

## Wednesday Evening Bible Study

September 15, 2021

Series - *The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul*

The Corinthian Letters

Text – Acts 18; 1 Corinthians 1

### Introduction to the Corinthian Letters

#### Timeline of Significant Events (Dates are approximate)

**50 AD** - Paul arrives in Corinth during his second missionary journey. (Acts 18 – See excerpts from Acts 18 study - *Turning the World Upside Down Study* beginning on p. 4)

He lodges with Priscilla and Aquila (v. 3).

He worked as a tentmaker to support himself. (v. 3; 2 Corinthians 11:7 - 9; 2 Corinthians 12:13 & 14).

After a season of discouraging results by himself, he is reunited with Silas and Timothy and is “pressed in the spirit” (v. 5). God builds a large church there (v. 10 – “much people”)

He has a tremendous ministry to the Gentiles, as well as to the Jews.

He remains there for 18 months.

**52 AD** - Paul leaves Corinth bound for Jerusalem, but stops in Ephesus. He finds a receptive spirit there so he leaves Priscilla and Aquila there while he travels to Jerusalem.

While he is away, Apollos visits Ephesus and was well received. He was then encouraged to go on to Corinth. (Acts 18:26 - 28)

**53 AD** - Paul returns to Ephesus and remains there for 3 years with tremendous success. (Acts 19; Acts 20:31-32)

While in Ephesus, Paul receives some disturbing news regarding carnality in Corinth, particularly gross immorality. He writes them a letter (**The Lost Letter**) dealing with these issues. (1 Corinthians 5:9 - 11)

This “Lost Letter” was responded to by a return letter from Corinth. Many questions were raised in this response, which prompted Paul’s second letter (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians - **The Long Letter**). Paul mentions his intentions in this letter to return to Corinth in the near future. (1 Corinthians 4:19; 11:34; 16:8)

Paul sent this letter (1 Corinthians) with Timothy, but it was not well received. Timothy most likely returned to Paul with the bad news that there was still a lot of carnality and division in Corinth.

**56 AD** - Paul writes a third letter to the church at Corinth. This letter is also not included in the Bible, but is referred to in 2 Corinthians. (2 Corinthians 2:3 & 4; 2 Corinthians 7) This letter was

very sharp and pointed, and Paul seems to almost have regretted writing it. We will call it **The Lamented Letter**.

Paul sent Titus this time with “The Lamented Letter”. Titus returned to Paul (now in Macedonia) with the good news that the church at Corinth had received the message well, and they had for the most part repented.

**57 AD** - Paul wrote his **Last Letter** (2 Corinthians) to them in response to the news that Titus brought. (See 2 Corinthians 2:12 & 13) Titus was the bearer of this letter along with “a brother” (2 Corinthians 8:18; 12:18), which was probably Luke. Paul returns to Corinth just before his return to Jerusalem at the end of his third journey. He stays there for three months and it is probable that Paul was satisfied that Corinth was going to be all right. (Acts 20:1 – 4; Romans 15:23; 16:1, 22 - 28) It was from Corinth at this time that Paul wrote his letter to the Romans.

### Facts About Corinth

Corinth was re-built by Julius Caesar as the seat of the Roman Province of Achaia.

The population when Paul started his ministry there was around 600,000.

The city was very wealthy; it was famous for its production of bronze, much of which was produced through slave labor.

The city hosted the Isthmian Games, which was an important sporting event, similar to the Olympic Games.

Corinth was extremely immoral and wicked. It was a Greek Sodom. (See Romans 1:21 – 32 which was written from Corinth) Homosexuality was tolerated and even encouraged; prostitution was rampant. Crime was everywhere. The name Corinth became synonymous with drunkenness and debauchery. To be “corinthianized” meant that one was very immoral.

Corinth had an Acropolis, which was elevated to 2000 feet, and was used for both protection and worship. It served as the temple of Aphrodite (called Venus by the Romans), and was “served” by 1000 priestesses, which were really nothing more than prostitutes. This was a city completely given over to licentiousness and pleasure. Corinth was extremely idolatrous; in addition to the worship of Aphrodite, children were also offered up in sacrifice regularly to Molech.

In the middle of this mess was the Jewish synagogue, which apparently was not well respected in the community. Paul was able to lead two chief rulers of the synagogue to Christ. (Crispus and Sosthenes - Acts 18; 1 Corinthians 1:1)

Corinth is located geographically in the Roman province of Achaia, approximately 45 miles west of Athens, on a narrow isthmus with two major ports (Lechaeum and Cenchrea) on either side. This city was positioned on the strip of land that connected the Aegean Sea (and Asia Minor) with the Ionian Sea (and Italy). It was certainly a valuable piece of commercial property. It is no wonder that it became the very center of commerce for the Roman Empire. The city was completely destroyed in 1858 by an earthquake, and later became a small fishing village.

