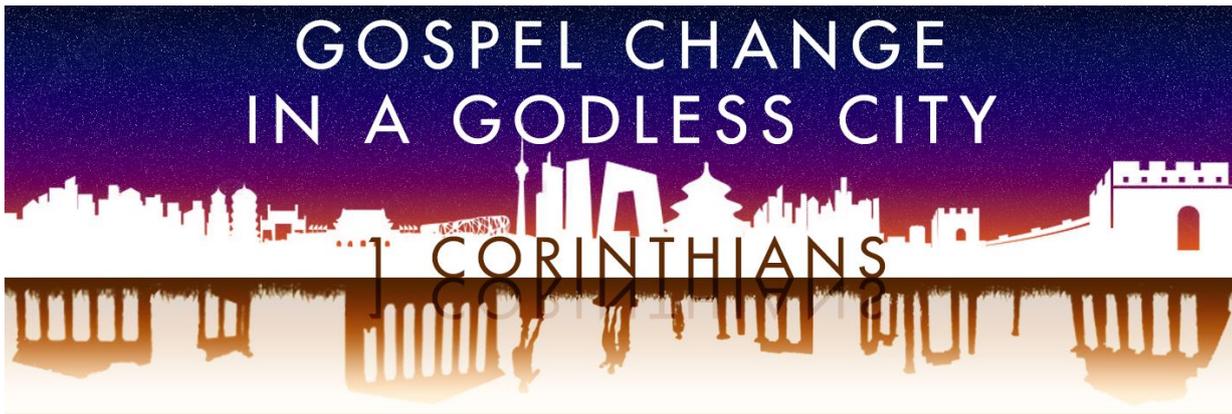
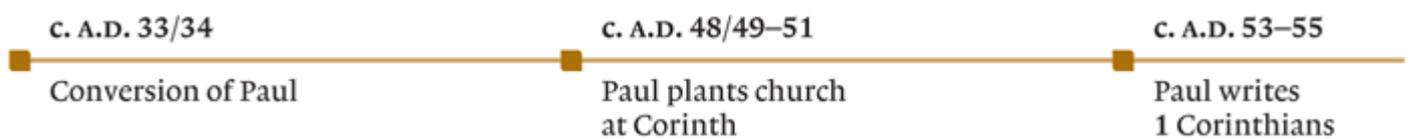


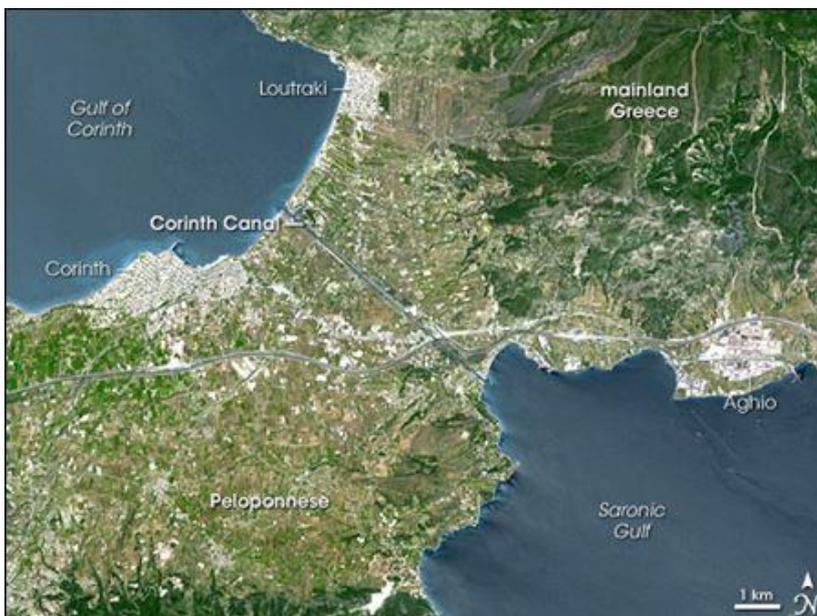
# Introduction to 1 Corinthians



## Timeline



## Corinth



The city of Corinth, perched like a one-eyed Titan astride the narrow isthmus connecting the Greek mainland with the Peloponnese, was one of the dominant commercial centers of the Mediterranean world as early as the eighth century b.c.

