

1/5/12

Introduction To Corinthians

We want to begin our study of Corinthians by looking at an introduction of the letter in order to better understand the condition of the church, it's members and the various problems that it was plagued with.

The letter to the Corinthians is of such great value for the mere fact that it deals with so many problem areas that parallel our own city life and society were there is a melting of philosophies, religions and cultures.

The Church of Corinth stands out in the New Testament as the evidence and warning to the church of Jesus Christ regarding carnality and what it can and will produce among the people of God.

There are three important things to remember as we study the book of Corinthians.

1. To give us a true picture of the early church and not think that it was perfect.
2. To have a scriptural base to deal with very specific problems.
3. To make sure no age of the church ever thinks that they are not capable of this carnal condition.

I. The city at Corinth.

- A. The location of the city is important.
 1. The city was located near Southern end of a narrow isthmus, only four miles wide, which connects the Grecian Peloponnese with the continent.
 2. The city at it's southern edge displayed it's famous Acrocorinthus that stood 1850' high on a half mile spare summit.
 3. The acrocorinthian provided protection for the city on one side, while walls on the other sides were six miles in circumference.
 4. The center of the city contained the market place, the agora, with all its shops, basilicas, monuments and the "bema" speaking platform located in the center of the agora, where Paul was brought before Gallio. Acts 18:12-17
 5. The city had a very strategic position having a gulf on both sides, Corinthian gulf on the west and Saronic Gulf on the east.
 6. The city had it's rival just 45 miles away in the city of Athens, where the Acropolis could be seen.

B. The history of the city.

1. Corinth was referred to a “wealthy Corinth” by Homer marking it’s importance.
2. Corinth was a rival in importance with Athens, Thebes and Sparta, but it never held the first place till the last days of Greece freedom.
3. The Greek lost their independence in 338 B.C. and Philip II of Macedonia and his son Alexander the Great, made Corinth the seat of a new Hellenic League.
4. The Greeks attempted to throw off the yoke of Macedon and Rome intervened and enslaved all Greeks.
5. The general of Rome named Lucius Mummius conquered and destroyed the city it in 146 B.C. and carrying off its treasures equal to Athens.
6. The city laid in ruins for 100 years till Julius Caesar realized its importance and rebuilt it as a Roman Colony under the name of Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiansis by sending veterans and freedmen in 46 B.C.
7. Later the Emperor Augustus made Corinth the capital of the province of Achaia, becoming the residence of the proconsul. Acts 18
8. The city was built on the lines of a Roman city whose official language was

Latin, while the common speech was Greek.

- C. The commerce of the city.
1. The city flourished in commerce being the only route between the peninsula and mainland of Greece also Asia and Italy, Syria, Phonicia, Egypt, Spain and therefore called “the bridge of the sea” and “the eye of Greece”.
 2. The city also benefited having three harbors, though only two are frequently mentioned, on the western Corinthians gulf was **Lechacum**, on the north side of city out to the Ionian Sea the **port of Schoenus** was situated a few miles north of Cenchreae and **Cenchreae** on the Saronic gulf, seven miles east of the city, out to the Aegean Sea.
 3. The isthmus being at one point only four miles across, cargo would be unloaded at one end and then loaded at the other port.
 4. Smaller vessels would be transported across the isthmus by means of a tramway with wooden rails while bigger ship had to go around Cape Malea, for that reason they called the isthmus 'Diolkos' the place of dragging across.
 5. The journey was a very dangerous one saving a 200 mile trip around Cape Malea.

6. There were two sayings about those who made the trip around Cape Malea; Let him who sails around Malea forget his home and Let him who sails around Malea first make his will.
7. The construction of a canal was attempted by Nero in 40-66 A.D. with Jewish slaves from the Jewish War, but abandoned, not until 1881-1893 was it accomplished.

The was the city at Corinth!

II. The population of Corinth.

A. The inhabitants.

1. The city being a sea port city was cosmopolitan.
2. The city had a Roman minority, but dominant and a good portion of Greeks, Egyptians, Syrians, Orientals and Roman veterans.
3. The city attracted many Jews due to it's business opportunities.
4. The inhabitants of the city were of many classes, cultures and nationalities mingled together attracted by the great wealth.
5. One writer said, "There were philosophers, merchants, sailors,