Another earthquake in 1928 unearthed some of the ancient ruins. Today it is a minor commercial factor with a relatively small population of fewer than 30,000.

To think that a church could exist here is almost incredible. Consider this statement by John Phillips about the church at Corinth:

“Mark those words - the church! At Corinth! Between the two there was a great gulf fixed. The Corinth known to Paul had been founded by Julius Caesar; the church had been founded by Jesus Christ. The great word at Corinth was commerce; the great word in the church was Calvary. Corinth was noted for its filth; the church was noted for its faith. Corinth was a place for business; the church was a place for believers. The great commodity at Corinth was pleasure; the great commodity in the church was purity. Corinth was a product of the world; the church was a product of the Word.” (Phillips, John: *Exploring 1 Corinthians*, Kregel Pub.)

The Church at Corinth was a church with many problems, but was also a church that was very close to the heart of the Apostle Paul. Yes, there were some troublemakers there, but there were also some good people who loved the Lord and wanted to do right. Paul wept over this church. Paul was not rebuking them here with a smile on his face. He desperately wanted to see this church go back to the fundamental doctrines and separation that it was founded upon. Perhaps we should take a hard look at our churches, and see that we are not so different from this struggling, carnal church.



[The Following (pp. 4 – 9) are excerpts from a study on Acts 18]

**Series** – *Turning the World Upside Down for Jesus*

*Paul's Second Journey*

**Message** – *Paul's Ministry in Corinth*

**Text** – Acts 18:1 - 17

## Introduction

So far on this second missionary journey, we have followed the Apostle Paul and Silas, along with Timothy for most of the journey, and for a short period, Luke.

Paul and Silas started out in Antioch.

They travelled through Syria and Cilicia confirming the churches.

Next, they went to Derbe and Lystra, which are in the region known as Galatia.

At Lystra, they picked up Timothy who would travel with them.

They continued through Galatia and Phrygia, and intended to stop in churches in Asia, but were forbidden of the Holy Ghost.

They next went to Mysia, and intended to go northeast into Bythnia, but once again the Holy Spirit closed the door.

They continued travelling westward, and ended up at Troas, where two things happened:

- 1 Paul saw a vision of a man in Macedonia that was calling for help.
- 2 They met up with Luke, (Acts 16:10) who travelled with them into Macedonia.

They sailed across the Aegean Sea, stopping for the night at the island of Samothracia, and then on to Neapolis. From Neapolis they travelled inland to Philippi, which was “the chief city” of that part of Macedonia.

There they went to a prayer meeting, and preached the gospel to Lydia, a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira. She was gloriously saved along with the rest of her household, and Paul had the privilege of baptizing her whole family. Paul and his companions lodged with Lydia.

Next, we find Paul incarcerated in the jail at Philippi because he had cast a devil out of a woman that was “possessed with a spirit of divination”. She was a “soothsayer”, or fortuneteller that had made some businessmen in town a lot of money. They trumped up charges against Paul and Silas, and had them thrown into the jail.

After being beaten, and while being incarcerated, an earthquake occurred which opened all of the doors of the prison. However, neither Paul nor any of the other prisoners attempted to escape. The jailor was so moved by the testimony of these men that he also trusted Christ as His Saviour; and he, along with his household were also baptized.

From there, Paul, Silas, and Timothy (not Luke) travelled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, and eventually stopped in Thessalonica, seemingly because there was a synagogue there. He preached there for three weeks, and was able to see some Jews, and many Gentiles saved; but there were also many Jews that were angry with Paul, and eventually he was run out of town.

He went down to Berea where he was also able to preach to a receptive audience, where the people “searched the Scriptures daily, [to see] whether those things were so” Eventually, however, the persecutors from Thessalonica caught up to him in Berea, and again he was forced out of town.

Next, we saw Paul in Athens by himself. He preached to the Athenians on Aereapogus (Mars Hill), where he had a few people saved, but no church was established.

This brings us to chapter 18, where we find Paul in Corinth. Paul would minister in Corinth for 18 months. Apparently he walked there, a distance of some 45 miles, by himself.

## **I Paul Arrives in Corinth and Abides with Aquila and Priscilla (18:1 – 4)**

Paul probably led Priscilla and Aquila to Christ. There is no evidence that Aquila was a believer prior to meeting Paul. The Scripture merely refers to him as a “Jew”. They were from Rome, but because of the anti-Semitism there, they were forced to leave.

If Paul did in fact lead them to Christ, he probably used their common trade as a bridge to reach them. Paul may have struck up a conversation with them about tents, but eventually steered the discussion to the gospel.