No city in Greece was more favorably situated for land and sea trade. With a high, strong citadel at its back, it lay between the Saronic Gulf and the Ionian Sea, with ports at Lechaion and Cenchrea. A diolkos, or stone road for the overland transport of ships, linked the two seas. Crowning the Acrocorinth was the temple of Aphrodite, served, according to Strabo, by more than 1,000

pagan priestess-prostitutes.

## The Setting of 1 Corinthians c. A.D. 53–55

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians during his third missionary journey, near the end of his three-year ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:21–22). Both Corinth and Ephesus were wealthy port cities steeped in pagan idolatry and philosophy. Corinth benefited both militarily and economically from its strategic location at one end of the isthmus that connected the southern Greek peninsula to the mainland.

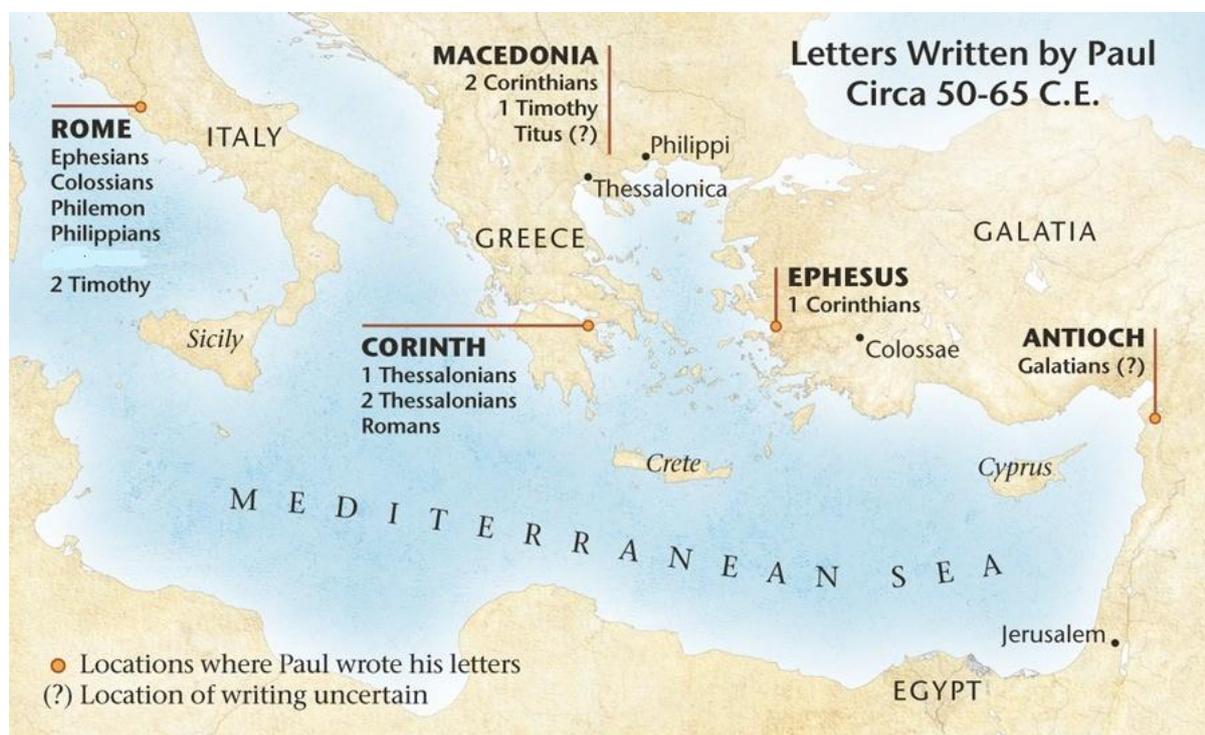
By the time the gospel reached Corinth in the spring of a.d. 52, the city had a proud history of leadership in the Achaian League, and a spirit of revived Hellenism under Roman domination after 44 b.c. following the destruction of the city by Mummius in 146 b.c.



Paul’s lengthy stay in Corinth brought him directly in contact with the major monuments of the agora, many of which still survive. The fountain-house of the spring Peirene, the temple of Apollo, the macellum or meat market (1Co 10:25) and the theater, the bema (Ac 18:12), and the unimpressive synagogue all played a part in the experience of the apostle. An inscription from the theater names the city official Erastus, probably the friend of Paul mentioned in Ro 16:23 (see note there).