- freedmen, slaves, trades-people, hucksters and agent of every vice."
6. The city like all large cities experienced the two extremes of great wealth and extreme poverty next to each other.
 7. A city of elitism, power, wealth, worldly wisdom through cultural corruption to impress, gain favor, scam, manipulate and benefit oneself by whatever means and methods, in order to be acknowledged and accepted.
 8. The population when Paul visited was about five to six-hundred thousand, of which 2/3 were slaves.
 9. The Corinthians were known for their brass, pillars and architecture, especially their temples and prided themselves in adorning their city and their interest in knowledge.
 10. One writer said, "At night its streets were hideous with the brawls and lewd songs of drunken revelry. In the daytime its markets and squares swarmed with Jewish peddlers, foreign traders, sailors, soldiers, athletes in training, boxers, wrestlers, charioteers, racing-men, betting-men, courtesans, slaves, idlers and parasites of every description --a veritable pandemonium. "Shaw"
 11. Isthmian games were held only second to the Olympic games, every two years,

honoring the sea god Poseidon to which Paul alluded to. 1Cor. 9:24-27

- a. Boxing.
- b. Wrestling.
- c. Chariot racing.

B. The morals and religions.

1. The Corinthians were associated with debauched sin and a life-style of loose living, associated to their religions.
 - a. To Corinthianize meant to engage in prostitution, an expression of immorality.
 - b. A Corinthian was always portrayed on the stage drunk.
2. The worship of Aphrodite or Venus by Romans was a contributing factor to its immoral life-style.
 - a. The large temple to the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite, stood 1,850 feet high.
 - b. The one-thousand temple priestesses were consecrated or sacred prostitutes, who would go from the Acrocorinthus down to the city to peddle their bodies as a service and revenue for the temple.
 - 1) The cult of Aphrodite was dedicated to the glorification of sex, much like the industry of pornography.

2) The worship of Aphrodite is a parallel to Ashtoreth or Astarte, in the days of Solomon, Jeroboam and Josiah.

3. The worship of “Melcertes”, stood at the foot of the acrocorinthus, the patron deity of navigation was the same as “Melkart”, the chief god of “Baal” of the city of Tyre which Jezebel introduced to Israel when Ahab married her.
4. The temple of Apollo, the god of music, poetry, song, with nude statues of Apollo in various poses giving rise to the idea of male beauty.
 - a. The idle male was worshipped.
 - b. Corinth became the center of homosexuality, as a worship and devotion.
5. The city had many other temples such as that of Athena, Hermes/Mercury, Jupiter, Neptune, Zeus, Asculapius, the god of healing, Dionysus, and many others, including Egyptian mystery cults, like the worship of Isis, etc.
6. The city was known as “Vanity Fair”, the “Vegas of the day”, giving us a better understanding that Paul came to the city with much fear and trembling. 1Cor. 2:3
7. One commentator stated, “Christians were labeled “misanthropes”, haters of humankind, because they refused to join

in the worship and sacrificial meals offered to local, traditional gods and their festivals that quickened local pride or to help polish a city's image as loyal to the emperor by taking part in the imperial cult." Garland:10

- a. Christians did not have temples, but met in homes.
 - b. Christians did not did not give emphasis to nationality or political ties to Rome.
 - c. Christians therefore were suspect by all.
8. But above all the religious cults, the imperial political cult of Caesar, as divine.
- a. It grew spectacularly throughout the empire during the Julio-Claudian and Flavian period than the early Christian movement ever did and the establishment of federal cult in Corinth was a matter of great political , social and financial importance for the colony." Garland:11
 - b. The imperial cult was tied to the Isthmian games celebrating the reigning emperors' birthday every year. Garland:11
 - c. Pliny the Younger used the imperial cult to determine if a person was a Christian by commanding them to

deny Jesus as Lord and burn a pinch of incense to Caesar. Garland:11

This was the population of Corinth!

III. The church at Corinth.

A. The setting out for Corinth.

1. The apostle Paul and Silas set out for the Second missionary and arrived at Derbe and Lystra going to Phrygia and the region of Galatia. Acts 16:1-5
2. They were forbidden by Holy Spirit to preach in Asia, went to Mysia and tried to go to Bythenia and again were forbidden by Holy Spirit and at Troas Paul had a vision, a man of Macedonia appeared and said, "Come over Macedonia and help us." Acts 16:6-10
- 3 The they arrived at Philippi, met Lydia the seller of purple and were imprisoned for casting a demon out of a girl who told fortunes. Acts 16:11-40
4. They then went to Thessalonica, where they were chased out to Berea, due to Jewish persecution as well as Berea and then were escorted Paul to Athens, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. Acts 16:17:1-15
5. Paul waiting for them at Athens was stirred in his spirit by the idolatry in the

city and disputed in synagogue and market place. Acts 17:16-17

6. Paul then preached to Philosophers of the day, the Epicureans and Stoics about resurrection at Mars Hill and won a few converts. Acts 17:18-33

