

Themes of I Corinthians (Part One)

Paul's Ministry in Corinth

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As I concluded last week's sermon on Samson, I was struck by the coincidence (if it was a coincidence) that the supporting scriptures that I found for my three lessons for second generation Christians all came from the book of I Corinthians. That started the wheels of my mind to turning, and it did not take me long to conclude that a study into the major themes of I Corinthians might be very instructive for us all at this time.

I believe that we will see, by the time I get done with this sermon series (I do not mean to go through I Corinthians verse by verse), that the situation in Corinth and our present circumstances very closely parallel one another. They are not exact, but I think that the parallels are considerable enough to at least grab our attention.

So, despite being separated from the epistles inception by nearly two millennia, this book is very relevant for us right now. And, as we get closer to Passover, certain sections are particularly relevant.

But, what makes this so relevant and useful is that this book is not one of systematic doctrine. Do not get me wrong, Paul takes care of doctrine in a large measure in Romans, which he wrote just after this—about a year later. But, I Corinthians instructs us in practical application of Christian teaching.

Now, do not misunderstand. I Corinthians itself includes a great deal of doctrinal material. However, the way that Paul sets this up it is all designed to teach, not just the knowledge of God, but the doing of God's will—to go from head knowledge to practical, day by day living, which in turn develops character.

So, the primary focus of I Corinthians is Christian living. It answers the question, "How does a member of God's church—a called out saint—conduct himself in an unchristian world?" Another way to state this would be, "How is a Christian to live in this present, evil age?"

Face it. Europe is already post-Christian, and proud to wear that moniker. And, America, and many other parts of the western world are swiftly following suit. There are millions of Islamists that are eager to end Christian civilization altogether, if the liberal, humanist, post-modern, multi-cultural types in government, media, and education do not beat them to the punch.

Which way will it happen? Will we become post-Christian because of outside influences? Or will we become post-Christian because of inside influences? My money is on the latter.

I believe that the situation in cosmopolitan first-century Corinth can provide us with some answers so we can live confidently at this present time.

So, as I said, this sermon will launch a short series on the Themes of I Corinthians, emphasizing the parallels between the Corinthian church and the church of God today. They are surprisingly

similar.

Today's sermon will set the background for the epistle of I Corinthians. It is important that we understand the culture of the time, and what kind of city it was, what the milieu of the environment was that Paul walked into back in about 51 AD. This date is not certain, but it was either 50 or 51 AD when Paul came into Corinth.

Acts 18:1 After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth.

So, we are in Europe already. This is part of what is known as Paul's second missionary journey, near to the end of it. He had just come from Athens, with his famous speech and discussion there on Mars' Hill—the Areopagus. And, he had a few people who were converted there.

But then, he went to Corinth. The city of Corinth lies on a neck of land—an isthmus—that joins the two main land areas of Greece. To the north was central Greece; and beyond that, Macedonia. To the south was the mountainous region known as the Peloponnesus. You may have heard of the Peloponnesian Wars. This is the area where that took place, and took its name from.

This isthmus separated two inlets or small gulfs next to which were Corinth's two port cities. One was called Cenchrea, which was about four miles to the east-southeast; and the second was the city of Lechaem, which was about two miles or so to the northwest. These ports were vital to the shipping in the Mediterranean Sea. If you look at one of the maps in the back of your Bible and see where Greece and Corinth are, you see that it is near the middle area of the Mediterranean Sea.

As we know from our reading of the Bible, and other sources, the Mediterranean Sea was not a safe sea to sail. The way the winds, tides, and currents were, shipping in the Mediterranean was a risky business.

Also, because Rome was the center of the known world at that time, things came from the east and south to Rome, and back again. There was a huge commercial network that the Romans set up.

At the time, they did not go straight across the sea. If you had a ship in Alexandria, Egypt, you just did not go straight across the sea, and dock in Rome. More than likely, the ship would take a coastal route that went up from Egypt to maybe Joppa, and Tyre, and other points on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean there, and it would stop to pick up more cargo or passengers, unload cargo and passengers. It would continue on around the bend in such fashion until they got to Cenchrea/Corinth.

