

THE NEW COVENANT LIFESTYLE

Introduction

THE CITY OF CORINTH

The first thing a person notices about Corinth is its location. In fact, the geographical setting of Corinth accounts for a great deal of its history, character, and reputation. It was what it was because it was where it was. Got it? The southern tip of Greece is almost an island. In fact, the only thing joining the two sections of the country is a thin strip ("isthmus") of land 4 miles wide. To get from north to south or east to west (by ship - they actually took their boats out of the water and dragged them across the isthmus rather than go around the coast), everybody had to pass through this area. Guess where Corinth was. It was called the "Bridge of Greece."

Merchants, soldiers, travelers, opportunists - everybody came to Corinth, and nobody behaved themselves there! It was one of the most popular trading centers in the ancient world, with a reputation for money and sensuality. You could find almost anything there - "Arabian balsam, Phoenician dates, Libyan ivory, Lycaonian wool, Phrygian slaves". They had the Isthmian games, a sports competition second only to the Olympics. They had the great temple of Aphrodite - the goddess of love. The priestesses (1000 of them) of Aphrodite were actually prostitutes who served their goddess by walking the streets at night. (Hence the proverb of the day was, "Not every man can afford a journey to Corinth!") Whenever a Corinthian was portrayed in a play, he appeared on stage drunk. In fact, things got so bad that they coined a new word - "korinthiazesthai" (to act like a Corinthian) - and it meant that someone was always drunk and immoral.

Nice place to start a church, huh?

It is interesting to note that when Paul wrote to the Romans and described the degraded course of rebellious mankind (Rom. 1:21-32), he did so from Corinth where he likely saw the sad portrayal that he wrote about. For an illustration of the results of sin, all Paul had to do was look out the window! But it was not only in sexual matters that the Corinthians were still children of their age. They were also easily impressed by external qualities such as eloquence and superior human wisdom (1 Cor. 2), and spectacular gifts such as tongues (1 Cor. 12-14).

Corinth was demolished in 146 B.C. when the Romans were overrunning Greece. It lay in ruins for 100 years until Julius Caesar rebuilt it into a great Roman capital city. So it was a relatively young city by the time Paul got there, "without aristocracy, without traditions, and without well-established citizens". The people who called Corinth home were mostly retired Roman soldiers, merchants (many of whom were Jews), and bizarre immigrants from the East.

William Barclay wrote: *"In this hotbed of vice, in the most unlikely place in all the Greek world, some of Paul's greatest work was done, and some of the mightiest triumphs of Christianity were won."*

WHAT 2 CORINTHIANS IS ALL ABOUT

"It is almost impossible to analyze this letter. It seems to be the least systematic of Paul's writing - almost like a journal. These are the words of a man who freely expresses his feelings about himself and his ministry."

Charles Swindoll

NEW COVENANT	COLLECTION	WARNING
Paul's Ministry	Corinthians' Gift	False Teachers
chapter 1 - 7	chapter 8 - 9	chapter 10 - 13
<i>"the Spirit gives life"</i>	<i>"the proof of your love"</i>	<i>"a true apostle"</i>

Paul had 3 reasons for writing this letter...



1. ... to describe the reality of the New Covenant lifestyle.

Paul felt tremendous joy as a result of the good news from Titus, and therefore, he wrote an emotional response in which he really opens up his heart to these people. Have you ever had a conflict with someone you really love? Do you remember the feeling of relief and happiness when it got resolved? That's what Paul experienced, and that is why we find out more about the "real Paul", (what made him "tick") in 2 Corinthians than anywhere else in the New Testament.

This is found mostly in chapters 1-7.

2. ... to encourage the Corinthians to give financially.

Many Christians in other places (especially Jerusalem) were hurting financially, and Paul was putting together a collection for them from the churches in Greece, (see Galatians 2:10). So Paul urges the Corinthians to use this as an opportunity to prove their maturity and love for other Christians, by giving cheerfully to their less fortunate brothers and sisters.

This is the subject of chapters 8-9.

3. ... to reassert his authority as an apostle.

Unfortunately, there was still a group in Corinth who questioned Paul's authority and criticized him when he wasn't there. They went so far as to deny that he was even an apostle. Therefore, Paul defends himself by showing that he really was an apostle, and that these false teachers were causing people to be "led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion of Christ."

This is the main purpose of chapters 10-13.

PAUL'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CORINTHIANS

Trying to piece together this section of Paul's life and ministry is like assembling a picture puzzle without the boxtop. The big pieces are easy, but the small ones drive you crazy! Nevertheless, this is probably what happened 19 centuries ago...

VISIT	LETTER	CHRONOLOGY	PASSAGE	DATE
#1	#1	1. Paul visits Corinth on his 2nd missionary journey and stays there for a year and a half.	<i>Acts 18:1-17</i>	Spring 51
		2. A while later, he writes a letter (from Ephesus) warning the Corinthians to stay away from immoral people. No one knows what has happened to this " <u>Previous Letter</u> ."	<i>I Cor. 5:9</i>	
#2	#2	3. Paul hears from various people and through a letter, that there are lots of <u>problems</u> in the Corinthian church.	<i>I Cor. 1:11, 7:1, 16:17</i>	
		4. Paul writes 1 Corinthians from Ephesus and sends it with Timothy. He hopes this will solve the problems.		Spring 55
	#3	5. However, things become worse, not better. So bad, in fact, that Paul checks out the situation personally in what he calls his " <u>Painful Visit</u> "	<i>2 Cor. 2:1</i>	Summer/Fall 55
		6. Well, that didn't help, either, so he gets tough and writes them what is known as the " <u>Severe Letter</u> ". (We don't have this one, either.)	<i>2 Cor 2:4</i>	Spring 56
#3	#4	7. Paul gets so concerned about their response to this letter that he can't even think about anything else. So he leaves Ephesus and runs into Titus in Macedonia, who tells him the good news that the Corinthians have turned over a new leaf and things have greatly improved! (However, there is still a group of people who are critical of Paul.)	<i>Acts 20: 1,2 2Cor. 2:13, 7:5-7</i>	Summer 56
		8. Paul rejoices and writes 2 Corinthians from Macedonia (probably Phillippi). In this letter he really opens his heart and shares his greatest joy and trials.		Fall 56
#3		9. Finally, he gets to visit the Corinthian church again in the middle of his 3rd missionary journey. He stays for the winter (three months, Nov-Feb) and writes Romans . Not bad for a winter break, Huh?	<i>Acts 20:3</i>	Winter 56/57