

Corinth

Corinth was an important ancient city. It was a large city, and with its size and wealth came immoral and wicked behavior. At one point in history, to say someone “acted like a Corinthian” was a way of saying they lived a life of drunken immorality and debauchery. The original Corinth was destroyed by Rome in 146 B.C., but was rebuilt in 46 B.C. by Julius Caesar. By the time Paul visited the city a little more than 100 years later, Corinth had regained her former size and prosperity, with an estimated population of over 500,000. As a center of military, political, and business interest, the city thrived. It promised new beginnings, so people from many cultures poured into Corinth. Like other Greek cities, it became a center of philosophy and a myriad of religions. Dozens of deities were worshipped in Corinth, and some of the temples are said to have employed priestesses that were nothing more

than prostitutes. All in all, Corinth was a large, bustling, extremely wicked city.

Knowing Corinth’s backdrop helps us appreciate the troubles the church faced. It demonstrates the danger of being influenced by our surrounding, and the importance of leaving worldly things behind us (1 Cor. 6:11). It also reminds us that everybody needs the truth. Even in Corinth there were those that responded to the Gospel. Never underestimate the power of Jesus Christ and Him Crucified! (1 Cor. 2:1-5)



Ruins of the temple of Apollo in Corinth

“That You May Grow Thereby...”

A weekly Bible reading plan



1 Corinthians 1-8

A Church in Need of Help

Overview

During his second missionary journey, the Apostle Paul came to the vibrant city of Corinth. He had faced many hardships and persecutions on his journey, and his recent time in Athens didn’t produce thrilling results. Arriving in Corinth must have been at least a bit discouraging. A city steeped in idolatry and gross immorality, it wouldn’t seem to be the ideal place for a church. But Jesus appeared to Paul in a vision saying, “...I have many people in this city.” (Acts 18:10) Paul established a congregation in Corinth, and remained there working with the new church for a year and a half!

After Paul’s departure, things apparently went downhill quickly at Corinth. Paul likely wrote First Corinthians within five years of leaving, and there was much that needed fixing. The congregation had fallen into strife and division. They tolerated flagrant immorality in their midst, but took one another to court over temporal things. They had perverted the worship assembly, forsaken Paul’s teaching about headship and authority, were misusing their spiritual gifts, and developed dangerous ideas about the resurrection. But neither the Lord nor Paul had given up on the Christians in Corinth. Thus, Paul wrote a letter to rebuke their error and encourage the Corinthian Christians to return to the way of the Lord.

Suggested Reading Schedule

Monday: 1 Corinthians 1

Tuesday: 1 Corinthians 2-3

Wednesday: 1 Corinthians 4-5

Thursday: 1 Corinthians 6-7

Friday: 1 Corinthians 8

Questions:

- Who reported to Paul that there were divisions among the brethren in Corinth?

- What type of man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God? _____
- Paul _____, Apollos _____, but _____ gave the _____.
- What is required of a steward? _____
- Explain what was wrong with the Corinthian Christians tolerating the case of immorality that Paul addresses in chapter 5. Why did such a one need to be judged? _____

- “For you were _____ at a price; therefore _____ God in you _____ and in your _____, which are God’s.” (NKJV)
- Had the Corinthians written a letter to Paul? _____
- What does Paul mean when he says, “to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord...” (7:10) and “to the rest I, not the Lord say...” (7:12)? _____

- What can a liberty become if we are not careful? _____

Outline

- Greetings (1:1-9)
- Overcoming Division (1:10—4:21)
- Moral Issues (5 - 7)
- Liberties and Idolatry (8 - 10)
- Headship and Communion (11)
- Spiritual Gifts (12 - 14)
- The Resurrection (15)
- Final Instructions and Closing (16)

“Although they were the Christian Church in Corinth, an inordinate amount of Corinth was yet in them, emerging in a number of attitudes and behaviors that required radical surgery without killing the patient. That is what 1 Corinthians attempts to do”
- Gordon Fee, NICNT

Themes

- Division:** Division was the underlying problem in Corinth. Paul spends nearly a fourth of the letter addressing it!
- Morality:** The immorality of the world can influence Christians in dangerous ways. Christians need to be reminded of the importance of purity as a child of God!
- The Church:** Corinth would fit in well with 21st century denominationalism. They made their own rules and worshipped their own ways. The problem was (and is) that’s not God’s way.
- Resurrection:** The heart of the Christian’s hope is the Resurrection. Thus, we find it as the basis for Paul’s argument throughout the whole letter to the Corinthians!

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