They did not want to go down and round the southern tip of the Peloponnesian peninsula because the Cape of Malea was like Cape Horn came to be known for. The seas at either place were known to be very rough. Between contrary winds and sea currents which came together, the waves were tremendous. So, if they did not have to go down and through the Cape of Malea, they did not. It was a very treacherous passage.

So, what they would do, which began a very long time before, was dock at Cenchrea. If the ship was small enough, they took it out of the water, and transported it overland to Lechaeum on rollers, and then put it back into the water, reloaded the cargo, and continued sailing for Italy.

If the ship was big, they would completely unload the cargo, put it on carts, transport by road over to Lechaeum, load it onto another ship bound for Italy, and continue on their journey. That was safer, less expensive, and easier than going around the Cape of Malea. And remember, Corinth lay between these two port cities. It was bound to make a lot of money from all this transit business going across the isthmus.

Corinth was the most prosperous city in Greece at the time of Paul. And it was on par with Ephesus and Antioch regarding commercial trading—huge cities—Corinth was right on par with them.

Therefore, there tended to be many wealthy people in Corinth. I am not going to say that the people tended to be wealthier, because that might not be true. There were a lot of people who were slaves, freed men, and manual laborers—it took a lot of manual labor to load and unload all those ships, to move them across the isthmus, and all the various other things too. There were a lot of shopkeepers. There was a lot of warehousing done here as well.

So, there were a lot of laborer jobs.

There were many "white-collar" type jobs too because there had to be a lot of good record keeping. There was a lot of money moving through as well, so it was a financial/banking center. And then there are many other things which glom onto any wealthy place.

So, because it was a transit hub, and such a commercial center—a giant in the Mediterranean—its inhabitants were very cosmopolitan. You could think of it in terms like an ancient New York City, or London, or Tokyo, or any other great port city in the world where there is a constant stream of people and commerce moving through.

In Corinth, east met west. So, there were Romans, Greeks, and other Europeans like ancient France, Switzerland, and Britain. Rome had been that far northwest in Britain since the time of Julius Caesar. So, there was much commerce coming from and going northwest. And of course, there were people coming by ship from the East like Jews, Egyptians, Syrians, other Africans, Babylonians, and beyond. Just about everybody who was anybody wound up at or going through Corinth at some point because it was such a magnet.

The city was a Roman colony, meaning that it had great rights, and power within the empire—it was an ally, basically, of Rome. It was the capitol city of the Roman province of Achaia. So, there was local and regional government there as well, not just wealth and commerce.

So, it had what we would call today a diverse, multi-cultural *mélange* of people.

It was also a very religious city. I found a place that told me all the different temples that were there. It was quite an eclectic collection of sanctuaries to various gods and goddesses. It boasted two temples to Aphrodite—it was the center of Aphrodite worship. It had a temple to Isis, and Serapis, Egyptian gods—also, Artemis, Dionysus, Poseidon, Apollo, Helios, Demeter, Zeus, Hermes, Athena, and others. And, those were just the Roman, Greek, and Egyptian gods.

There were also houses dedicated to various mystery religions where the adherents of each of them would come to meet. And of course, there was the Roman imperial cult, the worship of the Emperor of the Empire, and his spirit.

And we should not forget that being a financial and commerce hub, Jewish people were there too. From antiquity, the Jews were known for their gifts and talents of moneylenders, and shopkeepers. As a matter of fact, just before this period of time of the writing of I Corinthians, Claudius Caesar had expelled the Jews from Rome for, among other things, they were accused of monopolizing the shop keeping trade. And so he found an excuse for removing them from Rome. This is how Priscilla and Aquilla ended up in Corinth.

Just a little side item on that—there is a note in history that the reason that was officially given for expelling the Jews from Rome at that time was because of a certain Chrestus being preached. Most historians think that this was the garbled name of Christ—Christus. And, what had happened was that the Jews were fighting amongst themselves, some were becoming Christians, and others were holding to their Jewish faith, and so they were having troubles, and Claudius took the opportunity to act against them.

