

Defending Paul’s Apostleship (Introduction – 1:2)

- ✓ Author: Paul (1:1)
- ✓ Recipients:

- ✓ The City of Corinth:

Location

The ancient city of Corinth was located on the isthmus (land bridge) between Attica (the area around Athens), and the Greek Peloponnesus (the peninsula to the S.). It had controlling access to two seas: the Aegean and the Ionian. Cenchrea was its Eastern port, and its Western harbor was Lechaem. It was close to the sea, and only 45 miles from Athens. This gave the city commercial and military importance.

Population

It had a very cosmopolitan population composed of Romans, Greeks, Orientals, and Jews. It became a very wealthy and prosperous city, and was honored by being chosen to be the capital of the province of Achaia and the seat of the Roman proconsul. The people there prided themselves on their interest in “knowledge” and philosophical pursuits. At its peak the city had about 200,000 free people, and 500,000 slaves in its navy and in its colonies.

Gerald L. Borchert wrote in the *Review and Expositor* (Summer 1989):

...Corinth became a city of travelers and sailors. Its shops in the agora carried merchandise from all parts of the world, and it provided opportunity for all forms of pleasure.

It was like a bustling new city where people felt progressive, successful, and did not worry much about morals. Along with the merchandise and the world travelers came the philosophies and ideas of the empire. Syncretism was therefore a way of life, and it is not difficult to understand why the Corinthian Christians who lived in such an environment felt perfectly comfortable in participating at festivals where they ate meat sacrificed to idols and also sought to share in the table of the Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 8:1–13 and 10:14–30). It is also not difficult to understand why the Christians there were excited by such matters as spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12 and 14) and why they could be led astray with claims of those whom Paul ironically called “super apostles” (2 Cor. 11:5). Bigness, powerfulness, and excitement were important principles to them.

Moral and Spiritual Climate

The city lay below the steep North side of the 1800 foot high fortress rock (the Acrocorinth) where the Temple of Aphrodite (the goddess of “love,” a.k.a., Venus) was located. This temple had more than 1000 female prostitutes. Many people came to Corinth because of these priestesses, and the city grew rich.

The Greek word *korinthiazomai* was used at an earlier time of those who were sexually immoral, and “lived like a Corinthian.” Because of the immorality of this city a proverb of that time reads, “Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth.”

Some will point out that “New Corinth” (which was re-founded” by Rome under the direction of Julius Caesar in 46 B.C.¹) may not have been as proverbially bad as “Old Corinth.” Truthfully though, the moral climate of “New Corinth” had changed very little from “Old Corinth.” Paganism, idolatry, and immorality were still a part of the Corinthian’s culture, and were commonplace in society. When Paul wrote the epistle to the Romans from Corinth his vivid portrayal of depraved mankind as recorded in 1:21-32 probably described the conditions around him at the time. No doubt this moral degradation influenced the behavior of the Corinthian church, and prompted Paul’s first epistle to this church.

About 7 miles East of Corinth, the Isthmian games were celebrated at the Temple of Poseidon. With the games came an emphasis on luxury, hedonism, and immorality, since the sanctuary of Poseidon was given over to the worship of the Corinthian Aphrodite. The city had *many* pagan temples and shrines including the Temple of Apollo. Show other shots of the city, including layout diagrams.

- ✓ Place of Writing:

- ✓ Date:

- ✓ Occasion and Purpose:

Homer Kent writes that Paul was writing with “a mixture of elation and deep concern, of personal defense coupled with generous understanding and praise. This beautiful letter is the most personal and revealing document we have from Paul’s pen, for it uncovers the affectionate warmth of the man while at the same time showing the anguish of heart which he often suffered.”

The false teachers who were influencing the Corinthians were probably Judaizers from Palestine, who sought to discredit Paul, and impose Jewish practices on the believers. Hiebert mentions that they:

- “Made special claims to superior apostolic authority (11:5, 22; 12:11).”

¹ The former Greek city was destroyed by the Roman consul Lucius Mummius in 146 B.C. Until its “re-founding” the city was largely uninhabited for over 100 years.

