

1 Corinthians

Gospel-Centered Living in a Sin-Centered World

Introduction

1 Corinthians 1:1-3 & Acts 18

Introduction

ILLUS: Practicing Christians – 61% agree with ideas rooted in New Spirituality (people pray to the same God, meaning and purpose come from being one with all that is, karma), 54% with postmodern views (No one can know for certain the meaning and purpose of life, morality is determined by ones personal beliefs, offensive beliefs are wrong beliefs), 36% with Marxism (private ownership feeds greed and envy, everyone deserves equal allocation, and 29% with secularism (a person is valuable only if society sees them that way, meaning and purpose is found in getting the most out of life.

57% of self-identified Christians say casual is sometimes or always acceptable ... 20% opposed to require bathroom use that matches sex assigned at birth ... 29 oppose making it illegal for schools to teach about gender identity issues ...

“The breadth and scope of 1 Corinthians are breathtaking. It is the most wide-ranging and complete letter Paul wrote.”
(Wilson, 7)

“First Corinthians is a source of book of answers to church problems in the past and today.” (Mare, 180)

Location

A narrow ~ 5 mile isthmus (located in modern day Greece) that connects Peloponnesus with the mainland and is located about 50 miles to the west of Athens.

ILLUS: Image 1: Paul's Missionary Journey

While all part of the Mediterranean Sea, this isthmus connects the Aegean Sea to the Adriatic Sea through the Corinthian Gulf.

This meant that the city actually had two ports, one on the east and another on the west.

In ancient times, and we will see even in more modern, the sea travel around the Peloponnesus was treacherous.

"A sailor never takes a journey around Malea [the cape at the south end of the peninsula] until he first writes his will."
(MacArthur, vii)

For that reason, ships would dock and unload cargo to haul from one port to another. Or, if a smaller vessel, they actually developed a way to haul entire ships from one port to the other.

ILLUS: Image 2: Isthmus of Corinth

Canal began by Emperor Nero in first century but not completed until the 19th Century (MacArthur, vii)

ILLUS: Image 3: Corinth Canal

History

Corinth, a truly ancient city, is really the tale of two different cities that greatly influenced each other.

Corinth was originally a Greek city that had wealth and prominence to rival Athens.

It was destroyed by the Roman General Mummius in 146 BC and remained desolate for around 100 years.

Corinth was rebuilt by Julius Caesar between 46-44 BC and, because of its location, regained its former prominence in a short time.

Capital of the Roman province of Achaia in 27 BC.

In the center of the noted market place, was located the bema – the judicial bench or judgment seat of the province that Paul would later refer to in reference to Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:10 (NKJV) — 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

At this time only Rome and Alexandria had greater populations.

While estimates are widely varied because some numbers include slaves and others do not, there were ~ 200,000 total inhabitants.

Culture

Because of its location, Corinth was a large, vibrant, wealthy, diverse, commercial, open, progressive, and pluralistic city.

The city quite literally controlled both the overland and commercial traffic between Asia and Italy. (Fee, 1)

“... the city boasted a marketplace larger than any in Rome itself.” (Swindoll, 8)

Archeological evidence notes that Corinth had a banking system, exclusive neighborhoods, public and private dining, recreational facilities, and upscale rental properties. (Adapted from Swindoll, 9)

“The city contained at least twenty-six sacred places, including one dedicated to Aphrodite, the goddess of love.” (Akin and Merritt, 3)

Known for sexual promiscuity.

ILLUS: Image 4: Acrocorinth (~ 1900ft mountain) – was not only a fortress to protect in case on invasion, but the temple of Aphrodite was positioned there and, during the Greek period, it is said to have boasted of 1,000 temple prostitutes.

The Greek term *korinthiazō* was coined after the culture of Corinth and means “to commit immorality.”

Plato in his work “The Republic” used the term “Corinthian Girl” in reference to a prostitute.

In fact, Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans on a later return visit to Corinth. **Romans 1:18-32** gives us a look out Paul's window in Corinth.

"Paul's Corinth was at once the New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas of the ancient world." (Fee, 3)

"Corinth was the New York, Los Angeles, New Orleans, or San Francisco of the ancient world." (Köstenberger quoted in Akin and Merritt, 4)

Isthmian Games – (biannual games second only to the Olympics) named because Corinth was on an isthmus and held at the temple of Poseidon.

What we will find is that the location of the church in Corinth influenced the people to bring into the church to both the actions and attitudes of the culture.

Church

The church at Corinth was established by Paul on his second missionary journey around 51-52 AD. It was made up of both Jews and Gentiles, but the majority were gentile.

Its members ranged from wealthy to poor, prominent to slaves, leaders to laborers.

ILLUS: Archeologists have discovered and inscription that states Erastus was the commissioner of public works in Corinth. He later came to faith and was Paul's "fellow worker."
(Mare, 178)

Romans 16:23 (NKJV) — 23 Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and Quartus, a brother.

Acts 19:22 (NKJV) — 22 So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time.

However, it is clear that the majority of the congregation were common people.

1 Corinthians 1:26 (NKJV) — 26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.

The details surrounding Paul's planting the church are recorded in Acts 18. This background is foundational to our understanding of this important letter.