Obviously with such a diverse religious and cultural landscape, the Corinthians had all sorts of ideas and practices. And, the Romans, in the way that they governed, were content to let them go and leave them alone—just so long as the money kept flowing into their coffers. As long as business was going along and booming, Rome did not have a problem with whatever you wanted to do. And also, just so long as the peace was kept. And so, if there were riots over religion, they would come down hard. If there were someone riling the people, and making problems for commerce, as happened in Ephesus, they would come in and mop things up with a Legion. The people did not want that at all because the Romans wore iron-nailed shoes, if you know what I mean. When they came in, and wanted to make peace, they were brutal. That was a major thing with them. You keep the peace. Everybody is happy, and you can make money.

Corinth is what we would call a first-century laissez-faire society. Their motto could have been "anything goes." And, it did.

I have a quotation here from Melton's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, which says,

"The city soon became a melting-pot for the approximately 500,000 people who lived there at the time of Paul's arrival. Merchants, and sailors anxious to work the docks migrated to Corinth. Professional gamblers and athletes betting on the Isthmean Games,"

This occurred in a nearby place every two years. Of course, they had Olympic sporting events, but they also had drama competitions, music competitions, and rhetoric competitions (oration and such). Not only that, women were allowed to compete in these games. I do not know if they were barred from any specific sport, but this was a rather rare thing at the time.

So, you can get an idea of how progressive their thinking was here in Corinth.

Just as an aside, these games were dedicated to Poseidon. Even though Aphrodite was the leading deity in Corinth, Poseidon was the patron deity of Corinth, since it was right on the sea.

"Professional gamblers and athletes betting on the Isthmian Games took up residence here. Slaves, sometimes freed but with no place to go, roamed the streets day and night. And prostitutes, both male and female, were abundant."

There were a lot of prostitutes in Corinth. Now, what would you think a town of 500,000 might have in prostitute numbers? Well, to give you an idea of how many there were: the temple of Aphrodite on the Acro-Corinthus, high point of Corinth, employed 1000 prostitutes alone. Just the one temple employed 1000 temple prostitutes. Now, remember all of those other temples that I mentioned a moment ago? Many of them also had temple prostitution, plus there were others that were not affiliated with any temple at all.

So, keep this in mind for the background of what is found written in I Corinthians. These were people who came out of a highly sexualized culture. And the members had just been converted a short time before it was written to them.

"People from Rome, the remainder of Greece, Egypt, Asia Minor, and indeed all the Mediterranean world relished the lack of standards, and freedom of thought which prevailed in that city. These were the people who eventually made up the Corinthian church. They had to learn to live together in harmony, although their national, social, economic, and religious backgrounds were very different."

So, what we have is a first century version of New York City. Everybody tries to go there. There is vice. There is every kind of idea. You have actors, sports figures, financiers, business heads, great minds, artists, philosophers, all making their pilgrimage to a city where they know that they will have the freedom to do what they want to do. And this was known throughout the Mediterranean world. In fact, there was a word—to corinthianize—which means almost without restraint. It was tinged, of course, with sexual innuendo.

So, Paul comes into this city, and he has his work cut out for him.

As mentioned earlier, this is near the end of his second missionary journey—in fact, chapter 18 ends with the end of this second journey going back to Jerusalem. This, here, is part of Luke's account of Paul's ministry in Corinth, and it extended for about 18 months between AD 50 and 51.

Acts 18:1-4 After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.

We need to get a bit of an understanding of what had happened in Athens to Paul before coming here to Corinth. He had come into Athens after being in Berea. In Thessalonica, he had had some problems. And, they forced him out of the city. But, there were actually a fair number of people who were converted in Thessalonica.

Then he went on to Berea (Acts 17:10) who were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica. And, they really looked into the scriptures and proved whether Paul was speaking the truth. And so, he had many converts in Berea.

And so, from Berea, being on a high, he then goes to Athens. Athens, to him, was probably the biggest challenge of his life because he knew that in Athens were the great minds of the day. Athens was still known as where all the great philosophers gathered. And so, he knew in going to Athens, he was going to have to give it his absolute best shot, if there were going to be any converts in the city of Athens. It says there in verse 21 of chapter 17:

Acts 17:21 For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

So, Paul was coming in with a new thing. And, they would be willing to hear it, but they would have both barrels full, and give it back to him with all kinds of Greek logic. So he knew that he would have to be on his toes to answer their every question.

