

The First Epistle to the Corinthians

LESSON 1

INTRODUCTION THE SIN OF DIVISION

INTRODUCTION:

In this lesson, you will be introduced to the city of Corinth and the church which met there. To appreciate the apostle Paul's comments it is necessary to have an understanding of the historical and geographical setting of Corinth.

Corinth was a city located in a very sinful setting. As a result, the church was also situated in a sinful setting. Paul writes of his concern that the Christians of Corinth have lost sight of Christ and have started following after men. Division in the Lord's Body is wrong, and Paul begins 1 Corinthians dealing with the issue. In his opening remarks Paul expresses gratitude that the Corinthians had been enriched by God, came behind in no gift, and were eagerly waiting for the revelation of the Lord (1:1-9).

LESSON TEXT: Acts 18 and 1 Corinthians 1:1-17

LESSON AIM: To introduce the letter of 1 Corinthians; which will include background and the opening remarks.

LESSON OBJECTIVES: You will . . .

1. Gain an appreciation of the geographical setting and history of the city of Corinth.
2. Consider Paul's greeting to the church in Corinth.
3. See the problems facing the Christians of Corinth.
4. Learn of the problems caused by divisions and factions in the Body of Christ

BACKGROUND MATERIAL

A. Paul in Corinth.

1. Apparently Paul spent more time in Corinth than he first intended (Acts 18).
2. Paul supported himself by making tents with Aquila and Priscilla.
3. Paul spent much of his time sharing the gospel in the synagogue.
4. Date of Paul's stay in Corinth – A.D. 50-51.
5. The city of Corinth needed Christ and Paul spent 18 months preaching and teaching.
6. Many believed and were baptized. 7. Paul wrote the letter in A.D. 54-56.

B. The History of Corinth.

1. Corinth was destroyed in 146 B.C. by the Romans, in the early stages of the Roman Empire.
2. Corinth was rebuilt in 46 B.C. as a Roman colony.
3. Prospered because it was at the center of trade from both the east and the west.
4. It was also famous for its art and served as a cultural center.
5. Known for its athletic events, which were second only to the Olympics.
6. Capital of the Roman Province of Achaia.
7. The term **“Corinthian”** had become synonymous with immorality.
8. Ancient Corinth was known for its temple to Aphrodite, goddess of love, where a thousand priestesses practiced prostitution in the name of religion.

C. The Geography of Corinth.

1. Strategic location in Greece.
2. All north – south traffic went through Corinth.
3. Commercial center with a population of approximately 700,000.
 - a. 200,000 free born citizens.
 - b. 500,000 slaves.
4. Population made up of:
 - a. The descendants of the Roman colonists.
 - b. Roman businessmen.
 - c. The Jewish community.
5. Located on an isthmus between the Mediterranean and Adriatic Sea.
 - a. A canal across was begun by Nero in the 1st Century (deported Jews helped with the construction).
 - b. The canal which was completed in the 19th Century joins the two seas.
 - c. Prior to the canal’s completion ships from one side would come up the water way as far as they could.
 - d. They would put the ship on rollers and drag it to the other side, approximately 4 miles.

- e. Saved about 200 miles sailing around the cape in extremely dangerous waters.
- 6. Today it is a small city with little significance. Ancient city's ruins about 4/5 of a mile from present city.

THE PURPOSE OF THE WRITING

A. Purpose of The Epistle.

To answer questions and deal with problems.

B. Paul's Approach in The Letter.

Paul deals with their questions after he wrote six chapters on things they had not ask about, but needed to know.

1. 1 Corinthians 1-4 – Paul addresses the problem of glorying in men rather than Christ. (This is at the heart of all their other problems.)
2. 1 Corinthians 3 – Carnal nature and immaturity.
3. 1 Corinthians 5 – Paul addresses the problem of taking pride in immorality.
4. 1 Corinthians 6 – Paul addresses the problem of taking brethren to court.
5. 1 Corinthians 7 – Paul addresses the problems with regard to marriage and divorce.
6. 1 Corinthians 8 – Paul addresses the problems surrounding liberty in Jesus.
7. 1 Corinthians 8-10 – Paul addresses the problem of idolatry.
8. 1 Corinthians 11 – Paul addresses the problem of abusing the love feast and the Lord's Supper and the role of women in the church.
9. 1 Corinthians 12-14 – Paul addresses the misuse of spiritual gifts.
10. 1 Corinthians 13 – Paul addresses the problem when love is lacking.
11. 1 Corinthians 15 – Paul addresses the questioning of the resurrection.
12. 1 Corinthians 16 – Paul addresses the issue of collecting money for needy Christians.

