

# Studies in 1 Corinthians

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## LESSON I: An Introduction

### ► Paul & the Corinthian Church

**Who wrote 1 Corinthians?** The author identifies himself in the opening line of the first chapter as “Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.” Paul writes with a distinct style that is best identified with Romans, Galatians, and the other Pauline letters. Further confirmation comes from Clement of Rome, who identified Paul as the author of 1 Corinthians in A.D. 95. Dozens of 2<sup>nd</sup> century writers support this fact, too. Of course, we know that 1 Corinthians is ultimately inspired by the Holy Spirit, who used the ministry of Paul to address some very important issues in the early church...and today.

**When was it written?** About 55 A.D, while Paul was living in Ephesus. The Gospel had reached the city just three years earlier, so the church was still fairly young.

**What do we know about the church in Corinth?** It was a metropolitan church composed of Jews and Gentiles. The church struggled with living out the implications of Christ in the world around them. The problems we read about here are a reflection of a decadent and immoral culture.

### ► Corinth in a Nutshell



Corinth was the capital of Achaia, in the southern region of the Greek peninsula. When Paul visited Corinth, it was *the* city to live in. San Francisco stands out as a modern comparison. It was a young, vibrant city, inhabited by a diverse population of Romans, Greeks, and Jews. While Corinth’s history goes back centuries, it was decimated under Roman rule in 146 BC, then refounded, repopulated, and rebuilt under the watch of Julius Caesar. Corinth was strategically positioned along an isthmus (a narrow strip of land, connecting two large bodies of water). Trade came through to and from Italy, Spain, Egypt, Asia Minor, and Phoenicia. Corinth also joins Greece to Peloponnesus, and thus represented a melding together of cultures, languages, customs, and lifestyles. Having said, that the Greek culture was undoubtedly the strongest and most influential of the lot.

Corinth’s ports brought in plenteous trade and commerce, and that meant an abundance of goods and luxury, wealth and debauchery. There was once a saying, “*Ou pantos plein es Korintho*” which translates, “Not everyone is able to go to Corinth”—referring to its extravagant (read: expensive!) standard of living. That was not all that was said, either. Corinth was renowned for its 12 temples. The two most popular temples were dedicated to Asclepius, the god of healing, and Aphrodite, the goddess of love. The worship of Aphrodite was somewhat of a scandal, due to its rampant prostitution (at one time boasting 1,000 priestesses). So blatant and rampant was the immorality of Corinth that the Greeks coined a verb to describe it: *korinthiazomai*—“to Corinthianize.”

## *Text: 1 Corinthians 1:1-3*

1 This letter is from Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and from our brother Sosthenes.

2 I am writing to God's church in Corinth, to you who have been called by God to be his own holy people. He made you holy by means of Christ Jesus, just as he did for all people everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.

3 May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.



## *Questions for Thought & Discussion*

1. In small groups of 2-4, scan each chapter in 1 Corinthians and identify at least one major theme for each.
2. What parallels can be made between the world of that time and our contemporary society? Is the church today distinguishable from the world system or is it in danger of becoming assimilated by it?
3. Who was Sothenes (vs. 1)? (see Acts chapter 18).
4. There is no doubt that the church at Corinth was a troubled body. Yet, Paul was able to affirm some basic truths about that church. What were they (see verse 2)? What can **we** learn from this today when it comes to assessing the viability of our own congregation and others?