So, when he got to Athens, he went up onto the Areopagus—Mars Hill—and he began to preach. And, he was doing okay. It is very interesting to study his argument, here, pulling out snippets from the Greek poets. He gets them to understand that all people are related through one blood, and that God wants us to be his offspring, and he has them going. Then he mentions the resurrection from the dead. They start to scoff. They did not believe in the resurrection from the dead. And so, Paul with all his enthusiasm was suddenly punctured:

Acts 17:33-34 So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

You get the idea that in Athens he had really been disappointed. He came to Athens with such high hopes, primed and loaded for bear. And, we just have a couple of names here.

So, he decides to cut his losses and heads for Corinth.

So, he gets to Corinth, and he needs to take a break. What he does is finds Priscilla and Aquila. It is not known whether he knew them before this or not. I tend to doubt it. But, they were drawn together because they were Jews and also had the same trade as tentmakers. To us that would mean that they made tents, but actually it is broader than that. They were artisans in leather. Tents of the time were made of leather.

And I am sure that at times the Roman army would say that they were going on campaign and

needed a thousand tents, and the tent makers would hop to it and make a killing.

But, they made other things also. They made straps, belts, purses or packs; whatever was needed that could be made from leather—saddles, bridles, and such, maybe even aprons and shoes. So, Paul was a gifted artisan in terms of being a leather worker. And he found Aquila and Pricilla, who were in this same trade, and he began to stay with them for a while, talk with them, and maybe even converted them. That is the impression I get. Unless, they were already converted when they got there, because that was certainly possible since they had come from Rome. Christianity was already known in Rome. And so, maybe they were already converted, and that is why he was drawn to them.

So, he stayed with them and worked and made his own living. What he probably did was to take some time off. He rested and did some manual labor because it seems as if he was alone. There is no indication that anyone else was with him when he went to Corinth. He did not have much support. He had just come from Berea and Athens. And, maybe the funds, which he had brought with him from those places, had begun to run out. And so, he needed to make some money. So, he did his trade there. But, they also took time, especially on the Sabbath, to go to the synagogue and reason with the Jews and the Greek believers.

What he did was very interesting. He inserted himself into the life of the Jewish community there. He did not come out like he had in Athens and start making speeches. It seems that in Corinth, he went under the radar a bit. He went to the synagogue, heard the service, heard what they were talking about, and would make comments every once in a while. Probably leading comments to get people to think in a certain direction.

And, he would reason with them. He did not stand up and say, "I have a message from God! You are all sinners unless you repent!"

No, he came in by the back door, sat down, got to know the people, shook hands with them, found out what they were thinking. Are they liberal? Do they uphold the law? Do they still do all these different things? Who were their leaders? What are they teaching? And all that sort of thing.

Now, if you will go with me to I Corinthians 9, you will see Paul's reasoning for doing this.

I Corinthians 9:19-23 For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those *who are* under the law, as under the law, that I might win those *who are* under the law; to those *who are* without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those *who are* without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with *you*.

Now, he had done this in Corinth for a reason. He did this specifically. He had figured out in his travels about the Mediterranean that this was the best approach. To put it in modern terms, he

used a bit of psychology and a bit of marketing skills to persuade people to the truth—that was his goal, to preach the gospel so that they could be a partaker of it with him. That was what his mind was focused on. "Woe unto me if I preach not the gospel."

But, he knew that in many cases to just stand up and begin proclaiming the gospel had bad results. People did not want to be hit broad sided. So, he found out that in many cases the best way to do something is to prepare the ground a little bit.

And in Corinth, I think that he felt that he needed to do this especially, because Corinth was such a hodgepodge of ideas and people. He felt that this was a very volatile situation to bring the gospel into a place like that. He could very easily have found himself being run out on a rail if he approached the wrong people at the wrong time, and in the wrong way. So, he used his smarts to come up with a way to approach these Corinthians—and the Jews first of all.