C. Paul's Assurance to the Church.

Despite all their problems God still claims them as belonging to Him (1 Corinthians 1:1). There is always hope for people as long as they listen to the Word of God.

THE NATURE OF THE BODY

A. The Local Body – Empowered by God (1:1-9).

1. Called to be saints (vs 1-3).

a. Paul's apostleship (v. 1).

- 1) Of Jesus.
- 2) By God's will.

b. Their sainthood (v. 2).

- 1) Position – In Christ.
- 2) Privilege – Sanctified and holy.
- 3) Practice – Call on His Name.

c. Reception (v. 3). From God, our Father and Jesus Christ, our Lord.

- 1) Grace – God's gift of salvation based on Jesus' finished work at Calvary.
- 2) Peace – God's gift of security based on Jesus' finished work at the tomb.

2. Blessed as saints (vs. 4-9).

a. Past blessing (vs. 4, 6).

- 1) Salvation (v. 4).
- 2) Confirmation (v. 6).

NOTE:

- Grace cannot coexist with guilt (Romans 5 and 8).
- Grace cannot coexist with human obligation (Romans 4:4-8).
- Grace cannot coexist with human merit (Ephesians 2:5-10).

b. Present blessing (vs. 5, 7a).

- 1) All speech – Telling God's truth. Requires God's empowering and our willingness. Compare Ephesians 6:19.
- 2) All knowledge – Knowing God's truth. Essential to testifying is testimony (God's). Compare Colossians 1:9-12.

3) All gifts – Appropriating God’s truth. This refers to God’s provision, not our use. compare 1 Corinthians 12-14.

c. Future blessing (vs. 7b-9). We look for the Lord’s coming for five reasons.

- 1) It means Christ’s exaltation (v. 7b).
- 2) It means Satan’s defeat.
- 3) It means justice for the martyrs.
- 4) It means punishment for Christ rejecters.
- 5) It means heaven for those who believe.

NOTE: While we wait, we are kept:

- 1) Strong,
- 2) Blameless,
- 3) In fellowship.

SUMMARY OF 1:1-9. THE BELIEVER IS:

Sanctified: “hagios” – “originally a cultic concept, of the quality possessed by things or persons that could approach a divinity” (Bauer, p. 9).

Called: “klatos” – called, invited, cf. Matthew 22:14.

Enriched: “ploutos” – Make rich, wealthy, opulent. Compare 2 Corinthians 8:9.

Testimony confirmed in them. The genitive case indicates that they are involved in confirming the witness of the apostles about Christ. Compare 2 Corinthians 13:5.

Blameless: On the day of the Lord – “**anegklatos.**” Unblameable, irreproachable. Compare Colossians 1:22.

Fellowship: Fellowship with Jesus – “**Koinonia**” – fellowship, partnership, participation, communion, close relationship. The idea is that they had been invited to be partners with Christ in His great work.

NOTE: What is all this based on?

1. God’s work! Passive voice – Sanctified, called, enriched, was confirmed, be blameless.
2. God’s gifts! Grace, peace, spiritual gifts.
3. God’s character! Father, faithful.

Lesson 1. Answer the Questions and fill in the blanks.

1. List three reasons that contributed to the strategic location of the city of Corinth:

- a.
- b.
- c.

2. In addition to being a major trade center, Corinth was known for the following:

- A
- b.
- c.
- d.

3. The term "**Corinthian**" had become synonymous with _____

4. The date of Paul's stay in Corinth was _____

5. The date of the writing of 1 Corinthians is approximately _____

6. Paul spent _____ months in Corinth.

7. List five specific problems Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

8. In the salutation, Paul establishes his authority as what? _____

9. Define the term sanctify. _____

10. Explain the basis of unity among Christians. _____

11. Why was Paul happy that he had baptized only a few people in Corinth?