### Author, Date, and Recipients

The apostle Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthian church in the spring of A.D. 53, 54, or 55. This was near the end of his three-year ministry in Ephesus. Altogether Paul wrote four letters to this church: (1) the previous letter mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9; (2) 1 Corinthians; (3) the tearful, severe letter mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:3–4; and (4) 2 Corinthians. Only 1 and 2 Corinthians have survived.



## Occasion and Purpose

Paul had received information from several sources concerning the conditions existing in the church at Corinth. Some members of the household of Chloe had informed him of the factions that had developed in the church (1:11). There were three individuals—Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus—who had come to Paul in Ephesus to make some contribution to his ministry (16:17), but whether these were the ones from Chloe's household we do not know.

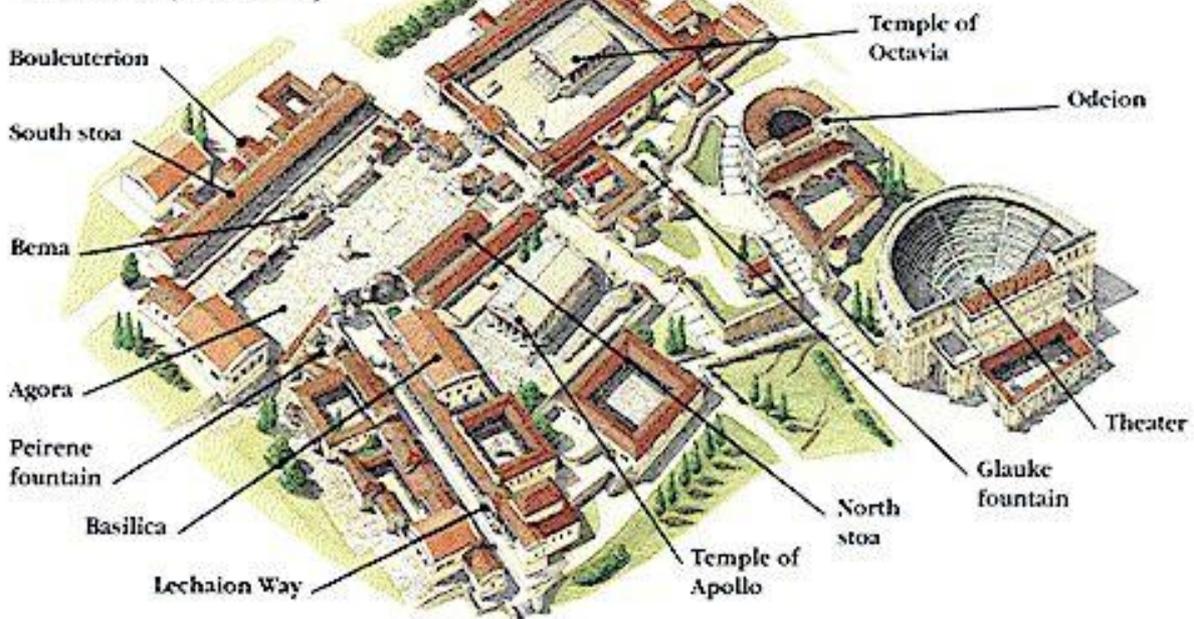


Some of those who had come had brought disturbing information concerning moral irregularities in the church (chs. 5–6). Immorality had plagued the Corinthian assembly almost from the beginning. From 5:9–10 it is apparent that Paul had written previously concerning moral laxness. He had urged

believers “not to associate with sexually immoral people” (5:9). Because of misunderstanding he now finds it necessary to clarify his instruction (5:10–11) and to urge immediate and drastic action (5:3–5,13). Other Corinthian visitors had brought a letter from the church that requested counsel on several subjects (see 7:1 and note; cf. 8:1; 12:1; 16:1).

It is clear that, although the church was gifted (see 1:4–7), it was immature and unspiritual (3:1–4). Paul's purposes for writing were: (1) to instruct and restore the church in its areas of weakness, correcting erroneous practices such as divisions (1:10—4:21), immorality (ch. 5; 6:12–20), litigation in pagan courts (6:1–8) and abuse of the Lord's Supper (11:17–34); (2) to correct false teaching concerning the resurrection (ch. 15); and (3) to answer questions addressed to Paul in the letter that had been brought to him.