Practical Point – Use the things that you have in common as a bridge to open the door to communicate the gospel.

At this point in Paul’s ministry in Corinth, he is still reasoning with both the Jews and Greeks. But his method of communication is about to change.

## **II Timothy and Silas Accompany Paul (18:5 - 8)**

### **A Paul was “Pressed in the Spirit” (v. 5)**

### **B Paul Preached that Jesus was Christ (v. 5)**

The word “testify” means to earnestly testify, witness, or charge. It means to passionately declare a truth. To reason means to discourse or converse – to testify means to declare.

Illustrate – SS Class – teacher went around the room asking everybody what they thought the passage meant. A competent teacher or preacher declares a truth boldly, and confidently.

### **C Paul was Persecuted (v. 6)**

Any time there is confident preaching there will also be persecution. Interestingly, there was no record of persecution in Athens, just some mocking.

Paul declared that his focus would be on the Gentiles: (See Acts 28:23 – 29)

### **D Paul was Productive**

You will notice that now Paul has some converts.

### **III The Lord Appears to Paul (18:9 – 10)**

The Lord now assures Paul that what he is doing is right. He tells him to not hold back, but keep testifying that Jesus is the Christ. He tells them that there are many people in the city of Corinth that will believe. Jesus assures him that He is with him, and that he will be protected.

Paul had preached boldly in the past and he had been punished for it, but at least saw many people saved

Paul reasoned intellectually in Athens, and he was mocked, with only a few converts.

In Corinth, he starts out reasoning, but switches back to testifying when Silas and Timothy join up with him, and again he saw many people converted.

Jesus appears to him, and tells him to not hold back.

Reasoning may be affective in certain situations one on one, but when we are given an audience, we need to preach.

### **IV Paul Abides in Corinth (18:11 - 17)**

**A An Attempt is Made to Incarcerate Paul**

**B An Acquittal is Granted by the Deputy**

**C An Attack Against the Jews is Permitted**

Jesus was faithful to keep his promise, and no harm came to the Apostle Paul here in Corinth. In fact the tables were turned on the people who tried to hurt him.

In fact, there is no record of Paul being attacked again until after he goes back to Jerusalem, which was against the will of God.

**[Excerpt from Acts 18 study]**

**Series – *Turning the World Upside Down for Jesus***

*Paul's Second Journey*

**Message – *Paul's Ministry at Ephesus***

**Text – Acts 18:18 - 28**

### **Introduction**

In the first part of Acts 18, we learn about Paul's ministry in Corinth, a very wicked place. Silas and Timothy rejoin him here. He is "pressed in the spirit" and testifies about the Lord Jesus. He has a fruitful ministry in Corinth, and stays there for at least 18 months while getting the church established. He meets up with a couple of fellow tentmakers while in Corinth, Aquila and Priscilla who will provide a place for him to stay, and even give him a means to support himself through their tent making business. During his stay in Corinth, Paul wrote both of his letters to the Thessalonians.

In Acts 18:18, the folks at Corinth will bid farewell to Paul, and he will travel back across the Aegean Sea into Ephesus, in the western part of Asia Minor.

## I      **The Conclusion of the Second Journey (18:18 – 21)**

*“took leave of his brethren”*

Paul stayed in Corinth for 18 months, and “took his leave of the brethren”. Paul most likely left Timothy and Silas in Corinth. Silas (also known as Silvanus) is not mentioned again in reference to Paul’s journeys. We don’t know what ultimately became of him. He is mentioned in both of Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians, and in Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, but no clear indication is given as to where Silas went immediately following his time spent in Corinth. A Silvanus is mentioned in 1 Peter as being the writer (penman) of 1 Peter, and though we assume it is the same Silas that travelled with Paul, we cannot be sure.

Timothy is mentioned in Acts 19 as being sent from Asia (Ephesus) into Macedonia, but again, we are not sure if he remained with the Apostle Paul as he travelled back to Jerusalem.

*“sailed into Syria”*

It is interesting the way this is worded. Syria was not the next stop, but it was the final destination on the second journey, and the launching place for the third journey. Antioch in Syria was where the home church was. He had to report to them on what took place in Greece, and he had to let them know of his plans for the next journey.

*“and with him Priscilla and Aquila”*

You will notice that Paul started out with just Silas on this journey, but as his ministry expanded, God gave Paul some likeminded men and women who co-labored with him as he established and strengthened churches.

Illustrate – Brother and Mrs. Stahl – we started out together in OCBC – co-labored together in the Christian Bible Church – both went to Bible College together – both came back to New Jersey – and now we are both serving the Lord here. Brother and Mrs. Stahl have been great friends to my wife and I, and have stuck by us through the difficult days.

