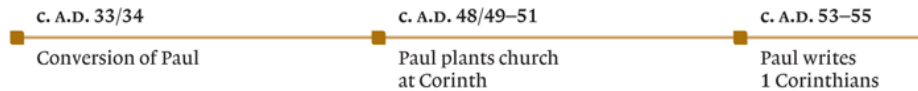


May 18, 2025

God's Good News Story: The Church Alive & Growing

The Book of 1 Corinthians – Part 1, Chapter 1
Houston, We Have A Problem

Today we continue on our multi-year journey through the New Testament where we are seeking to understand the historical, chronological and missiological of the 1st Century Church so that we in the 21st Century Church can keep the 'THE CHURCH ALIVE & GROWING'. As we have made our way through the Book of Acts we have stopped at various points to delve into books of the New Testament that seem to have been written at that specific point in time. We just completed study of Acts 19 and it seems that at this point in the 30 plus year time span that the book of Acts covers, that Paul took the time to **write to the Church in Corinth.**



SLIDE:



The Greek city of Corinth was located about 50 miles west of Athens and located on a strategic 4 ½ mile isthmus (a narrow piece of land connecting two larger ones) (**See example of Panama Isthmus**)

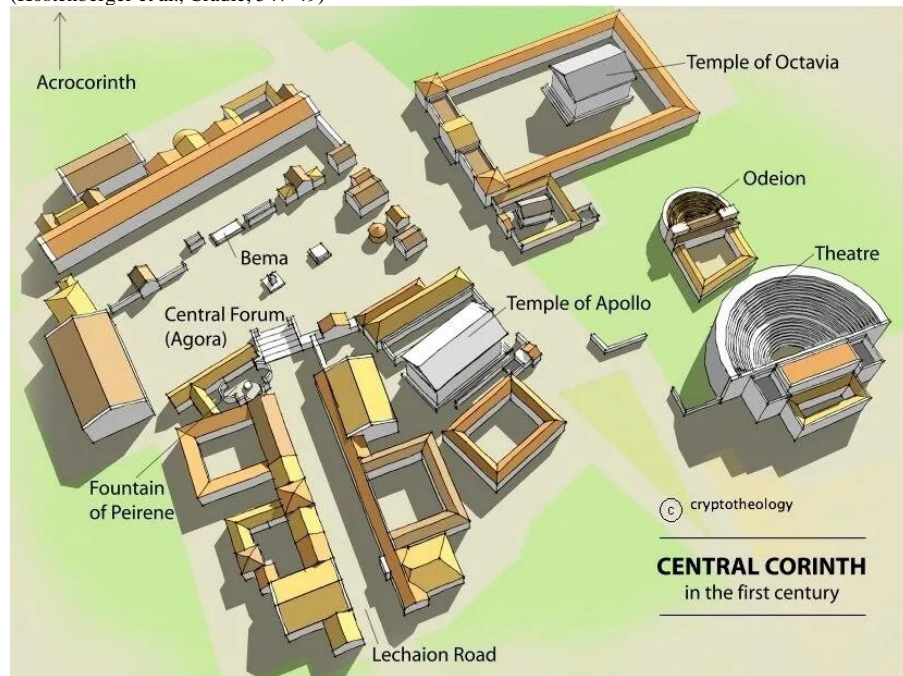


Here is a map showing the ancient city of Corinth is relation to mainland Greece.



Here we see a reconstructed map of the city of Corinth as it may have appeared in Paul's time. It was a large city with estimates of nearly 200,000 population, actually larger than Athens. It was a chief port city, a cultural destination, an academic center and a thriving pagan religious center. Historians say there were around 26 sacred places, including one to Aphrodite, the goddess of love. One ancient writer reports there were over a 1000 temple prostitutes. As I mentioned before the Greek word *korinthiazo* means "to commit immorality" and Plato used the phrase "*Corinthian girl*" to refer to a prostitute.

(Kostenberger et al., Cradle, 547-49)



I bring all this up to let you get the real picture that Corinth was a rough and tumble playground for sex, power and money. Some say it would be like a mixture of modern day New York, Los Angeles, New Orleans

and San Francisco. In other words, it is not a Christian Church Friendly environment.