B. The arrival at Corinth.

1. Silas and Timothy not having arrived at Athens, Paul went to Corinth. Acts 18:1
* Some believe that Paul was discouraged when he arrives at Corinth.
2. Paul then joined himself to a couple named Aquila and Priscilla, who had been expelled by Claudius from Rome in 49 A.D. for being Jews and he abode with them because they were of the same trade, tentmakers. Acts 18:2-3
3. Paul as his custom, disputed with the Jews in the synagogue on the Sabbath, as well as the Greek “God-fearers” with some success. Acts 18:4
4. Silas and Timothy then arrived from Macedonia and Paul was compelled by the Spirit to testify to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ, but they opposed him and blasphemed. So Paul told them he was going to the Gentles and leaving the synagogue he joined himself to one Justus, a worshipper of God, whose

house was next to the synagogue. Acts 18:5-7

5. Crispus the chief ruler of the synagogue was saved and his family, plus many others. Acts 18:8
6. Jesus then appeared to Paul in the a night vision telling him to stop being afraid and speak, no one would harm him, “for I have many people in this city”, to be saved and he remained for eighteen months. Acts 18:9-11
7. Six months after, Paul was accused by the Jews and brought before Gallio deputy of Achaia and refusing to hear them for religious affairs were driven out and Sosthenes was beaten, ruler of synagogue. Acts 18:12-17
8. Paul left Corinth for Syria with Priscilla and Aquila, stopping at Ephesus, where he left the married couple, as he sailed to Caesarea to greet the church, then to Antioch. Acts 18:18-22
9. The members of the church at Corinth were diverse.
 - a. Some Jews. Acts 18:4, 8; 1Cor. 7:18
 - b. The majority Gentile. 1Cor. 12:2
 - c. There were various social levels. 1Cor. 1:26-31
 - d. There were slaves and free man. 1Cor. 7:21-22; 12:13

- e. There were a few wealthy, most poor. Rom. 16:23; 1Cor. 11:21-22
 - f. All were sinners. 1Cor. 6:9-11
10. The church at Corinth was culturally worldly, having transferred their worldly lives to the church, like many in the church today.

This was the church at Corinth!

IV. The epistle to the Corinthians.

- A. The letter to the Corinthians was not the first for Paul mentioned an earlier one he had written to the Corinthians. 1Cor. 5:9
 - 1. So First Corinthians is really Second Corinthians.
 - 2. And Second Corinthians is really Third Corinthians.
 - 3. Some have proposed up to four letter by dividing up the two letters, believing no letters were lost, which has not internal or external evidence, at all.
- B. The authorship of the letter to the Corinthians.
 - 1. The internal evidence.
 - a. Paul claims to be the author of the letter in the greeting. 1Cor. 1:1a
 - b. The name Paul appears seven more times. 1Cor. 1:12, 13, 3:4, 5, 22; 16:21

- c. Paul claimed to be the founding father of the church. 1Cor. 4:14-15; 18-21; 9:1-3; 15:8
2. The external evidence.
- a. Few scholars have ever denied the authenticity of Paul's authorship.
 - b. In A.D. 96 a letter, 1Clament, was sent from the church at Rome to Corinth, and it contained quotations from and allusions to First Corinthians.
 - c. Ignatius, ca. A.D. 35-ca. 107, echoes the language of the letter many times.
 - d. Quotations are found in Justin Martyr's, ca. 100- ca. 165, Dialogue with Trypho.
 - e. Irenaeus, ca. 130-ca. 200, and Tertullian, ca. 160- ca. 220 quote it also.
 - f. No book in the New Testament has stronger attestation.
- B. The prompting and purpose of the letter to the Corinthians.
- 1. The prompting of the letter.
 - a. Paul had received news from the household in Corinth that there were contentions among them. 1Cor. 1:11
 - b. There appeared to be four distinct party factions dividing the church. 1Cor. 1:12

- 1) Those followers of Paul.
 - 2) Those followers of Apollo.
 - 3) Those followers of Peter.
 - 4) Those followers of Christ, with the idea of super-spirits.
- c. The letter was brought by three individuals, who probably informed Paul further on the problems at Corinth, along with a gift. 1Cor. 16:17
- 1) Stephanas.
 - 2) Fortunatus
 - 3) Achiacus,
2. The purpose for the letter was five-fold.
- a. To clear up the party divisions. 1Cor. 1.11
 - b. To affirm himself as the founder and his apostleship that was being questioned, but not in full defense as in Second Corinthians. 1Cor. 4:14-15; 18-21; 9:1-3; 15:8
 - c. To answer questions they had posed to him about sexual immorality, marriage and single life. 1Cor. 7
 - c. To prepare the collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem. 1Cor. 16:1
 - d. To announce his plans to them. 1Cor. 16:5-8
3. The central message to the Corinthians is the power of the gospel to transform sinners.