I love to see God raise teams of laborers – people whose hearts are knit together in the Lord.

We will see in a few verses just how valuable Priscilla and Aquila were to Paul’s ministry, and to the cause of Christ in Ephesus.

*“having shorn his head in Cenchrea, for he had a vow”*

Cenchrea is the port city of Achaia. Corinth was inland approximately 10 miles west of Cenchrea. Paul’s ship sailed from Cenchrea.

Paul’s head was shorn (his hair was cut) because he had a vow. In Numbers 6:1 – 21, the vow of a Nazarite was discussed. A Nazarite was a voluntary and temporary vow that either a man or a woman could participate in, and involved:

- 1      hair could not be cut

2 a dead body could not be touched

3 no wine, or even grape juice, grapes, or raisins could be consumed

This vow was voluntary, temporary, and was a vow that separated the person participating “unto the Lord”. Some have criticized Paul for making this vow, saying that he was no longer under the Law; but if you and I try to force Paul not to do this vow, aren’t we putting him under a new law. Under grace, if Paul chose to do this vow, he could, and if he chose not to do it, that was his business.

vs. 19 – 21, Paul travels into Ephesus with Aquila and Priscilla, but will not stay long, because he wants to make it back to Jerusalem for the “feast”, which was possibly the Passover. If it was then this was probably in the winter of 53 or 54 AD.

Paul leaves Aquila and Priscilla behind and travels on further. Priscilla and Aquila probably continued to work as tentmakers while they were there; but as we will see, their main employment was serving the Lord.

Paul did promise to return to Ephesus, the Lord willing. He wrote to the church at Corinth later on that “a great door and effectual” was opened unto him at Ephesus. (1 Corinthians 16:18 – 19)

## **II The Commencement of the Third Journey (18:22 – 23)**

Caesarea is on the coast. Jerusalem is inland, and up on a mountain. They went up the mountain from the coast to salute (greet) the church. Then he went down the mountain and travelled north to report to his home church in Antioch.

After reporting to the church at Antioch, he then travels back through Galatia and Phrygia, on his way back to Ephesus. (See map of third journey.)

## **III The Continuation of the Work at Ephesus (18:24 – 28)**

In this section we are introduced to a very bold preacher, named Apollos. He was a good speaker (eloquent), and he knew the Old Testament Scriptures very well; but his knowledge of the Scriptures was limited, and he needed to be given additional training in New Testament doctrine.

Aquila and Priscilla disciplined him so that he would know the way of God more perfectly. Notice it says “the way of God” not the word of God. The New Testament canon of Scripture was not yet written, with the exception of a handful of letters. The Apostles were in the process of putting in writing the Word of God as the Holy Spirit gave it to them. (See 2 Peter 3:16) Priscilla and Aquila had been disciplined by one of the men who had been given the privilege of recording a portion of the body of doctrine in the New Testament. Now they were pouring into Apollos what had been given them.

*"And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." (2 Timothy 2:2)*



They then sent him into Achaia (Corinth), where he became one of the leaders of the church at Corinth.

### **Where do 1 & 2 Corinthians fit in with the rest of Paul's writings?**

<u>Letter To</u>	<u>Approx. Date</u>	<u>Where From</u>
Galatians (region; churches)	Possibly 49 AD	Possibly Antioch
1 Thessalonians (city; church)	51 AD	Corinth
2 Thessalonians (city; church)	51 AD	Corinth
1 Corinthians (city; church)	55 AD	Ephesus
2 Corinthians (city; church)	57 AD	Philippi (in Macedonia)
Romans (city; no church yet)	58 AD	Corinth
Ephesians (city; saints)	61 AD	Rome (prison)
Philippians (city; saints)	61 AD	Rome (prison)
Colossians (city; saints)	61 AD	Rome (prison)
Philemon (person; in Colossae)	61 AD	Rome (prison)
1 Timothy (pastor)	63 AD	Macedonia; possibly Laodicia
Titus (pastor)	65 AD	Possibly Nicopolis (W. Macedonia)
2 Timothy (pastor)	67 AD	Rome (2 <sup>nd</sup> time in prison)
Hebrews (the Jews)	61 or 67?	Rome

### **Problems or Questions Dealt with in 1 Corinthians**

Divisions (chapters 1 – 4)

Immorality (chapter 5)

Lawsuits among the Believers (chapter 6)

Marriage and Divorce (chapter 7)

Idolatry (chapter 8 & 10)

Giving (chapter 9)

The Lord's Supper (chapter 11)

Abuse of Spiritual Gifts (chapter 12 - 14)

False Teaching regarding the Resurrection (chapter 15)