So, what he did in Corinth was that he adapted his approach and methods to his audience. He considered his audience by trying to find the best way to persuade them. In other places, he says that they persuade men. That was his goal. He wanted them not only to hear the message, but to understand and accept it.

Now, he knew, obviously, that God had to call people specifically. But, if he was run out on a rail the first time he opened his mouth, how was God going to persuade anyone? Maybe, somebody seeing Paul being run out of town would have pity and follow him out there and say, "What is it you were going to say?" But, that would probably be pretty rare. It would be far better to approach the people in a way so that they are friendly to you, and would at least give you a hearing.

Now, this approach, "becoming all things to all men," had its limits, which he knew, and stated in verse 21. He said, "If I came to people who did not have the law, who are without law," he said, "I became without law." But then, he says, "But, not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ."

He said, "I would not go in and do something that God would not approve of." He did not step outside the law even when he was trying to appear as if without law. He had the standards of Jesus Christ.

But, he would not flaunt a certain thing. For instance, when he was with the gentiles, he would make a conscience effort not to appear Jewish. He knew that that would immediately set the gentiles against him. They would automatically put up a barrier to him. He is a Jew!

Now, maybe he might let it be known that he was a Jew, but he would not appear as a Jew, doing all the things that would seem to wrangle the gentiles whenever they met with the Jews. This does not mean that he ate unclean food, or that he did anything that was against the law. He just toned things back a bit so that he would not appear so Jewish in the hopes that they would accept him more readily and listen to what he had to say.

While he was with the Jews, though, he made sure that he did not offend them by any refusing to do something that was now unnecessary under Christ. He would do Jewish things. They were not wrong things, but they might have been unnecessary because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Still, he was not going to offend them by refusing to do those things. So he became

more Jewish to them.

He was trying to win them. He was trying to fit in. He was trying to establish a sense of trust between them and good will. And then he would hit them with the gospel.

This was just a good strategy. We know from books like Philemon, Paul understood human nature. He was a master of understanding the way people act and react.

So, when he preached the gospel in Corinth, he said, "*This is a hodgepodge of peoples. I do not know how they might react to me. I am just going to slip in quietly, and do my work. I am going to support myself. I am going to live with whoever I may find to be with. I am just going to slip into the community and start building some truth, doing jobs for people, showing that he was trustworthy*" He would go to synagogue every Sabbath and have some good discussions and fine fellowship. Maybe get invited over for supper somewhere, and maybe toss in some tidbits of the gospel and Christian thought. And then, let it rest for a while. He had time. He did not need to come in with both barrels blazing.

And so, he did this for a time; we do not know how long. It might have been a couple of months where he was there, in Corinth, just establishing his credentials with the Jews in the city.

And then, something happens to change all this.

Acts 18:5-11 When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews *that Jesus is the Christ* [he decided to hit them]. But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook *his* garments and said to them, "Your blood *be* upon your *own* heads; I *am* clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." [All that preparation seemed to do no good; but it did, actually]

And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain *man* named Justus, *one* who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized. Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city." And he continued *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

So, at first it looked as though it did not work, however if you read on, you find out that it did work. He convinced maybe some of the most important people in the synagogue. He had convinced Crispus, the leader of the synagogue and Justus, who lived next door.

And this all was catalyzed by the arrival of Silas and Timothy from Macedonia. Their arrival, and the news that they brought with them, inspired Paul to let loose with the full force of the gospel message.

Now, they had been left in Macedonia with the people in Thessalonica, and Berea. They had continued to preach to those people and to continue setting up the church there. And the news that they brought Paul was just wonderful. They wanted to see him, and they wanted him to come back and preach to them. They were continuing and growing, learning more and more, adding more people. And this was wonderful news to Paul.

He was still thinking about his disastrous few days in Athens, probably thinking, "Woe is me." He had been down, and frustrated. But then, when Timothy and Silas came, they told him, "*No! It may have been a little slow in coming, but you have got many people to hear you again. And they love God, and they want to learn more*" And this just gave Paul all kinds of good feelings and enthusiasm. He wanted to get back into the game.