- a. Through Divine revelation, not human speculation.
 - b. Through Divine wisdom, not human wisdom.
 - c. Through Divine power, not human power of position.
 - d. Through Divine love, not human love for self.
- C. The letter was a cause of much pain to Paul.
1. The apostle wrote the letter through much afflictions. 1Cor. 4:14; 2Cor. 2:4
* Some believe that it refers to another letter, but there is no evidence!
 2. Paul was so disturbed that he sent Timothy on ahead to remind them of their life in Christ. Acts 19:21-22; 1Cor. 4:17
- D. The letter deals with many major doctrines.
1. The power of God to save and transform man through the cross. 1Cor. 1:18, 2:4
 2. The wisdom of God superior to the wisdom of man. 1Cor. 1:21
 3. The judgment of the believer. 1Cor. 3:12-15
 4. The stewardship of one's ministry. 1Cor. 4:1-2
 5. The holiness of the believer from sexual immorality, through sanctification. 1Cor. 5:7, 6:11

6. Marital relationships, divorce and single life. 1Cor. 7:1-40
 7. Christian liberty regarding meats offered to idols. 1Cor. 8:1-13
 8. Striving for excellence in ministry, forfeiting finances to be blameless. 1Cor. 9:1-27
 9. Judgment of God on His people in the wilderness, a warning to the carnal Christian. 1Cor. 10
 10. The cultural clashing of women's submission to their husbands and the chastening for dishonoring the Lord's table. 1Cor. 11
 11. The correction of the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit in the church, motivated by Agape love. 1Cor. 12-14
 12. The physical resurrection was being denied, exposed their ignorance. 1Cor. 15
 13. The offering of God for the poor saints in Jerusalem. 1Cor. 16:1-2
 14. The letter is Soteriological dealing with salvation through the cross, the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- F. The date of the epistle is said to be 55-56 A. D.
1. Paul was brought before Gallio in the summer of 51.

- a. The limit of the proconsul was one year, Gallio served from July 1st A. D. 51 to the June 30, A. D. 52.
 - b. Archeologist discovered near Delphi discovered an inscription with the name of Gallio, as proconsul of Achaia connected with Claudius.
2. He was there eighteen months, three years at Ephesus.
 3. He wrote it from Ephesus at the end of his ministry before Pentecost. 1Cor. 16:8
 - a. Paul had dispatched Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia, possibly Timothy did not know about the First letter, till he arrived at Corinth. Acts 19:22, 1Cor. 4:17
 - b. Paul had spent three years at Ephesus. Acts 20:31
 - c. Apollos was at Ephesus with Paul and chose not to come with the other three. 1Cor. 16:12, 17
 4. Paul had visited Corinth a second time while at Ephesus. 2Cor. 12:14; 13:1
 5. When Paul left Ephesus, he sent Titus to Corinth. 2Cor. 2:13, 7:6

This is the epistle to the Corinthians!

V. Key versus, words and phrases.

A. Key versus.

1. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 1Cor. 1:18
2. And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people, but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. 1Cor. 3:1
3. Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. 1Cor. 5:7
4. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 1Cor. 10:11
5. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. 1Cor. 10:12
6. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*. 1Cor. 10:13

B. Key words.

1. Wisdom “sophia” is found seventeen times in the first three chapters and once in the twelfth. 1Cor. 1:17-3:19; 12:8

2. The wise “sophos” is found eleven times in the first three chapters and once in the sixth. 1Cor. 1:19-3:20; 6:5
3. Knowledge “gnosis” is found ten times. 1Cor. 1:5-14:6
4. Edification is found four times. 1Cor. 14:3, 5, 12, 26h
5. Spirit, spiritual, spirit is found forty-one times.
6. The word carnal is found four times. 1Cor. 3:1, 3 (2x’s), 4

C. Key phrases.

1. The phrase “puffed up” is found six times. 1Cor. 4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4
2. The word “wisdom” appears nineteen times in a contrast of human and divine.

These are the key versus, words and phrases in First Corinthians!

VI. The outline

- I. The introduction. 1Cor. 1:1-9
 - II. The problems at hand. 1Cor. 1:10-6:20
 - III. The questions they asked. 1Cor. 7:1-16:4
 - IV. The closing remarks. 1Cor. 16:5-24
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- I. The introduction. 1Cor. 1:1-9
 - II. The matters of carnality. 1Cor. 1:10-11:34

- III. The matters of spirituality. 1Cor. 12:1-16:4
- IV. The closing remarks. 1Cor. 16:5-24