- “Prided themselves on their Jewish distinctives (11:22).”
- “Were overbearing in their attitudes (11:20).”
- Were “libertine in their relations (6:14 - 7:1; 12:21).”
- “Preached a different gospel (11:3-4)
- “Strongly opposed Paul by attacking his person (10:1, 10; 11:6), his teaching (10:12-18; 11:7-12; 2:17), and his veracity (1:15-18; 10:9-11; 12:16-19).”

✓ Theme:

✓ The History of Paul’s contact with the Corinthians: Since this is so important to our interpretation of this book, I want to lay out a probably history in some detail:

1. Paul plants the church at Corinth during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-19...about AD 50-51). He ministers there 1½ years.
2. Paul writes a letter (now lost) dealing with how to handle those believers who are living inconsistent and sexually immoral lives (1 Cor. 5:9-10). Paul then received news about the Corinthians from the household of Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11), and from Apollos (1 Cor. 16:2). He also receives a letter from the church at Corinth, probably delivered by Stephanus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (1 Cor. 16:17). Paul then sends Timothy to Macedonia and on to Corinth to assist with their problems (Acts 19:22; 1 Cor. 4:17). Paul is not sure whether Timothy would arrive before or after the epistle of 1 Corinthians.
3. Paul writes 1 Corinthians (early AD 55) from Ephesus during his third missionary journey (1 Cor. 16:8).
4. Since the problems in the Corinthian church continued, Paul left Ephesus to pay the Corinthians a second “painful visit” (2 Cor. 2:1; 12:14).
5. Upon Paul’s return to Ephesus he wrote the Corinthians a severe letter (2 Cor. 2:4, 9; 7:8-12), delivered by Titus (2 Cor. 12:18). The letter is now lost. Paul then left Ephesus for Troas (perhaps intending to rendezvous with Titus there), and he became impatient for Titus’ return. Paul then moved on to Macedonia where he met up with Titus and received good news about the Corinthians (2 Cor. 2:12-13; 7:5-16).
6. Paul writes 2 Corinthians from Macedonia, perhaps in the fall of AD 55 (2 Cor. 8:1; 9:2-4). It is probably delivered by Titus accompanied by two others (2 Cor. 8:16-24). Timothy is once again with Paul (2 Tim. 1:1). Although Paul is very pleased with the repentance of the Corinthians, he is still very much concerned with the presence of false teachers who are slandering him and his ministry. Apparently Paul became aware of these false teachers after the writing of 1 Corinthians. This epistle is designed to straighten out any problems so that Paul’s upcoming visit with them will be a good one.

7. Paul pays another visit to Corinth, where he spends the three winter months (Acts 20:1-4; 2 Cor. 12:14; 13:1).

✓ Outline (edited from an outline by Homer A. Kent, Jr.):

- I. Greeting and Thanksgiving (1:1-11)**
 - A. The Author (1:1a)**
 - B. The Addressees (1:1b)**
 - C. The Salutation (1:2)**
 - D. The Thanksgiving (1:3-11)**
 - 1. For God's Comfort in Suffering (1:3-7)**
 - 2. For God's Deliverance of Paul in Asia (1:8-11)**
- II. Paul's Relations with the Corinthians (1:12 – 7:16)**
 - A. The Change of Itinerary (1:12 – 2:13)**
 - B. The Character of Paul's Ministry (2:14 – 6:10)**
 - C. An Appeal for Separation from Sin and Full Reconciliation to Paul (6:11 – 7:16)**
- III. The Collection for the Poor Christians in Jerusalem (8:1 – 9:15)**
 - A. The Contribution of the Macedonians (8:1-5)**
 - B. Encouragement to Similar Generosity in Corinth (8:6-15)**
 - C. The Sending of Titus and His Companions (8:16 – 9:5)**
 - D. The Results of Generous Giving (9:6-15)**
- IV. Paul's Apostolic Authority (10:1 – 13:10)**
 - A. Paul's Defense of His Authority (10:1 – 11:15)**
 - B. Paul's "Boasting as a Fool" (11:16 – 12:13)**
 - C. Paul's Proposed Third Visit (12:14 – 13:10)**
- V. Final Greeting (13:11-14)**