

## Wreckage and the Fire - Revival in a Corrupt City

**Acts 18:1–11**- After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth.<sup>2</sup> And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them.<sup>3</sup> So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation, they were tentmakers.<sup>4</sup> And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.<sup>5</sup> When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit and testified to the Jews *that Jesus is the Christ*.<sup>6</sup> But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook *his* garments and said to them, “Your blood *be* upon your *own* heads; I *am* clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”<sup>7</sup> And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain *man* named Justus, *one* who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue.<sup>8</sup> Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.<sup>9</sup> Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent;<sup>10</sup> for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.”<sup>11</sup> And he continued *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

## Introduction - The Myth of the Perfect Church

When many believers think about THE EARLY CHURCH, they IMAGINE something that has NEVER ACTUALLY EXISTED.

- In the imagination of many Christians, the early church looked like this: the Holy Spirit fell on the Day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, the believers were filled with power, miracles began to happen, unity flowed through every gathering, and from that moment forward the church walked in uninterrupted purity and harmony.

**BIG LIE - There were no conflicts, no divisions, no immorality, no personality clashes, no confusion about doctrine, and no hurt among believers. The church supposedly stayed perfect until centuries later when denominations and organized religion entered the story and complicated everything.**

**It sounds inspiring. But it is not biblical. The New Testament itself dismantles that fantasy.**

**The reason we have most of the New Testament letters is because churches were already dealing with serious issues.**

- The Galatians were drifting into another gospel.
- The Thessalonians were confused about the return of Christ.
- The Romans struggled with tension between Jewish and Gentile believers.
- The Philippians had relational conflict inside the church.
- The Colossians were facing theological deception.
- The seven churches of Revelation were rebuked for compromise, lovelessness, corruption, spiritual deadness, and lukewarm faith.

Even in the very first church in Jerusalem there was conflict.

Acts chapter 6 records a dispute between Greek-speaking widows and Hebrew-speaking widows over the daily distribution of food.

**The early church was PRESENCE-FILLED, but it was not PROBLEM-FREE!**

- The Holy Spirit had come.
- The Gospel was advancing.
- People were being saved by the thousands. Miracles were happening.
- Yet at the same time believers were still learning how to live in the power they had received.

**The Spirit was poured out, but people still had flesh. Grace had arrived, but people still carried baggage.**

**Salvation happened INSTANTLY, but sanctification was still a PROCESS.**

**That truth is critical for us to understand as we begin this journey through First and Second Corinthians. Because one of the greatest misconceptions people carry into church is the belief that the church is supposed to be a perfect place filled with perfect people where nothing ever goes wrong.**

- People expect no hurt.
- No misunderstandings.
- No immature behavior.

- No personality clashes.
- No offenses.

**But The church is not made of angels. It is made of redeemed human beings who have come out of a broken world.**

- When broken people come into the church, they do not instantly lose every thought pattern, habit, cultural assumption, or emotional wound they carried before they met Christ.
- Many of those things walk into the church with them.

**Now, once inside the church, those things are set on a collision course with the cross of Jesus Christ.**

**That collision is called DISCIPLESHIP.**

**It is the process where God begins to reshape the mind, confront the heart, heal the wounds, and retrain the instincts of people who have been saved but are still being transformed.**

**The church is not a showroom for flawless people. The church is a shaping room for redeemed people.**

**And nowhere is that reality more visible than in the church at Corinth. Which brings us to the first great movement of this message. I have got to deal with this...**

### **1. The Myth of the Perfect Church**

- Before we study Corinth, we must dismantle the illusion that the early church was flawless.

Pentecost did not produce a perfect church. Pentecost produced a powerful church. The difference matters.

**The Holy Spirit did not come because the church was mature. The Holy Spirit came so the church could mature.**

- The outpouring of the Spirit did not eliminate the need for leadership, correction, teaching, boundaries, and discipline.
- If anything, the presence of the Spirit intensified the need for those things.

**SPIRITUAL POWER without SPIRITUAL FORMATION can quickly become SPIRITUAL CONFUSION.**

That is why the apostles wrote letters. The New Testament letters are not abstract theology floating in the air. They are pastoral responses to real situations in real churches.

