the narrow isthmus that connects the Greek mainland with the Peloponnesus, the city became a major commercial meeting place of the ancient world. The traders from nearby Athens and Sparta congregated in Corinth. From the West and especially Italy, commerce came to it by way of Lechaem, its port on the Corinthian Gulf that flowed into the Ionian Sea. In addition, the riches of the Near and Far East poured across the Aegean Sea into its port at Cenchreae on the Saronic Gulf. The cargoes of ships were transported across the isthmus so that the ships might avoid the treacherous 200 mile voyage around Cape Maleae. Strabo (Geography 8.6.20) records a proverbial statement which expresses the danger: ‘When you double Maleae forget your home!’” (Curry 13)

»Besides it’s dual port cities, “roads from Isthmia in the east, from Sicyon in the west, from Argos in the south, and from the two harbors converged in Corinth.” (22)

»The Isthmian games “every other year poured additional money into both the city’s treasury and the citizen’s pockets.” (22)

»“Archaeological remains demonstrate that Corinth was designed to facilitate trade and commerce. Obviously, its paved roads served as excellent trade routes. Abundant springs supplied adequate amounts of water to quench the thirst of the people, to refrigerate numerous items of food, to wash the streets, and to flush the elaborate sewer system. In addition, there were numerous establishments for manufacturing, banking, legal services, and retail businesses, including meat markets, restaurants, and wine shops. A great variety of goods were sold in the city.” (23)

Cultural center:

»“Although Corinth never quite rivaled ancient Athens in cultural attainments, it had eclipsed it in prominence by the first century A.D. Indeed, in Paul’s time, the Corinthians had much in which to boast, namely, their beautiful buildings, religious shrines, health spas, amusement venues, and intellectual pursuits.” (23)

»Associated with this Curry discusses the Sophists: “The Sophistic movement was extremely popular in Paul’s day, and one use of the term sophist is ‘any orator who emphasized style over substance and received pay for his work’... His preaching among the Corinthians did not have the flare of the ornamental oratory of the sophists (1Cor. 2:1-5).” (27-28)



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HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN CORINTH

Second Journey Visit, Acts 18:1-17.

- » A period of 18 months (vs. 11)
- » First preached in the synagogue (vs. 1-6)
- » Then in the house of Titius Justus (vs. 7-11)
- » Persecution by the Jews (vs. 12-17) Regarding Gallio (vs. 12), “an inscription found at Delphi has been used to date his administration as beginning probably in the spring or summer of A.D. 51 or 52.” (Curry 29)



Judgment seat
(bema) in Corinth
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Apollos' work in Corinth, Acts 18:27-28.

“No doubt, Apollos's eloquent manner and skillful exposition of the Scriptures appealed to the Corinthians (Acts 18:24,28; compare 1Cor. 1:12). But later, he must have left Corinth (perhaps, due to the divisive spirit there) and very likely returned to Ephesus, from which he did not seem eager to return to Corinth (1Cor. 16:12).” (Curry 31)

During Paul's stay at Ephesus (3rd Missionary Journey)

- » Where Paul penned 1st Corinthians (see 16:9-10).
- » Paul apparently received reports from Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (16:17) and Chloe's people (1:11). This furnished the material for chapters 1-6.
- » These also delivered a letter with several questions they had, chapters 7-16.
- » As a backdrop to all, several were promoting themselves and questioning Paul's integrity (4:7-17).
- » Paul dispatches Timothy (1Cor. 4:17-21; 16:10-11; Acts 19:22).
- » Paul writes 1st Corinthians. Curry dates its writing at A.D. 52-53.
- » Paul determines to visit (16:5)

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

Introduction (1:1-9)

Issues reported to Paul (1:10-6:20)

- Division (1:10-4:21)
- Moral laxity (5:1-6:20)

Their letter (7:1-16:4)

- Marriage (7)
- Food sacrificed to idols (8:1-11:1)
- The covering (11:2-16)
- The Lord's Supper (11:17-34)
- Spiritual gifts (12:1-14:40)
- The resurrection (15)
- The collection (16:1-4)

Concluding matters (16:5-24)

CLASS SCHEDULE

Date	Scripture	Topic
March 8, 2015	1 Corinthians 1:1-9	Introduction
March 11, 2015	1 Corinthians 1:10-31	The Sin of Division
March 15, 2015	1 Corinthians 2	The Sin of Division
March 18, 2015	1 Corinthians 3	The Sin of Division
March 22, 2015	1 Corinthians 4	The Sin of Division
March 25, 2015	1 Corinthians 5	Sexual Immorality & The Church
March 29, 2015	1 Corinthians 6:1-11	Taking Each Other To Court
April 1, 2015	1 Corinthians 6:12-20	Warning Against Fornication
April 5, 2015	1 Corinthians 7:1-24	Marriage Principles
April 8, 2015	1 Corinthians 7:25-40	Marriage Principles
April 12, 2015	1 Corinthians 8	Regarding Food Sacrificed To Idols
April 15, 2015	1 Corinthians 9	Regarding Food Sacrificed To Idols
April 19, 2015	1 Corinthians 10	Regarding Food Sacrificed To Idols
April 22, 2015	1 Corinthians 11:1-16	Submission
April 26, 2015	1 Corinthians 11:17-34	The Lord's Supper
April 29, 2015	1 Corinthians 12	Guidance Regarding Spiritual Gifts
May 3, 2015	1 Corinthians 13	Guidance Regarding Spiritual Gifts
May 6, 2015	1 Corinthians 14:1-19	Guidance Regarding Spiritual Gifts
May 10, 2015	1 Corinthians 14:20-40	Guidance Regarding Spiritual Gifts
May 13, 2015	1 Corinthians 15:1-11	The Resurrection
May 17, 2015	1 Corinthians 15:12-34	The Resurrection
May 20, 2015	1 Corinthians 15:35-58	The Resurrection
May 24, 2015	1 Corinthians 16:1-4	Principles of Giving
May 27, 2015	1 Corinthians 16:5-24	Conclusion
May 31, 2015	Topical	
June 3, 2015	Topical	