

I Corinthians; Lesson #1
Introduction to The Book of I Corinthians
Pentwater Bible Church
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The apostle Paul came to Corinth on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-18). This was probably in the spring of A.D. 51. When the apostle Paul first visited the city (AD 51 or 52), Gallio, the brother of Seneca, was proconsul. Gallio's tenure can be fairly accurately dated to between 51-52 AD or 52-53 AD. Gallio ruled that all religions were equal in his eyes and was clearly hostile to Paul and his exposition of the "Truth." The events of Acts 18 can therefore be dated to this period. This is significant because it is the most accurately known date in the life of Paul who resided here for eighteen months. He was working as a tentmaker and converting as many Jews and pagans as he could. Here he first became acquainted with Aquila and Priscilla, and soon after his departure Apollos came from Ephesus.

Paul visited Corinth for a "second benefit" (II Corinthians 1:15), and remained for three months, according to Acts 20:3. During this second visit in the spring of 58 it is likely the Epistle to the Romans was written.

Paul also wrote two of his epistles to the Christian community at Corinth, the First Epistle to the Corinthians and the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. The first Epistle reflects the difficulties of maintaining a Christian community in such a cosmopolitan city. It is this difficulty that Paul desired his readers to receive instruction on how to be in the world but not of the world. This book can be viewed as a struggle of living in a degenerate culture that seeks to draw us in to it. However, as the apostle prays we must be led by the Spirit and not conformed to the practices of this world however enticing they may be (Ephesians 4:1-5:17).

Corinth is an ancient city about 48 miles west of Athens on the narrow stretch of land that joins the Peloponnese to the mainland of Greece. Corinth was an important city in ancient Greece. When Paul arrived in A.D. 51, the Corinth he saw was little more than 100 years old, but was five times as large as Athens and the capital of the province. Ancient Corinth, the original Corinth, founded in the 10th Century BC, had been the richest port and the largest city in ancient Greece. Strategically located guarding the narrow isthmus that connects the Peloponnesus (as southern Greece is called) to the mainland, it was a powerful commercial center near two seaports only 4 miles apart. Lechaem, the western harbor in the Corinthian Gulf was the trading port to Italy and Sicily, and Cenchreae, the eastern harbor in the Saronic Gulf, was the port for the eastern Mediterranean countries. Periander (ca. 625-585 BC) had constructed a five-foot wide rock-cut tract for wheeling small ships and their unloaded cargo from one gulf to the other. By 400 BC, a double wall ran from the city to Lechaem to protect a two mile rock paved street, about 40' wide, leading to the port. When Rome demanded the dissolution of the Achaian League, Corinth, the leader, resisted and so Lucius Mummius, the Roman consul, leveled the city in 146 BC, killed the men and sold the women and children into

slavery. Some of the wealthier families escaped to the island of Delos. For the next 100 years, only a handful of squatters occupied the site.

Julius Caesar refounded the city as a colony in 44 BC, named it Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis and populated it with conscripted Italian, Greek, Syrian, Egyptian and Judean freed slaves. New Corinth, as Ancient Corinth, thrived. Within just a few years, new Corinth's settlers' enormously profitable commerce at this crossroads of the nations had brought thousands more eager settlers from all over the Mediterranean and enormous personal wealth to a local ruling class of self-made women and men. The wealthy Greek families who had fled to Delos also returned.

Corinth was an especially licentious city, a reputation it seems to have had in ancient times. Indeed, one of the Greek verbs for fornicate was *korinthiazomai*, a word derived from the city's name. Apparently this estimation was based on Strabo's report of 1,000 sacred prostitutes in the temple of Aphrodite on the Acrocorinth, an 1886-foot hill that rises above the city to the south. Sacred prostitution was a Middle East custom, not a Greek one. No doubt Corinth, like other large port cities, had plenty of prostitutes to service the sailors, but they were not sacred.