- Paul wrote to the Galatians because false teachers were corrupting the Gospel.
- He wrote to the Thessalonians because believers were confused about the end times.
- He wrote to the Romans because tensions existed between Jewish and Gentile believers.

**And when he wrote to Corinth, he addressed one of the most complicated churches in the New Testament.**

- Corinth had spiritual gifts - But it also had spiritual pride.

- Corinth had passionate worship - But it also had disorder in worship.
- Corinth had revelation - But it also had rivalry.
- Corinth had the Lord's Table - But it also had class division at the Lord's Table.
- Corinth had powerful ministry - But it also had moral compromise.

**Yet through all of it, the Spirit of God was still moving. That truth alone should bring perspective to every believer in the room.**

- Many people walk away from the church when they discover that Christians are still imperfect.
- But the New Testament never hid that reality. It revealed it.

**Which leads us to the setting where this remarkable church was born.**

## **2. The Mess of a Crossroads City and a Carnal Church**

**Acts 18:1 says, “After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth.”**

- At first glance that seems like a simple travel note. But that sentence carries enormous weight.
- Corinth was one of the most strategic cities in the Roman world. **PUT UP PIC OF A MAP**

**It sat on a narrow strip of land connecting northern and southern Greece. Ships traveling between the Aegean Sea and the Adriatic Sea often passed through Corinth to avoid the dangerous journey around the southern coast.**

- That meant trade flowed constantly through the city.
- Merchants traveled through Corinth.
- Sailors flooded its ports.
- Athletes came for the Isthmian Games.
- Philosophers debated in its streets.
- Money flowed through its markets.

**Corinth was wealthy, Corinth was influential, Corinth was ambitious, But Corinth was also morally chaotic.**

- The city was famous for its devotion to Aphrodite, the goddess of love.
- Ancient writers describe a culture where **sexual immorality was not hidden but normalized.**

**The reputation of Corinth became so infamous that the Greeks created a phrase for reckless immorality - “To Corinthianize.”**

- If someone in the ancient world accused you of Corinthianizing, they were describing a lifestyle of indulgence and moral collapse.

This was the environment where God planted a church.

**The City Tells You Everything About the Church** - Acts 18:1-4

## The Five Pressure Points That Shaped This Church

- **Status Obsession:** Roman colony with intense social hierarchy — who you aligned with determined your standing. This is why the divisions break along personality lines.
- **Philosophical Relativism:** Greek mind trained to believe truth is a matter of perspective. Absolute claims were considered intellectually primitive — this is why Paul must argue for bodily resurrection in ch. 15.
- **Sexual Permissiveness:** The city normalized what the church was commanded to mortify. The culture was always pulling the congregation back toward its pre-conversion normal.
- **Economic Division:** The wealth gap in Corinth was enormous — and it followed the church straight to the communion table (ch. 11).
- **Rhetorical Idolatry:** Worth of a message was measured by the eloquence of its delivery. Some began to dismiss Paul in favor of the more polished Apollos.

## Paul's Deliberate Counterculture Strategy

- **He works a trade** — refuses to be a performing Sophist

- **He preaches a cross** — the ultimate symbol of shame in Greek culture
- **He uses dialegomai** — reasoned dialogue, not rhetorical performance
- He is doing everything wrong by Corinthian standards — and God is with him anyway
- **Every one of these five pressure points will produce a crisis in this congregation**
- **Every one of them is alive and well in the 21st century church**

**That fact alone reveals something powerful about the nature of the Gospel.**

- God does not **wait for culture to become righteous before He builds His church.**
- He plants His church in the middle of **broken cultures so that redemption can begin there.**

**Darkness does not intimidate God - IT ATTRACTS HIS MISSION.**

### **The Documented Spiritual Condition of This Church**

- 1 Cor 1:5 — **Enriched in all speech and all knowledge**
- 1 Cor 1:7 — **Not lacking in any spiritual gift**

- This is not flattery — Paul does not flatter. This is apostolic acknowledgment.
- The Corinthian church was genuinely extraordinary in the operation of spiritual gifts

## **The Critical Theological Tension**

- The gifts were real. The tongues were not performance. The prophecy was not theater.
- **The Holy Spirit was genuinely at work — and they were still carnal, factional, arrogant, litigious**
- Chrysostom (4th c.) marveled that a church with such supernatural endowment could fall into such carnality
  - His conclusion: **Gifts are given for the benefit of others. Character is the fruit of surrender.**
  - **A person can operate in a genuine gift and still be a spiritual infant.**
- 1 Cor 3:1 — I could not address you as **SPIRITUAL PEOPLE**, but as people of the **FLESH, AS INFANTS** in Christ
- **Modern Pentecostalism has often equated spiritual gifts with spiritual maturity**
- Corinth is the permanent biblical refutation of that equation

- You can speak in tongues and still be immature
- You can prophesy and still be carnal
- You can see miracles and still be divisive
- The gift is God's grace flowing through a vessel.