Nevertheless, Paul and his dream team of evangelists and disciples saw many converts to Christ. He stayed there for about a year and a half teaching, discipling and training these new church members on his 2nd Missionary journey. He then made his way to Ephesus

PAUL'S THIRD JOURNEY



where he stayed a short while and then he left for Israel. After a period of time he began his 3rd Missionary journey which landed him in Ephesus again for a much longer period of nearly 3 years. It was during this time that he gets a disturbing message... '*Houston, we have a problem*', well, maybe not exactly that (Apollo 13, 1970) but Paul gets a message from '*the members of Chloe's household*' (1:11) that there were problems in paradise. We are not sure who Chloe was, but it appears to be a faithful member of the church in Corinth that Paul highly regarded and trusted.

Realistically, we all know that Christians don't always act the way they should and thus Church Life can sometimes be challenging, disappointing and messy. No excuses for such behavior, but we must remember the church is not full of perfect people, just saved and redeemed ones who must constantly depend on the Holy Spirit to let Christ reign in their thoughts, words and actions. As we know and experience ourselves, that doesn't always happen.

That's what we find in Corinth. As Warren Wiesbe states it was a **Defiled Church, A Divided Church and a Disgraced Church**, ouch!

The Church members had been saved, baptized and given basic discipleship, but it appears that the cosmopolitan atmosphere of debauchery, hyper-sexuality, materialism, and prideful academia had caused them to slide into **Defilement, Division and Disgrace**.

Let's look at how Paul, the consummate Pastor, Discipler, Encourager and Disciplinarian responds to these problems. Just maybe, we today on the 21st Century Church can learn some things to keep us from falling into the same quagmire.

Paul uses a tried and true approach that he has used in previous church issues. He reminds them of their high **Calling To...**

1. **Be Holy**
2. **Develop A Rich And Genuine Fellowship Of Harmony and Love**
3. **Fulfill Their Ultimate Goal To Glorify God.**

Paul Addresses the Problem of DEFILEMENT in...

1 Corinthians 1:1-9...¹ *Paul, called as an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will, and Sosthenes our brother:*

² *To God's church at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus and called as saints, with all those in every place who call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord—both their Lord and ours.* ³ *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.* ⁴ *I always thank my God for you because of God's grace given to you in Christ Jesus,* ⁵ *that by Him you were enriched in everything—in all speech and all knowledge.* ⁶ *In this way, the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you,* ⁷ *so that you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.* ⁸ *He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you will be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.* ⁹ *God is faithful; you were called by Him into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

1. You Are Called to Be Holy (vs. 1-9)

Paul addresses the problem of **DEFILEMENT** by taking a positive approach. Rather than chastise them he calls them to remember their **High & Holy Position** in Jesus Christ.

“What we are **POSITIONALLY** in Christ (Holy) ought to be what we **PRACTICE** in our daily life.” (Wiersbe. P. 568)

Paul reminds them that they are

- Set apart by God (vs. 1-3)
- Rich in God's grace (vs. 4-6)
- To eagerly expect the return of Jesus (vs. 7)
- Be dependent of the faithfulness of God (vs. 8,9)

Paul then addresses the Problem of Division (10-25)

¹⁰ Now I urge you, brothers, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, that there be no divisions among you, and that you be united with the same understanding and the same conviction. ¹¹ For it has been reported to me about you, my brothers, by members of Chloe's household, that there is rivalry among you. ¹² What I am saying is this: Each of you says, "I'm with Paul," or "I'm with Apollos," or "I'm with Cephas," or "I'm with Christ." ¹³ Is Christ divided? Was it Paul who was crucified for you? Or were you baptized in Paul's name? ¹⁴ I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so that no one can say you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ I did, in fact, baptize the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't know if I baptized anyone else. ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to evangelize—not with clever words, so that the cross of Christ will not be emptied of its effect. ¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but it is power of God to us who are being saved. ¹⁹ For it is written: I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will set aside the understanding of the experts. ²⁰ Where is the philosopher? Where is the scholar? Where is the

*debater of this age? Hasn't God made the world's wisdom foolish? ²¹ For since, in God's wisdom, the world did not know God through wisdom, God was pleased to save those who believe through the foolishness of the message preached. ²² For the Jews ask for signs and the Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ **BUT WE PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED**, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. ²⁴ Yet to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is God's power and God's wisdom, ²⁵ because God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.*

To solve the problem of DIVISION Paul reminds them.

2. You Are Called to Develop a Rich and Genuine Fellowship of Harmony & Love (vs. 10-25)

Paul addresses Three serious questions with the Corinthian Church (and it applies to us today as well).

1. Is Christ Divided?

It appears that a popularity and partisanship situation have developed. It could be they took their cues from the Corinthian society around them that divided themselves into various political, philosophical and religious camps based upon certain powerful personalities. It was a case of buying into the 'Cult of Personality'

There were **Four (4) candidates** that seemed to be in the running for prominence in the Corinthian Church.

