

“A Letter to the Saints in Sin City”

The Book of 1 Corinthians

The Epistle to the Corinthians

From a world corrupted by sin, God has called out a people to be His own. By His grace, Jesus has placed His Spirit within them and commissioned them to shine forth His glory. Nearly 2,000 years ago, God performed this miracle in a city called Corinth. Despite the grace of God in their lives, these believers were torn apart by the invasion of false teaching, division, and other sins. The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to address the moral and theological perversions that had ransacked the congregation. Today, God is still working the miracle of salvation, and churches are still struggling to walk in His grace. The lessons learned from this study will help us shed off the sins that call for our devotion and be more committed to the God who has redeemed us from death.

The City of Corinth

(Geography) Corinth was an ancient port city located between Sparta and Athens in the center of Greece’s bustling culture. *(History)* The city was rebuilt by Julius Caesar in 44 B.C. after its destruction in 146 B.C. by the Romans. *(Culture)* This up-and-coming city was the center of ancient trade and tourism and boasted of tremendous wealth. Its streets were filled with many people who sought the healing of holistic medicines, the wisdom of philosophers, and the entertainment of the arts and sporting events. Corinth was thoroughly Hellenized and driven by Greek culture. *(Religion)* The residents worshiped idols at approximately 26 sacred places and also found great pride in the exaltation of human wisdom. Aside from a small Jewish synagogue (Acts 18:1-4), the city was also influenced by the mysterious religions from Egypt and Asia.

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.” Its great influence on the rest of the world could not go unnoticed. This is precisely why God called the Apostle Paul to plant a church there.

The Church in Corinth

Acts 18:1-18 records the beginning of this church by the Apostle Paul during his 2nd missionary journey (50-52 A.D.). After staying in Corinth for 18 months, Paul began his 3rd missionary journey by returning to Ephesus. During his time there Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (55 A.D.). Paul also penned three other letters to this congregation. Two of them were not inspired and are no longer in known existence (1 Cor. 5:9-11; 2 Cor. 2:12-13, 7:5-16). The letter we call 2 Corinthians was the final letter Paul sent to the church. He wrote this from Macedonia (56 A.D.) before paying his final visit to Corinth in the winter of 56-57 A.D.

The Sin in the Church in Corinth

A theologian once said, “the sins of the culture always become the sins of the church.” When believers do not actively fight against sin, this sad statement proves true. Rather than allowing the power of the Gospel to flow out of its members to transform Corinth, the Corinthian culture had spread throughout the church. As the members neglected to cultivate holiness, they quickly began to lose their distinctiveness as saints. Paul composed this letter to Rebuke their sin (ch. 1-6) and Reply to several spiritual and practical questions (ch. 7-16).

Chapters 1-6 – Rebukes Concerning Sin

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

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

5:1-6:20 – Lust & Lawsuits: Addressing the Immorality Among Them

Chapters 7-16 – Replies Concerning Questions

7:1-40 – Worshipful Wedlock: God’s View of Marriage, Divorce, & Singleness

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

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

11:17-34 – Corrupted Communion: Sin and Purification at the Lord’s Table

12:1-14:40 – Spiritual Service: Understanding Unity, Diversity, and the Gifts of the Spirit

15:1-58 – Alive from the Dead: Paul’s Defense of the Resurrection

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

16:13-24 – Closing Comments: So Long to All the Saints

The letter to the Corinthians is what we call an “occasional letter.” This means that the letter is written specifically to a congregations regarding issues they were well aware of, but we are not. In one sense, reading the book of 1 Corinthians is like listening to one end of a phone conversation. You can usually figure out what two people are talking about, but sometimes it takes some work. Because this is the case, we must closely examine the cultural background of Corinth to correctly understanding the book. In light of the fact that there is a 2,000 year gap between our culture and the Corinthians, we should have great humility in our interpretation of these passages. Please pray that God will use this series to transform your heart, my heart, and the heart of Graham Bible Church.