

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 3/23/11 Wednesday Evening
1 Corinthians—An Overview

This evening we're beginning a new Wednesday evening series in the book of 1 Corinthians. We'll be taking an inductive, discussion-oriented approach.

Discuss: What's the first thing that comes to mind when the book of 1 Corinthians is mentioned?

If you were going to take a trek through a forest, you probably wouldn't just start walking. You'd take time to discover "the lay of the land." You're in trouble when you "can't see the forest for the trees," as they say.

The same is true in Bible study. Before beginning a trek through a book, it's important to get a handle on the "lay of the land," the big picture of the book.

[The following is adapted from material used in 1997, in a NT Survey we offered]

•Who wrote the book?

--Paul (see 1:1)

Paul's authorship was attested by Clement of Rome as early as A.D. 96.

How did Paul happen to write a letter to a church in the city of Corinth? To answer that question, we must go back...

How was the Church Established?

See Acts 18

Q: Where was Paul before he came to Corinth? V 1 Athens

Q: Who did Paul meet in Corinth, acc. to verse 2? Aquila and Priscilla

Q: What did they have in common, acc. to verses 2-3? Both Jews; both tentmakers

Q: How did Paul evangelize in Corinth? V 4 In the synagogue weekly

Q: Who else assisted? V 5 Silas and Timothy

Q: What kind of response did he receive from the Jews? V 6 Not good, so he turned to the Gentiles

Q: Who were some of the early converts? Vv 7-8, Titius Justus, Crispus

Q: What assurance did God give Paul in vv 9-10? I have many people

Q: How long did Paul stay there? V 11 A year and a half

The gospel reached Corinth, then, around A.D. 51, and a church was started there by the year A.D. 52.

•When was the book written?

--A.D. 55

Read: 1 Cor 16:5-9. and answer the following...

Q: Where did Paul say he was when he wrote this letter, acc. to v 8? Ephesus

Q: What were Paul's travel intentions, acc. to verses 5-6? Go through Macedonia, to Corinth

Q: What did he hope to do in Corinth, acc. to v 7? Stay for an extended time

Q: Why did Paul not want to leave Ephesus yet, acc. to v 9? God had opened a great door for effective work there.

So, the letter was written at the close of Paul's three year stay in Ephesus.

The City of Corinth: (see NIV Study Bible)

--Had a population of 250,000 free persons, and 400,000 slaves

1. It had a strategic location for commerce.

It had two harbors, and was located at a crossroads for travelers and traders.

Goods flowed through the city from Italy and Spain to the west and from Asia Minor and Egypt to the east.

2. Its culture was Greek.

It's people were interested in Greek philosophy and placed a high premium on wisdom.

3. It was very religious.

Corinth contained 12 temples. One of the most infamous was the temple dedicated to Aphrodite, the goddess of love. It's worshippers practiced religious prostitution.

In addition, there was a Jewish synagogue in Corinth.

4. It promoted immorality in the name of religion.

Like an large commercial city, Corinth was a center for open immorality. At one time, the temple of Aphrodite had 1,000 sacred prostitutes. I read one commentator that referred to Corinth as the New York City, Los Angelos, and Las Vegas of the ancient world, all wrapped up in one.

The immorality of Corinth was so widely known that the Greek verb "to Corinthianize" came to mean "to practice sexual immorality." Is it any wonder that the Corinthian church had problems?

•Why was the book written?

1 Corinthians is a letter that Paul wrote to help a church work through its problems in a God-honoring way.

The letter accomplishes this main purpose—it corrects problems of behavior and belief. The church at Corinth was gifted (see 1:7), yet immature (3:1-2).

Apparently, Paul had received information from several sources about problems in the church at Corinth. You'll see one source in 1:11--some members of Chloe's household told him about the factions. Another possible source of info came from those mentioned in 16:17--Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus. Another source was a letter written to Paul requesting counsel on various subjects (see 7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1).

What kind of problems were there? We find out as we examine the contents of the book. Let's take a quiz...

Quiz: Where would you look in this book to answer these questions?

1. What is true love?

ch 13

2. What does God think about rivalry and competition in a church?
chs. 1-4
3. Is it God-honoring for a Christian to take another Christian to court?
6:1-11
4. What is a church to do when it disciplines one of its members?
ch 5
5. What about speaking in tongues?
chs. 12-14
6. Why is the resurrection such a big deal?
ch 15
7. What does God think about the subject of sex?
chs. 5, 6, 7
8. What counsel would you give a Christian whose spouse left him/her?
ch 7
9. What are spiritual gifts?
chs. 12-14
10. Why do we take offerings in church?
ch 16

Discuss: We are living in a Corinthian society. How so?

•What is the outline of the book?

(from Gromacki, p. 205)

- I. Reply to Personal Report (chs. 1-6)
 - A. Correction of church divisions (chs. 1-4)
 - B. Discipline of fornication (ch 5)
 - C. Criticism of lawsuits (ch 6)
 - D. Criticism of sexual abuse (ch 6)
- II. Reply to Questions in their Letter (chs. 7-16)
 - A. Concerning marriage (ch 7)
 - B. Concerning virgins (ch 7)
 - C. Concerning things offered to idols (chs. 8-10)
 - D. Concerning problems of worship (ch 11)
 - E. Concerning spiritual gifts (chs. 12-14)
 - F. Concerning resurrection (ch 15)
 - G. Concerning the collection (ch 16)

•What contribution does 1 Corinthians make to the rest of the Bible? (i.e. “biblical theology”)

1. *1 Corinthians emphasizes the need for progressive sanctification.*

Discuss: How long do Christians struggle?

Notice 1:2. What does Paul call the Corinthians? "Sanctified." Though Paul will have much to criticize, and many flaws to rebuke, he begins with this assumption. They

were "sanctified," not because of their conduct, but because of their connection to Christ. That's positional sanctification (see also 6:11).

What is progressive sanctification? The continuing development of holiness in the lives of Christians. What does it take for progressive sanctification to occur? See Eph 4; Rom 6.

2. *1 Corinthians gives us the most extensive teaching on the subject of spiritual gifts.*
See: 1 Cor 12-14

3. *1 Corinthians reminds us that a successful church is not a church without problems, but a church that solves its problems God's way.*

Discuss: What does that mean?

Next Time: We'll take a look at chapter one...