It's easy to see why Paul chose Corinth as headquarters for his mission to the west. The city was young, dynamic, not hidebound by tradition, a mix of dislocated individuals without strong ethnic identities seeking to shed their former low status by achieving social honor and material success. Paul was not intimidated by a big, bustling, cosmopolitan hub city, with no dominant religious or intellectual tradition, for Corinth shared many characteristics with Tarsus, his home town, and Syrian Antioch, his home church city. The heart of the city, the forum, was filled with temples and shrines to the emperor and various members of his family, built alongside temples to the older Greek gods such as Apollo. Apollo's son, Asklepios, the god of healing, had a shrine there as well as at Epidaurus, the ancient site of miracle healings, about 50 miles southeast. The seat from which Gallio sat at the athletic events was called the *Bema* seat. This is the name that Paul uses to describe Christ's final judgment of believers (I Cor 3; II Cor 5).

The moral depravity that Paul saw at Corinth persuaded him to speak to the spiritual needs of believers in a difficult culture. It was essentially a moral cesspool and a seaman's paradise. It was akin to our modern day Las Vegas where divorce was commonplace, which resulted in broken lives for the new believers there. It was indeed debauched since "easy" women roamed the streets and led Paul to catalog the sins in Romans 1:18-32. It was from this filthy trough of sin that Paul made converts. He had a difficult job ahead of himself to work with the new converts to be in the culture but now of the culture.

General Outline:

I. Introduction (1:1-9)

A. Salutation and description of the writer and readers (1:1-3)

B. Thanksgiving for the effects of God's grace (1:4-9)

II Divisions in the Church (1:10-4:21)

- A. The reality of division (1:10-17)
 - B. The causes of division (1:18-4:5)
 - 1. A misunderstanding of the message (1:18-3:4)
 - 2. A Misunderstanding of the ministry (3:5-4:5)
 - C. The cure of division (4:6-21)
- III. Disorders in the Church (chapters 5-6)
- A. Failure to discipline a sinner (chapter 5)
 - B. Failure to resolve personal disputes (6:1-11)
 - C. Failure to practice sexual purity (6:12-20)
- IV. Difficulties in the Church (chapters 7:1-16:12)
- A. Counsel concerning marriage (chapter 7)
 - 1. Marriage and celibacy (7:1-9)
 - 2. Marriage and divorce (7:10-24)
 - 3. Marriage and ministry (7:25-38)
 - 4. Remarriage and widows (7:39-40)
 - B. Counsel concerning Christian liberty (chapters 8-14)
 - 1. Christian liberty vis-à-vis pagan worship (8:1-11:1)
 - a. The principle of brotherly love (chapter 8)
 - b. The regulation of privilege (9:1-10:13)
 - c. The application to idolatry (10:14-11:1)
 - 2. Christian liberty in relation to Christian worship (11:2-14:40)
 - a. The state of women in worship (11:2-16)
 - b. The state of Christians at the Lord's supper (11:17-34)
 - c. The state of Spiritual gifts (chapters 12-14)
 - C. Counsel concerning the Resurrection (chapter 15)
 - 1. The certainty of bodily resurrection (15:1-34)
 - a. The historical argument (15:1-11)
 - b. The logical argument (15:12-19)
 - c. The theological argument (15:20-28)
 - d. The experiential argument (15:29-34)
 - 2. Answers to certain questions (15:35-58)

- a. About the resurrection of the dead (15:35-49)
 - b. About the Rapture of the living (15:50-58)
 - D. Counsel concerning the collection for the poor (16:1-4)
 - E. Counsel concerning future visits (16:5-12)
- V. Conclusion (16:13-24)
- A. Exhortation on appropriate conduct and commendation (16:13-18)
 - B. Salutation, imprecation and benediction (16:19-24)