His funk was over. His discouragement was gone now, and he was ready to get back to the work. And so, pumped up, he let the Jews and the synagogue have it with the full force of the gospel.

In I Thessalonians we will find out what it was that had gotten Paul going again, because he responds to them in a letter written right about this time with a very effusive message to them. He is just so happy. It is very positive. He just cannot say too much about the Thessalonians.

I Thessalonians 1:2-8 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.

And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.

But he will for another three or four chapters!

I Thessalonians 2:17-3:7 But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire. Therefore we wanted to come to you—even I, Paul, time and again—but Satan hindered us. For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.

Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God,

and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.

But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also *to see* you—therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith.

That is what Paul was feeling when Timothy and Silas came and gave him the good news of what was happening in northern Greece. And that just lit a fire under Paul. Even apostles can become down once in a while and think that they are not being the type of servant that they should be. And the membership gave him that shot in the arm that he needed, because of their faith. It was not that they necessarily sent a "good luck on your ministry" card. Rather, it was knowing that Timothy and Silas brought back a good report of all their growth and all the faith that they had shown, even though they had been suffering some persecution, especially there in Thessalonica. And, that just made him happy and ready to go out and slay dragons.

So, he leaped up with new vigor, and blasted the Corinthian Jews with both barrels.

And they shot back. They argued and ended up blaspheming Christ, and so Paul threw up his hands and told them that they were cursing themselves; and he turned his back on them. He had been with them maybe a couple of months. And if they did not know his character and the fact that what he said was true, well, that was enough for him.

But his teaching had convinced a small number of them. And, it seems that the ones that he did convince were among the wealthier or more influential members among them. The fact that Justus' house was next to the synagogue indicates that he may have been a wealthy person.

His name, we believe, was Gaius Titeous Justus, a Roman citizen. And, there are some records that seem to indicate that he may have been descended from one of the original founding families of Corinth. And so, he came from a very important family in the city.

In 146 BC when Rome was doing their conquering, they destroyed Corinth and razed it. And then, about one hundred years later, they decided to rebuild the place and make it their capitol in Greece. And so, what they did was they took their freedmen—former slaves who had done their time in the army—and, as their payment for their service, they were given land and their freedom. And so, they set them up in this colony of Corinth.

Evidently, some of these founding families of these former slaves and freedmen became very important in the city. This name, Gaius Titeous Justus, evidently fits in with one of those

prominent families. He may have been quite a significant person.

Crispus is also a Roman name. And remember that if they were not God-fearers, they were Jewish-Roman citizens. They might not have had a Roman name if they were citizens like Paul was.

So, these were free citizens of the Empire. That means that they had rights and privileges within the Empire. They were not the down trodden. They had the ability to move from place to place, and make their living in various ways. As a citizen, they could do things like bring lawsuits, petition the governor, and many other things that a non-citizen, or slave could not do.

These, were also very influential people. And as ruler of the synagogue, he was at least well respected. And, he may have been quite wealthy. Someone who would be able to lead the synagogue, but also keep it up, and do all the other work that needed to be done. And, he and his whole household were baptized. Who knows how man people that was. But, it seems that from the way it goes from verse 8 to verse 9, that even though a fair number of people were baptized, Paul was still a bit disappointed. Probably that it had gone so badly with the rest of the Jews in the synagogue.

So, God gave Paul a vision in the night telling him to preach fearlessly, and that many people would come to join him. God said, "I have many people in this city." He wanted to Paul to get out of the synagogue because He had others He wanted to call who were not connected to the synagogue.

So, Paul got going.

Acts 18:12-17 When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, saying, "This *fellow* persuades men to worship God contrary to the law." And when Paul was about to open *his* mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look *to it* yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such *matters*." And he drove them from the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat *him* before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these things.

An interesting situation.

The Jews did not take preaching lying down. Evidently, Paul began to preach more publicly, and they felt that they needed to stop this by any means possible. Remember that I said that if a person was a Roman citizen they could bring a suit against another.

