

Equipping Hour

Corinth: The Immature Church

Key Verse: Acts 18:9-11

“And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, ‘Do not be afraid *any longer*, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.’ And he settled *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”

Overview

The city of Corinth was the largest and most prosperous city of mainland Greece from 350–250 BC. The city was destroyed in 146 BC by Rome, but later rebuilt by Julius Caesar in 44 BC. It quickly became the capital of the Roman province of Achaia. Some have said this cosmopolitan city was a miniature of the Roman empire with a very large population of over 500,000 people.

The city was a major commercial hub. It served both the north-south trade and the east-west trade. Being located on a four mile wide isthmus, it had two major seaports. Lechaem was the seaport to the west on the Gulf of Corinth and Cenchrea was the seaport to the east on the Saronic Gulf. It also served two major seas, the Adriatic Sea and Aegean Sea. Goods were transported across the isthmus so that sailors did not have to take the dangerous 200 mile journey around the Peloponnese.

Religiously, this restored Roman colony continued to worship Greek gods. There were shrines to Apollo, Hermes, Hercules, Athena, and Poseidon. There was also a famous temple dedicated to Asclepius, the god of healing, and his daughter Hygieia. The most significant pagan cult in Corinth was the cult of Aphrodite. The worship of Aphrodite flourished in old Corinth before its destruction in 146 BC, but was revived in the new Roman Corinth. The city had an acropolis (“a high city”) which rose 2,000 feet above the city and was used for defense and worship. A temple for the worship of Aphrodite was located on the top of the acropolis.

The city was full of immorality. To “corinthianize” meant to be involved in gross immorality and drunken debauchery. In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul lists sins of fornication, idolatry, adultery, being effeminate, homosexuality, stealing, coveting, drunkenness, reviling, and swindling. The wealth and religious diversity of Corinth had an impact not only on the culture but also on the church.



The church at Corinth was founded by Paul on his second missionary journey after his visit to Athens (Acts 18:1). As usual, Paul went to preach in the synagogue where he was assisted by two Jewish believers, Aquilla and Priscilla. Paul remained in Corinth for eighteen months teaching the Word of God (Acts 18:11) before he concluded his second missionary journey and returned to Antioch.

Paul wrote a total of four letters to the church at Corinth. The first letter, referred to as “the lost epistle,” we do not have (1 Cor. 5:9). Then, from Ephesus, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (ca. AD 55–56). After this he wrote a third letter called “the severe letter,” (2 Cor. 2:4, 8) which is also lost. Months later he wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia (possibly Philippi). It is from 1 and 2 Corinthians that we see Paul’s commendations and condemnations to the church at Corinth.

Paul’s Commendations

They Were Saved

1. 1 Corinthians 1:2. How does Paul describe the believers at Corinth? _____
 2. 1 Corinthians 1:4. What did the Corinthian believers receive? _____
 3. 1 Corinthians 1:9. What did God do to these believers? _____
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They Were Standing Firm

1. 1 Corinthians 15:1–2. What does the Corinthian believer stand on? _____
2. 2 Corinthians 1:24. What were they standing firm in? _____

They Had Sound Doctrine

1. 1 Corinthians 7:1. What does this verse show about the Corinthian believers? _____
2. 1 Corinthians 11:2. What did Corinthian believers hold firmly to? _____

“The basic problem in the Corinthian church did not concern doctrine but morals, not theology but life-style. They were orthodox but not pure. They remembered and believed the cardinal truths about God’s nature and work, but they did not live godly lives.” —John MacArthur

Paul's Condemnations

They Had Divisions

1. 1 Corinthians 11:18. What happened when the believers came together? _____

2. 1 Corinthians 1:11–13. Who did the church identify with? _____
3. 1 Corinthians 3:21–23. How did Paul confront their division? _____

4. 1 Corinthians 1:10. What does Paul exhort them to do? _____

They Were Tolerant of Sin

1. 1 Corinthians 5:1–2. What did the church tolerate? _____
2. 1 Corinthians 5:13. What were they commanded to do? _____

They Were Self-Seeking with Spiritual Gifts

1. 1 Corinthians 14:12. What were the Corinthians commanded to seek after? _____
2. 1 Corinthians 13:1. With what attitude are spiritual gifts to operate? _____
3. 1 Corinthians 14:33, 40. How does God want His church to operate? _____

They Profaned the Lord's Supper

1. 1 Corinthians 11:20–22. What does Paul accuse them of by profaning the Lord's Supper? _____

2. 1 Corinthians 11:27–32. What happened to those who partook in an unworthy manner? _____

They Remained Immature

1. 1 Corinthians 3:1–3. What did Paul feed them spiritually? _____
2. 2 Corinthians 6:13. How did Paul speak to the Corinthian believers? _____

“This is the profile of a church whose collective mind had been deceived by Satan and led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. Be warned and beware!” —Dr. Richard Mayhue

Application

1. How do the failures of the Corinthian church motivate you to live for Christ?
2. What are you doing to grow out of immaturity and become mature in Christ?