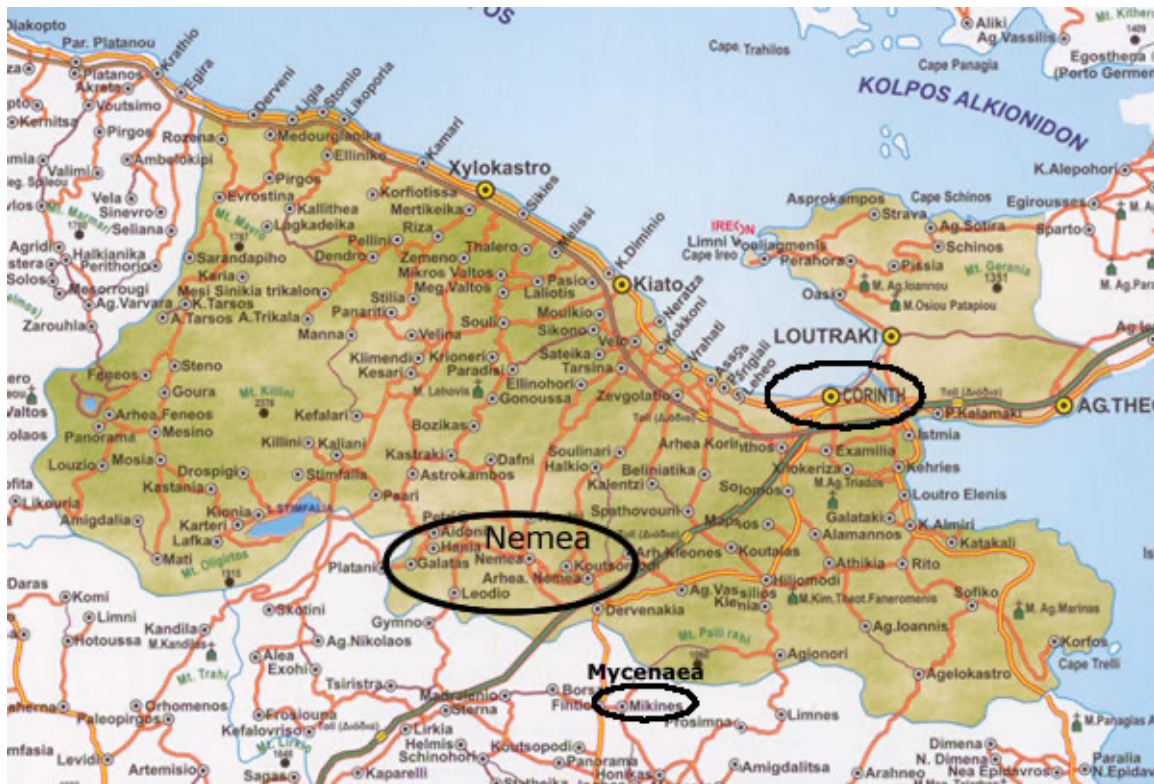
1 Corinthians Chapter One

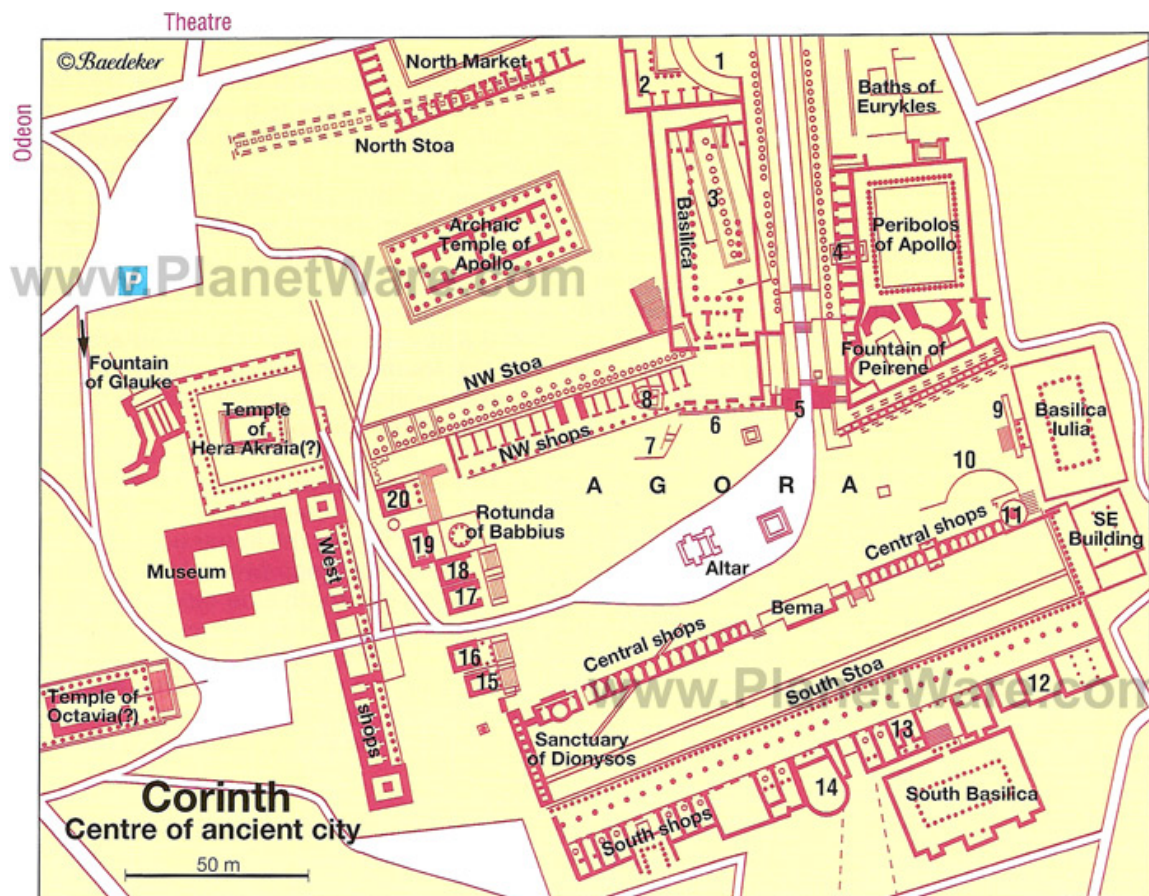
1 Paul called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,

