



Midweek Study

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God's Amazing Book

Journey Through the New Testament

CORRECTING A CARNAL CHURCH

A Quick Look at the First Letter to the Corinthians

1 Corinthians is so vital to us. Conditions have not changed much. Many of the problems that confronted the Corinthians plague present-day believers as well. Living wisely for God is not easy in the midst of a sinful and materialistic age. But 1 Corinthians is filled with valuable and important lessons... which (are) so essential for our walk with the Lord. – J. Allen Blair

Interesting Insights:

- 1 Corinthians is the longest of Paul's epistles.
- 1 and 2 Corinthians are, by content, Paul's most practical epistles.
- In 1 Corinthians, Paul uses the title "The Lord Jesus Christ" six times in just the first ten verses, emphasizing Christ's Lordship.
- 1 Corinthians is an epistle of reproof and correction.
- 1 Corinthians addresses practically every existing church problem.
- 1 Corinthians contains the most extensive treatment of spiritual gifts found in the New Testament.
- In 1 Corinthians 15, we find the greatest and earliest New Testament discourse on the Resurrection.
- The church at Corinth was the least spiritual of all the churches addressed by letter in the New Testament.
- 1 Corinthians contains one of our earliest references to the Lord's Supper, found in chapter 11.
- Funny: What verse from 1 Corinthians should be the motto of every church nursery? (15:51)**

About The City of Corinth (source: Dr. Danny Akin teaching handout)

- The city was strategically located as a sentry of the 4 ½ mile Isthmus of Corinth, and it was located on major land and sea travel routes. It was located at the foot of the 1,886 feet high AcroCorinth, and was the master of two harbors (Cenchreae leading to Asia and Lechaem leading to Italy).
- From the beginning it was prosperous; but it became famous also for luxury and immorality. The city contained at least 26 sacred places, including one dedicated to Aphrodite that had 1,000 temple priestesses/prostitutes.
- The population of the city has been estimated at approximately 500,000. Corinth was the New York, Los Angeles, or New Orleans of the ancient world. Indeed *Korinthiazo* meant to commit immorality.
- In 27 BC it became the capital of the Roman province of Achaia, what is southern Greece today. The city was comprised of Jew and Greek, slave and free. It was proud of its Hellenic culture, international Isthmian games, philosophical schools, and esoteric mystery religions.

Fast Facts on 1 Corinthians

Written by? Apostle Paul

Written when? 56 AD

Written why? To help Christians practically understand how to live their everyday lives for Christ in a carnal world.

Where Written? Ephesus (3rd missionary journey; v. 16:8)

Key Phrase:
Correcting the Church

About The Church at Corinth

A. The church was founded on the second missionary journey, and included both Jews and Gentiles, with Gentiles (and probably slaves and the lower classes) in the majority.

B. The church at Corinth was a divided and carnal church in a number of areas:

1. CLANISH CHRISTIANS - A party spirit predominated, as believers split ranks to follow various personalities (1:12ff; 3:5ff). In Paul's case, both his authority and Gospel were being challenged.

2. CHARISMANIAC CHRISTIANS - Perhaps a group of enthusiasts elevated the supernatural gifts, especially speaking in tongues, to the top of the Christian life and thereby created an elitist group that looked down on the other believers and took control of the worship services. There were disagreements concerning spiritual gifts, and just what it means to be "spiritual" (*pneumatikos*).

3. CARNAL CHRISTIANS - Some of the believers adopted a libertine lifestyle, returning to the immorality of their former ways, and looking down on the members who were convicted by conscience. Perhaps they were influenced by some type of Hellenistic duality (Platonic philosophy), which downplayed one's physical existence. Thus, such physical acts as sexual immorality were permissible because the "flesh" was unimportant.

4. CHASTE CHRISTIANS - Others reacted in the opposite direction by becoming ascetic (ch. 7), rejecting sexual relations within marriage between a man and a woman.

The tension between various groups is not simply evident in the first part of the book; it is also reflected in chapters 7-12. In these chapters, Paul's arguments, often include a "yes—but" form. In other words, he is saying to each faction, "Yes, you have something of the truth—but . . ." For example, notice the beginning of chapter 8. Paul acknowledges that food offered to idols is not dangerous (vs. 4-6). "But," he says, "not everyone knows this" (v. 7), by which he is referring to other Christians within the church.

The Outline to the Book

1:1-9 – Paul's Greeting

1:10-4:21 – The Problem of Divisions

5:1-13 – The Problem of Sexual Sin

6:1-11 – The Problem of Lawsuits

6:12-20 – The Problem of Sexual Immorality

7:1-40 – Problems Related to Marriage

8:1-11:1 – Problems Concerning Idols

11:2-14:40 – Problems at Church

15:1-58 – Thoughts about the Resurrection

16:1-24 – Thoughts about Christian Giving

The Purpose of the Book

A. To remind the Corinthians that Jesus is Lord. (1:2; 16:23).

B. To answer questions addressed to him concerning problems in the Church. (7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1).

C. To reprove a spirit of division in the Church, the result of immaturity and following men rather than Christ (1:11-13).

D. To defend his Apostleship and ministry, being attacked by Judaizers (Ch. 9).

E. To urge the Corinthian Believers to discover, develop and use their Spiritual Gifts in an atmosphere of love (Ch. 12-14).

F. To establish the historical and doctrinal basis for believing in the resurrection of Christ (Ch. 15).

The Keys to the Book

A. The key thought = Personal, moral & doctrinal errors can be corrected when Believers surrender to the LORD.

B. The key phrase = "The LORD Jesus Christ". (1:3; 16:22).

C. The key verses = 13:13; 14:33, 40

D. Key Words: 1. Lord - 62 times; 2. Spiritual - 16 times; 3. Carnal - 5 times; 4. Gift - 11 times

Extra Note: According to 1 Corinthians 5:9, 11, Paul had written an earlier letter to the church at Corinth, which has since been lost. Also, 2 Corinthians 2:4 points to still another letter not found today. Therefore, 1 and 2 Corinthians are actually Paul's second and fourth letters to that church. Consequently, it makes the church at Corinth the only known church to which Paul ever sent four letters.