

# 1 Corinthians: Living in a Corrupt Society



- To what degree would you say the media, your friends, work associates, family, etc. influence your attitudes, values, morals, beliefs, and lifestyle?

The Church at Corinth existed in a broken and corrupt society. It was one of the most important cities of ancient Greece. It was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia (a-kai' a) and was ideally located on the empire's most important travel route from east to west. It was 4th in size among the great cities of the Roman Empire. It was well known for commerce, culture, and corruption. The expression "a Corinthian girl" and "to live like a Corinthian" was synonymous with luxury, license, and lewdness. The city was known for its vice and immorality. Corinth was the home of the temple of Venus, also known as Aphrodite (af-ro-dit-e), the goddess of love. The temple housed about 1,000 prostitutes. The people believed that they were communing with the gods by having sexual relations with these prostitutes. Many other temples were in the city that promoted the mystery cults from Egypt and Asia.

The church at Corinth was letting the corruption of their society slip into their lives, home, and church. Bible teacher, Ray C. Stedman, calls First Corinthians: "The Epistle to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." He explains:

"Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians is important and extremely relevant to us today because it so thoroughly captures the problems that we face as Christians living in a postmodern, post-Christian age—an age of tabloid TV, radio talk shows, rampant prostitution, pornography, homosexuality, and child pornography. Of all the cities we find in the New Testament, Corinth is the most typically American. It was a resort city, the capital of pleasure-seeking in the Roman Empire.... The city was openly given over to the most depraved forms of sexual activity, and then—as now—unrestrained sensualism and obscenity were not only tolerated, but approved by the leaders and opinion-makers of society." *Adventuring through the Bible*, pp.573-574.

We must not let our ungodly world shape our values, morals, beliefs, and behaviors. We are called to a higher, better, more virtuous value system—God's value system. We must seek to live God's way and glorify Him.

## Central Lesson:

**Don't let your behavior and beliefs be shaped by an ungodly society, but by scripture—God's Word.**

**Author:** The book identifies the Apostle **PAUL** as the author (1:1 and 16:21). The vocabulary, style, logic, and theological development are consistent with Paul's other epistles.

**Date:** First Corinthians was written about A.D. **54** or **55** from the city of Ephesus during Paul's third missionary journey (1 Cor. 16:8, 19).

**Title:** The title of the book is named after the recipients—Christians living in the city of **CORINTH**. Paul was the founder of this church. Paul came to

Corinth on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-18). Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half (Acts 18:11).

**Key Verses:** The key verses 3:1-3. *"1 Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in Christ. 2 I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready, 3 for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren't you living like people of the world?"*

The central message of 1 Corinthians reminds us of the **difference between being "in" the world from being "of" the world**. As Christians, we must live "in" this world, but we do not have to be "of" the world—that is, embracing its ungodly beliefs and behaviors. Paul summarized the central message of First Corinthians in the book of Romans: *"Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect."* (Rom. 12:2 NLT).

**Key Chapter:** Chapter **3**. Paul confronts the Corinthians with the problem of **allowing the ungodly world to slip into their lives and church**. He said that they were **worldly** and were acting like **spiritual babies** because of their **jealousy** and **quarreling** among themselves (3:1-3). Their lack of spiritual growth hindered him from teaching them anything beyond milk, that is, spiritual baby food (3:2). Paul rebuked their divisiveness (3:4-9) and reminded them that all believers will one day stand before the judgment seat of Christ (Greek "bema") where their life and service will be evaluated by Jesus (3:10-15). Life and service done with the right motives will be rewarded (3:14). Anything done from wrong motives will be rejected (3:15). Furthermore, Paul reminded them of the sacredness of the believer's body as the "temple" of the Holy Spirit and that the temple must be honored and protected from defilement (3:16-17). Last, Paul warns the Corinthians against allowing the "*wisdom of this world*" (3:19) to shape their thinking (3:18-23).

**Outline:** Bible teacher, Warren Wiersbe, outlines the book as:

## Greeting (1:1-3)

### I. Reproof: The Report of **SIN** (Chapters 1-6)

- A. Divisions in the church (1-4)
- B. Discipline in the church (5)
- C. Disputes in the courts (6:1-8)
- D. Defilement in the world (6:9-20)

### II. Instruction: Reply to **QUESTIONS** (Chapters 7-16)

- A. Concerning marriage (7)
- B. Concerning idols (8-10)
- C. Concerning church ordinances (11)
- D. Concerning spiritual gifts (12-14)
- E. Concerning the resurrection (15)
- F. Concerning the offering (16:1-12)

## Farewell (16:13-24)

**Central Lesson: Don't let your behavior and beliefs be shaped by an ungodly society, but by scripture—God's Word.**

► Accept Christ as your Savior. ► As a Christian, dedicate your life to Christ. ► Invite someone to next Sunday's study. ► Attend a small group. ► Read the Bible this week & journal meaningful verses. ► Pray for friends that need Jesus.