Paul is affirming the apostolic authority that Christ gave him on the road to Damascus. Paul was indeed the apostle to the Gentiles. Here with Sosthenes he is facing a troublesome group of new believers, which are challenging his integrity. Therefore he begins this epistle with the highest authority in the universe certifying his apostleship. Paul has a job to do and he is going to meet the difficulties straight on. He is taking action to correct the issues. This is one of the most practical epistles in the New Testament. To be sure all of the books of the Bible are sent from God and authoritative. It finds present day relevance in our churches of today sadly because some of the same issues plague today's Christianity. Is it therefore appropriate that he forcefully assert the origin of the words he is about to convey. They are not his opinions or suggestions. They are God sent and must be obeyed if a Christian church is going to walk in the will of the Lord. His apostleship was divine and he wanted the Corinthians to realize this as he began to correct them for their behavior.

Sosthenes was clearly a man known to them as Paul characterizes him as *our* brother. He was not an apostle or a coauthor of the book. But nevertheless Paul saw fit to name him as a person who helps him ingratiate himself to the Corinthians as he pleads for Christian correct behavior. Sosthenes replaced Crispus who was one of Paul's first converts and he was Jewish and a synagogue ruler. Therefore Sosthenes had been know with some stature in the Corinthian community and lent credibility to Paul's message. As a supporter of Paul he must have been converted to Christianity. Therefore being called a brother by Paul he was solidified into the Corinthian Christian community.

Paul needed to make these declarations as the skillful lawyer that he was in order to establish his authority for teaching these people. If there was a self serving sense within him the congregation would quickly identify it and turn away from him or worse continue with their destructive practices. If that happened and the sin was left unchecked Christ would distance Himself from them until He corrected them and they repented and returned to faithful fellowship. Paul saw the need to quickly take action in order to preserve their fledgling community.





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| 1 Semicircular Market | 6 "Captives' Facade" | 11 Rotunda | 16 Pantheon |
| 2 Roman Market | 7 Sacred Spring | 12 Office of Agonothetes | 17 Temple of Herakles |
| 3 Greek Market | 8 Oracle | 13 (mosaic pavement) | 18 Temple of Poseidon |
| 4 Greek temple of 4th c. B.C. | 9 Starting-line in Stadion | 14 Bouleuterion | 19 Temple of Apollo |
| 5 Propylaea | 10 Retaining wall | 15 Temple of Venus Fortuna | 20 Temple of Hermes |

Next Session: I Corinthians Chapter One.

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