### RECONSTRUCTION OF ANCIENT CORINTH (c. AD 100)



## Theme

The Corinthian church, divided because of the arrogance of its more powerful members, should work together for the advancement of the gospel. They should repent of their rivalries, build up the faith of those who are weak, and witness effectively to unbelievers. The letter revolves around the theme of problems in Christian conduct in the church. It thus has to do with progressive sanctification, the continuing development of a holy character. Obviously, Paul was personally concerned with the Corinthians' problems, revealing a true pastor's (shepherd's) heart.

## FIRST CORINTHIANS

| Rebuke for Sinful Conditions |   | Reply to Specific Questions                           |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| Introduction (1:1-9)         | <b>Divisions in the Church</b>                          | <b>Difficulties in the Church</b>                     |
|                              | Exposition (1:10-17)                                    |   |
|                              | Explanation (1:18-4:5)                                  |   |
|                              | <b>Disorders in the Church</b>                          |   |
|                              | Moral disorder (5:1-13)                                 | Domestic difficulty—marriage and divorce (7:1-40)     |
|                              | Legal disorder (6:1-11)                                 | Social difficulty—liberty and license (8:1-11:1)      |
|                              | Carnal disorder (6:12-20)                               | Ecclesiastical difficulty—women and worship (11:2-34) |
|                              |   | Practical difficulty—gifts and body (12:1-14:40)      |
|                              |   | Doctrinal difficulty—death and resurrection (15:1-58) |
|                              |   | Financial difficulty—gifts and body (16:1-9)          |
|                              | CHAPTERS<br>1:10-4:21                                   | CHAPTERS<br>7:1-16:9                                  |
| <b>Key</b>                   | "I exhort you." (1:10)                                  |   |
| <b>Need</b>                  | "Now concerning the thing about which you wrote." (7:1) |   |
|                              | Unity among the Corinthian Christians                   |   |
|                              | Clarity regarding six areas of concern                  |   |

## Outline

- I. Introduction to the Letter's Main Themes (1:1-9)
- II. Divisions over Christian Preachers (1:10-4:21)
- III. A Report of Sexual Immorality and Lawsuits (5:1-6:20)
- IV. Three Issues from the Corinthians' Letter (7:1-11:1)
- V. Divisions over Corporate Worship (11:2-14:40)
- VI. The Futility of Faith If the Dead Are Not Raised (15:1-58)
- VII. The Collection for the Saints and Travel Plans (16:1-12)
- VIII. Closing Admonitions and Greetings (16:13-24)

## Key Topics

I. The church is the dwelling place of God’s Spirit. Thus, the people who make up the church should work for unity by building each other up (1:10–4:21, especially 3:10–16; 14:12).

II. Christians should build up the church in four practical ways:

a. they should be sensitive to those with fragile faith (8:1–9:18; 10:28, 33).

b. they should win unbelievers to the faith (9:19–23; 10:27, 32–33).

c. they should conduct worship services in such a way that unbelievers might come to faith (14:16, 23–25).

d. their corporate worship should use spiritual gifts not for personal pride, or evaluating who has the better gift, but to build up the church (11:2–16; 12:12–30; 14:1–35).

III. Sexual relations form a union between man and woman as deep as the union of the believer with Christ. Therefore sexual activity should be confined to marriage (5:1–13; 6:12–20; 7:5, 9, 36).

IV. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are important. Yet both are less important than personal trust in the gospel and living in the way God commands (1:14–17; 10:1–5; 11:17–34; 15:29–34).

V. The bodily resurrection of Jesus (and of his followers) from the dead is a key truth of the Christian faith (6:14; 15:1–58).



## Relevance

This letter continues to be timely for the church today, both to instruct and to inspire. Christians are still powerfully influenced by their cultural environment, and most of the questions and problems that confronted the church at Corinth are still very much with us—problems like immaturity, instability, divisions, jealousy and envy, lawsuits, marital difficulties, sexual immorality and misuse of spiritual gifts. Yet in spite of this concentration on problems, Paul’s letter contains some of the most

familiar and beloved chapters in the entire Bible—e.g., ch. 13 (on love) and ch. 15 (on resurrection).

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