

# 1 CORINTHIANS: TRUE WISDOM FOR THE SAINTS IN SIN CITY

“The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

## 1 Corinthians 1:18

**AUTHOR AND DATE:** The Apostle Paul, 54-55AD<sup>1</sup>

- There is almost no debate among scholars regarding Paul’s authorship of both Corinthian letters (**1 Cor.1:1; 2 Cor. 2:1**).
- Paul composed both 1 and 2 Corinthians in response to on-going trouble in the church as an effort to promote Gospel unity.
- Paul appears to have written at least four letters to the Corinthians. Two were inspired and preserved, the others were lost.<sup>2</sup>

**AUDIENCE:** Saints in Corinth

**CITY OF CORINTH:** high profile port city boasting a population of between 80,000-100,000 in the first century.

- *Geography:* Corinth was an ancient port city located between Sparta and Athens in the center of Greece’s bustling culture.
- *History:* Julius Caesar rebuilt the city in **44BC** following its destruction in **146BC** by the Romans. In **27BC** it became the governmental seat for Achaia, from which seat Gallio as proconsul would allow Paul’s proclamation of the gospel.
- *Religion:* polytheism, pluralism, mystery religions, and idolatry marked the city’s religious life. Along with a synagogue that served dispersed Jews (**Acts 18**), roughly twenty-five sacred places of idol worship have been discovered.
- *Culture:* Corinth was a Hellenized city whose trade and tourism produced a booming economy. Its streets were filled with people seeking healing from holistic medicines, wisdom of traveling philosophers, and entertainment in the arts and sport.
- The city had a long history of materialism and perversion. References to Corinth’s wealth and immorality show up in Homer’s *Iliad* (2. 569–70) and Plato used the expression “Corinthian girl” to refer to a prostitute (*Republic* 404d).
- The Greek playwright Aristophanes coined the term *korinthiazomai* to refer to fornication (*Fragment* 354) and Strabo suggested much of Corinth’s perversion centered around the temple of Aphrodite and its thousand temple prostitutes (*Geography* 8. 6–20).
- The greed, idolatry, philosophy, and perversion that drove this city made it a popular place for travelers to visit. Gordon Fee suggested that “Paul’s Corinth was at once the New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas of the ancient world.”<sup>3</sup>

### CORINTHIAN CHURCH TIME LINE

- 50-51AD – Corinthians Church Planted (Acts 18:1-7)
- 51-52AD – Paul ministered for 18mo (Acts 18:18)
- 52-54AD – Paul wrote a “previous letter” (1 Cor.5:9)
- 54-55AD – 1 Cor. written from Ephesus (Acts 18:18)
- 55AD – Paul paid them a “painful visit” (2 Cor. 2:1)
- 55AD – Paul wrote a “severe letter” (2 Cor. 2:3f)
- 55-56AD – 2 Cor. written from Philippi (Acts 19-20)
- 56-57AD – Paul made a final visit (Acts 20:1-3)



<sup>1</sup> Background information and teaching notes draw from Tom Nelson (Denton Bible Church, Young Guns), Thomas Constable’s 1Corinthian Notes (DTS NT, 2003), John H. Sailhamer, NIV Compact Bible Commentary, and Gordon Fee’s NICNT Commentary.

<sup>2</sup> Letter 1: Paul’s “earlier” letter (1 Cor. 5:9), Letter 2: 1 Corinthians, Letter 3: the “severe” letter (2 Cor. 2:3), Letter 4: 2 Corinthians

<sup>3</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pg. 3

## CHURCH IN CORINTH

- Paul visited Corinth on his 2nd missionary journey (**Acts 18:1-18**; spring **51AD**) and joined Aquila and Priscilla in the tent-making trade. As was his custom, he taught in a local synagogue and planted a church among those who believed (**Acts 18:7**).
- He ministered in Corinth for 18 months until he departed for Jerusalem by way of Ephesus (**Acts 18:18-28**, fall, **52AD**).
- In fall of **53AD** Paul returned to Ephesus as part of his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey (**Acts 19**). During this time he likely wrote the letter mentioned in **1 Corinthians 5:9** that was misunderstood by the Corinthians. After hearing about the confusion and divisions (**1 Cor. 1:11, 16:17**), Paul penned 1 Corinthians to rebuke sinful behavior and reply to their concerns (54-55AD).
- Problems in Corinth continued so he visited the church a second time for what he called a “painful visit” (**2 Cor. 1:15, 2:1**).
- While in Ephesus, Paul sent Titus to Corinth with a difficult letter, which grieved Paul to write (**2 Cor. 2:4**). Paul later traveled to Macedonia where he penned 2 Corinthians and followed-up with a third visit in winter of **56-57AD** (**Acts 20:1-4**).

## **AN OUTLINE of 1 CORINTHIANS**

### **CH.1-6 – REBUKES CONCERNING SIN**

1:1-9 – Introduction: Encouragement to the Saints in Sin City

1:10-4:20 – Deadly Divisions: Confusion About The Gospel, Spirituality, & Authority

5:1-6:20 – Lust & Lawsuits: Immorality Among The Holy Ones

### **CH.7-16 – REPLIES CONCERNING QUESTIONS**

7:1-40 – Worshipful Wedlock: Heavenly Wisdom about Marriage and Singleness

8:1-11:1 – Immoral Meals: Understanding Freedom, Restraint, and Food Sacrificed to Idols

11:2-16 – Hair and Head Coverings: Understanding God’s Design of Roles in Worship

11:17-34 – Corrupted Communion: Division and Drunkenness at the Lord’s Table

12:1-14:40 – Spiritual Service: Unity, Diversity, and Giftings by the Holy Spirit

15:1-58 – The Gospel and the Grave: Reassurance Regarding the Resurrection

16:1-12 – Misunderstanding Money: Questions Concerning Collections

16:13-24 – Closing Comments: Let All You Do Be In Love