Note: Acts 17 and Paul in Athens at the Areopagus then to Corinth (Swindoll says from famous to infamous, 9)

Acts 18:1-4

Acts 18:5-8

Acts 18:9-11

Acts 18:12-17

Gallio was the governor of Achaia and brother of Roman philosopher Seneca. (Patterson, 13)

Acts 18:18-21

Acts 18:24-19:1

Setting

The letter of 1 Corinthians was written by Paul from Ephesus in 54 or 55 AD.

Most scholars believe that this is the second of 4 letters that Paul wrote to the church.

Paul founded the church and after 18 months continued on his second missionary journey.

Sometime later he wrote them his first letter.

1 Corinthians 5:9 (NKJV) — 9 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.

He later received a bad report from a family in the church.

1 Corinthians 1:11 (NKJV) — 11 For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you.

And the church sent him back a letter questioning his instructions in that letter.

1 Corinthians 7:1a (NKJV) — 1a Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me ...

1 Corinthians 16:17 (NKJV) — 17 I am glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus,

and Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part they supplied.

Paul responded with a second letter, which we know as 1 Corinthians.

What we later learn is that the church did not heed this letter and was insubordinate to his leadership.

This led to him later making a “painful visit” to the church.

2 Corinthians 2:1 (NKJV) — 1 But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow.

2 Corinthians 12:14a (NKJV) — 14a Now for the third time I am ready to come to you.

They still continued in their worldly ways, so Paul wrote them a third letter.

2 Corinthians 2:4 (NKJV) — 4 For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.

And, finally, they grew to the place that Christ rather than the culture had the greatest influence in their lives and actions. This was demonstrated by the church’s reconciliation with a member that was disciplined because on incest mentioned in 1 Corinthians. Paul wrote 2 Corinthians (now his

fourth letter to them) to commend and encourage the church.

Ultimately, the issue that precipitated what we know as 1 Corinthians is that the Corinthian church looked and acted more like the culture in Corinth than it did Christ.

“Paul’s contentious relationship with the Corinthians produced the most extensive correspondence between an apostle and a local church preserved in the New Testament.” (Taylor, 20)

“Church life can be a messy business ... Perhaps no church exhibited this mire than the church in Corinth in the first century ... It was a mess theologically, practically, and morally.” (Akin and Merritt, 3)

“Although they were the Christian church in Corinth, and 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’s what this letter attempts to do ... Paul is taking them on at almost every turn.” (Fee, 4, 6)

The actions of the people in the church were not only sinful but were a threat to the validity of the gospel to the very culture God had established them to reach!

Paul’s purpose in writing was to reestablish his authority, rebuke, and redirect the church toward Gospel-Centered Living in a Sin-Centered World.

Outline

The book of 1 Corinthians is decidedly different than most of Paul's writing. Note: generally, theology/application rotation. However, in this text it is like "a collection of short essays where he defines the problem and responds with the gospel revealing how we should think about every area of life through the lens of the gospel." (paraphrase from The Bible Project 1 Corinthians summary)

Introduction (1:1-3)

Sosthenes

Acts 18:17 (NKJV) — 17 Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things.

Unity and The Gospel (1:4 – 4:21)

Division, Foolishness, Arrogance, True Wisdom, Real Spirituality, Genuine Discipleship, and Kingdom Cooperation

Purity and The Gospel (5:1 – 7:40)

Sexual Immorality (including incest, homosexuality, adultery, and prostitution), Church Discipline, Civil Litigation, Marriage, Singleness, Divorce, and Remarriage

Liberty and The Gospel (8:1 – 10:33)

Freedom in Christ, Consideration of Others, Self-denial, Imitators of Christ

Assembly and The Gospel (11:1 – 14:40)

Spiritual Leadership, Lord's Supper, Spiritual Gifts,
The Greatest Gift – Love, Spiritual Maturity,
Tongues, Order in Church Services

Theology and The Gospel (15:1-58)

The Resurrection of Christ and Believers

Conclusion (16:1-24)

Be Generous, Welcoming, Strong in the Faith, and
Humble

Themes

The themes that we see emerging in Paul's letters are directly related to the challenges that he is seeking to address.

Spiritual – what does this mean and who is?

Wisdom – where do this come from?

Authority – who has it?

Body – whose is it?

Freedom – can we do anything we want?

Church Gatherings – what should they look like?

Love – how is it defined?

Gospel – who is it for and what difference does it make?

Resurrection – what does it change?

Cross, grace, God, mission, love, gospel, hope.

Conclusion

“Without 1 Corinthians it would be hard to imagine how church services actually worked in the New Testament. We would know next to nothing about the Lord’s Supper in these first-generation churches. We would have no idea how spiritual gifts are supposed to function in Christian worship.” (Wilson, 7)

“Sometimes we need to watch an exasperated apostle talking to a rebellious and divisive church.” (Wilson, 8)

“... in every case his greater concern is the theological stance behind the behavior.” (Fee, 5)

But his point is this, the gospel should make a difference not just in what we believe but how we behave.

Not that we are saved by how we live, but that being saved should change how we live. The obedience does not bring faith, but faith should be obedience.

James 2:18 (NKJV) — 18 But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

And it is not just for Corinth then, because we are Corinth now!

“Features of the Corinthian church are but mirrors held up before the church of today ... the need for discipleship ... for love to rule over all ... for edification to be the aim of worship ... for sexual immorality to be seen for what it is ...

for the expectation of marriages to be permanent ... are every bit as relevant to us as to those for whom they were first written." (Fee, 20)