Well, evidently there were several Roman citizens in that synagogue—Sosthenes, maybe, being among them—and so, they went before Gallio the proconsul.

Gallio is an interesting person. His name is Junius Aeneus Gallio, and he was the older brother

of the stoic philosopher Seneca, the tutor to Nero.

So, with just a hop, skip, and a jump, you are at the Emperor of the Empire. Paul was brought before Gallio, who was Seneca's brother, who was Nero's tutor. That is pretty close.

Seneca wrote about his brother Gallio and left us a record which said that he was a man universally beloved, and who, while exempt from all other vices, especially abhorred flattery. He seemed like a pretty upstanding guy.

Now, this suit brought before Gallio, is one of those rare datable events in the Bible, because he was appointed as proconsul of Achaia in AD 51. Those appointments usually commenced about July 1. They were made earlier, and they were expected to be at their post by July 1.

But, we know from history, that when he got there, he only stayed a few months, because the climate there caused ill health, and he resigned his commission and went home. That took place in late October or early November AD 51. That means that Paul appeared before Gallio somewhere between July 1 and October 31 AD 51. So this makes this very dateable to within a few months.

(Gallio was executed by Nero's order in AD 65, by the way. Nero was a madman who killed good people, and let bad people live.)

Whoever spoke the complaint before Gallio, maybe Sosthenes, made a huge mistake in bringing up this suit the way that he did it. And why? He mentioned the name of God. Just as soon as he did this, Gallio cut him off, and he did not even get the chance to protest. Gallio said that his jurisdiction did not go that far. So, he dismissed the case without even hearing it. He basically told them to work it out among themselves. "This is an internal Jewish matter—it is not a matter for a Roman proconsul to rule on." The precedent was already set where other Jewish internal matters had been dismissed, and he was going to follow that precedent. So, he did not even allow any arguments to be made.

Now, one of the reasons why he did this, besides precedent, was that the Empire had not ruled on Christianity yet. It was not considered a separate sect. Probably not until the time of Nero was there any ruling made that Christianity was something different than the Jewish religion. So, he did not want to get involved. He just dismissed the case. There would be no Roman law to rule on.

It says there that he had them driven from the judgment seat, the Jews who brought the charge—Sosthenes, and whoever was with him—and probably the lictors put their whips to them and drove them away from the "bema," translated as "judgment seat," an open air courtroom in the Agora. So, not only were the Jews and Paul there, but there were probably hundreds of potential spectators milling by. Remember this was Corinth and Agora was a very important place within the city. There were people coming and going, and all this was done out in the open. So, that also explains what happens next. Sosthenes was the one who miffed Gallio, and obviously there were gentiles there who saw this, and said, *Gallio does not like this guy. Let's beat him up!*" And Sosthenes got beat up very badly.

This happened a lot under Roman law. Romans did not like Jews. They put up with them, but they did not like them. They tolerated them and not much more. The authorities often allowed

them to be harmed or robbed one way or another. And, if somebody said, "The Jewish quarter is going up in flames," they would drag their feet. They did not care. They would rather see them dead than help them. So, this is probably what happened here in Corinth.

That was their general attitude toward the Jews. They were very slow to come to their aid or to order violence to stop.

Now, Paul learned a lesson from this. And, he passed it onto the Corinthians, and they probably understood it; he made sure that he wrote it down so that we all could understand.

I Corinthians 6:1 Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?

I Corinthians 6:4-7 If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers! Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather *let yourselves* be cheated?

The lesson he learned and shares with us is, even though Gallio gave the church of God a favorable ruling—actually a non-ruling; still it was in Paul's favor—Paul was astute enough to realize that Gallio had really used a legal loophole to get out of judging the case.

Now, this says something about Roman jurisprudence, that the judges used whatever it took to rule, or not. They were not interested in justice. They were interested in what it might have happened to have been—keeping the peace, keeping the money flowing, etc—and not necessarily for the giving of the right answer.