- Paul, their founder and teacher, who from general accounts was a sincere but average ‘preacher’.
- Apollos, the Rookie Star of the Missionary Dream Team. He was an eloquent preacher and an extraordinary expositor and apologist.
- Cephas (i.e. Simon Peter), One of the ‘Big 3’ inner circle Apostles and a key Pillar of the Church.
- Jesus: The Christ, The Savior, Son of God.

Sadly, even though most of them would say that Christ is the Lord and Savior, they in actuality, were placing their allegiance in one of the other three men. Paul was horrified at the ‘party politics’ that was taking place and boldly calls them to task with the question “***Is Christ Divided?***”

Paul firmly addresses this problem and points out that there is to be no competition for their loyalty in Christ. The concept of unity and fellowship was always a hallmark of the Christian faith. **Christ is the Head of the Church, there is no other.**

2. **Were You Baptized in the Name of Paul?** (vs. 13b-17)

A second question Paul fired at them was about their baptism. He used his name and experiences here but they would apply to Apollos and Cephas as well. We are baptized in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, not in the name of a Pastor or Preacher. It is not the efficacy or authority of a church leader that makes

Baptism valid, it is the Name and Authority of God! There is no room for ‘personality cult’ or ‘hero worship’ of human leaders. They are to be respected and listened too, but in the end, spiritual leaders are simply messengers, representatives of God.

3. **Was Paul crucified for you?** (vs. 18-25)

The third fire-brand question of Paul ‘**Was Paul crucified for you?**’

This question leads to a powerful section on the primacy of the Cross. His point was that it wasn’t himself, Apollos or Peter who died on the cross... It was Jesus Christ. Thus, the issue of Who is preeminent and Who is to be the sole source of our allegiance is the One WHO died on the Cross to pay our sin debt, procure our freedom and bring eternal life and fellowship with God.. that person is the One and Only Jesus Christ. AMEN!

²³ **BUT WE PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles.**

Paul then addresses the third problem of being a DISGRACED Church with this third teaching on the Church’s Calling...

3. You Are Called to Fulfill Your Ultimate Goal to Glorify God (vs. 26-31)

(You Are Called to Fulfill Your Ultimate Goal to Glorify God (vs. 26-31))

²⁶ Brothers, consider your calling: Not many are wise from a human perspective, not many powerful, not many of noble birth. ²⁷ Instead, God has chosen what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen what is weak in the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ God has chosen what is insignificant and despised in the world—what is viewed as nothing—to bring to nothing what is viewed as something, ²⁹ so that no one can boast in His presence. ³⁰ But it is from Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who became God-given wisdom for us—our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, ³¹ in order that, as it is written: The one who boasts must boast in the Lord.

The chief goal of all people who call themselves the People and Followers of God is that we are to GLORIFY GOD! Like people today, throughout mankind's history pride 'being puffed up', has been a major problem. It could be said that it was the source of sin itself in Satan and his pride.

Paul gives them a stark and frank wake up call. In essence he says remember from '*whence you came*'. You were called to be a part of God's family not because you were wise, powerful, of noble birth, but in actuality you were foolish, weak, insignificant, with nothing to boast about. Paul sticks a 'spiritual pin' in their prideful balloon and brings them back to reality. We are nothing without Christ.

It reminds me of the original lyrics (which I prefer) to the old hymn '*O For A Thousand Tongues to Sing*' by Isaac Watts. The original line read

*Alas! and did my Savior bleed And did my Sov'reign die?
Would He devote that sacred head For such a worm as I?*

Refrain

*At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light,
And the burden of my heart rolled away,
It was there by faith I received my sight,
And now I am happy all the day!*

Paul transitions from his correction of their pride to redirect them of their significance only in Christ. Let me read it again: *²⁸ God has chosen what is insignificant and despised in the world—what is viewed as nothing—to bring to nothing what is viewed as something, ²⁹ so that no one can boast in His presence. ³⁰ But it is from Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who became God-given wisdom for us—our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, ³¹ in order that, as it is written: The one who boasts must boast in the Lord.*

Let me summarize and close... They were a Defiled Church, a Divided Church and a Disgraced Church. But because of Christ and His Cross they (and we) are now a Dynamic, Powerful and Redeemed Church.

**Will you pledge your allegiance to Christ and live up
to His calling for the Church to
Be Holy, Be Unified in Fellowship, and Glorify God?**