Character is what the vessel is made of.

**"God gave Corinth every gift they needed to be great. But their character was not in alignment with His grace."**

***We have the city, corrupt and pressurized. We have the church, gifted and genuine. Now we look at what Paul actually finds when he writes — because chapter one does not ease into the problem. He lands on it immediately.***

**But when God plants a church in a place like Corinth, He rarely begins with perfect people. He begins with available people. Which leads us into the next movement of the story.**

### **3. The Mercy of God in the Middle of the Mess**

**Acts 18:2** introduces two individuals who became essential to the birth of the Corinthian church.

**"And he found a certain Jew named Aquila... with his wife Priscilla."**

- These two believers had recently been forced out of Rome when Emperor Claudius expelled the Jewish population.

- At first glance it looked like persecution had disrupted their lives.
- But what looked like disruption was divine positioning.

**God moved them from Rome to Corinth so they would be there when Paul arrived.**

- They were tentmakers by trade, just like Paul. So Paul began working alongside them.
- Together they prayed, labored, and helped establish the church in Corinth.

**This reveals a powerful Kingdom principle.**

**God often advances His mission through ordinary people who are simply willing to obey Him.**

- Aquila and Priscilla were not apostles.
- They were not famous leaders, But they were faithful servants.

And their obedience became part of the foundation of the Corinthian church.

**The Kingdom advances not through FAMOUS PERSONALITIES but through FAITHFUL PEOPLE.**

**The mission in Corinth was not easy. Opposition grew. Resistance intensified. And at one point Paul needed encouragement from heaven itself.**

*But before we understand the fractures, we must understand the fire — because **What God built in Corinth was not a social club. It was a Spirit-breathed, miracle-working, gift-operating congregation. And that is what makes the dysfunction so devastating.***

#### **4. The Mission of the Cross Against the Culture**

**Acts 18:9** records a remarkable moment. **“Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision: ‘Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you... for I HAVE MANY PEOPLE IN THIS CITY.’”**

**That statement is astonishing. God looked at a corrupt city filled with idolatry and immorality and said, “I have many people in this city.”**

Many of those people had not yet heard the Gospel. Many were still trapped in sin. Many were still living in darkness.

- **God already saw them as future sons and daughters.**
- **God always sees the harvest before the harvest appears.**
- **He sees redeemed lives before redemption happens.**
- **He sees transformed hearts before transformation begins.**

**That promise sustained Paul in Corinth.**

**Acts 18:11 says he remained there a year and six months teaching the Word of God.** And that teaching produced a church.

**A church that would later struggle with division, immorality, pride, lawsuits, confusion about marriage, chaos in worship, abuse of spiritual gifts, and misunderstanding about resurrection.**

- Yet through all those struggles, the Spirit of God never abandoned the church.
- Because God's strategy has never been to wait for perfect people.
- His strategy has always been to redeem imperfect people and then transform them over time.

## **Conclusion**

The church at Corinth forces us to confront an important truth.

- The church has never been flawless, but it has always been fought for by God.
- The early church was powerful and imperfect at the same time.
- And that reality should reshape how we view the church today.

**The church is not a museum for saints - It is a hospital for sinners. It is not a gathering of perfected people - It is a community of people being perfected.**

Over the coming weeks we are going to walk through the letters Paul wrote to Corinth.

- We will explore their struggles.
- We will examine their questions.
- We will confront their compromises.

But we will also witness something remarkable. Through every correction, every rebuke, and every challenge, the Spirit of God continues to work.

**Because God does not abandon His church when it becomes messy. God sees the redeemed before they are redeemed!**

**He steps into the mess and begins the work of transformation.**