In addition, Paul saw that Sosthenes was punished for even bringing the suit before the court. He had done nothing but say, "I have an offence I want judged." And he got beaten to a bloody pulp. That is not justice. Even though Paul technically won that case, he was not very happy that Sosthenes had been beaten up for something that was legal to do. It was legal for a citizen of Rome to bring a suit against another. It did not matter if it was a good suit, or not; he had the right to do it. He should not have been beaten up. But, knowing who Christians and Jews are, knowing that they were not among the favored of society, he knew that they would be noticed by the legal system.

So, he took Gallio's advice. Settle these matters within the church of God, because outsiders are unworthy and unable to judge spiritual matters properly. Paul thought about this and put it into a principle that we could understand and gave it to the church of God. You are not going to get justice from the world. It is best to solve any kind of offenses or problems within the confines of the church of God.

Okay—Sosthenes has been beaten up, Gallio has turned a blind eye,

Acts 18:18 So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila *were* with him. He had *his* hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow.

By this time, he is off to Ephesus, and then he will go to Caesarea, Antioch, and then to Jerusalem.

Paul remained possibly close to another six months. Evidently, he did a great deal of preaching and had a lot of converts, because by the time that we actually get to the writing of the letter there seems like there is a pretty good number of people there.

But, he wanted to go back to Jerusalem and be there by the Feast of Pentecost, AD 52, which meant that he had to leave by early spring, or even late winter, so he could make various stops on the way back, arriving by late May, early June of that year.

He took with him Aquila and Pricilla, who had become very good friends with him, and there were probably others who went with him too. The text does not say, though, who he left in charge of the Corinthian church. We know from chapter 19, verse 22, and verse 29 of Acts that he did not leave Timothy, or Gaius, or Aristarchus, who had come from Macedonia and traveled with him. Maybe Silas was there? I do not know. It does not say who was in charge of the church there when Paul left.

Now, we do know, towards the end of chapter 18, that when Aquila and Pricilla set up shop in Ephesus, they found Apollos. And, they instructed him more accurately in the way of God, and then he desired to go to Achaia, and he was the one who ended up in Corinth. And, evidently, he ended up pastoring the church there. That is why in I Corinthians 1, you have some saying, "I am of Cephas," and others, "I am of Apollos..."

By this time Apollos had gotten quite a following. He had made quite a splash because he was such a great orator. He was very convincing. But, perhaps it was his inexperience—remember, he had just been converted, had never handled a congregation before—and then he goes to the most diverse, immature, and carnal congregation in the whole of the Mediterranean.

And so, it could be his inexperience allowed some of the problems to get out of hand. And, there is a possibility, too, that he was not there all the time. These men probably traveled about quite a bit, even in their "local" areas. It is not like today where you can hop in a car, and be somewhere in 20 minutes. It took days to go anywhere. So, he might have been gone for weeks at a time, and all kinds of things can happen in short time periods.

I just want to mention—nobody know why Paul made a vow. Perhaps he had made it when he went to Corinth, and said, "God help me. I am a failure." Who knows?

When he saw that things had worked out well, he decided that the vow was over. I do not know. Nobody knows for sure.

By the way, just a little thing, his hair was not shaved off, but rather only cut off. So, perhaps he just had it cut to its normal length, rather than shaved bald because there were priests of pagan religions who shaved their heads bald, and he probably did not want to be mistaken for one of those.

I Corinthians 1:1 Paul, called *to be* an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, *and Sosthenes our brother*,...

I do not have any time to get into the themes today. But, at least now we understand the background of the letter, and next time we can get into the themes.

But, I wanted to leave you with a bit of good news, because I know that you all were aching for what Sosthenes had to go through. But, it seems that that beating led to his conversion. He seems to have been between the time that he was beat up in front of Gallio's judgment seat until the time that Paul wrote the first epistle to the Corinthians that he was converted, and ended up traveling with Paul to Ephesus, where this epistle was written from.

Now, there is also the idea that maybe Sosthenes had to beat it out of town because the other Jews were against him now. Not only had he messed it up in front of Gallio, now he had turned coat and joined the Christians.

So, perhaps Paul's leaving Corinth was not just to get back to Jerusalem, but to help Sosthenes not to be beaten up again.

All things work together for good, even beatings, to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.