

Notes on First Corinthians

The “modern” history of Corinth began when it was rebuilt \pm 50 BC by Julius Caesar as a Roman colony, capital of Roman province of Achaia. It was a sports center – home of the biennial Isthmian games.

More importantly, Corinth was a commercial center: known as the "City on Two Seas" – situated on a narrow isthmus, all North-South/East-West traffic had to pass through it. It's not surprising that as a consequence of being a political, commercial, *and* a sports center, it was not only large (500,000 population) but also something of a “sin city”. It has been described it as a "*brawling seaport, notorious for its blatant immorality – a city of sailors, freebooters, adventurers, swindlers of every sort*".

Looming over the city: the Temple of Aphrodite (Venus) on the Acrocorinth (1750 ft high). In its heyday the sailors kept 1000 priestesses/prostitutes busy in the city itself. Even in the loose moral standards of the day “Corinth” was a byword for sexual immorality. Archaeologists have discovered in Corinth the largest non-religious building in the ancient world, a stoa or colonnade [= 1st century mall] within which there were remains of no less than 33 taverns!

Hardly an auspicious place to begin a new parish of Christians! Paul evangelizes the city during the 2nd missionary journey according to his familiar pattern – first preaching in the synagogue, then setting up headquarters in a house for his weekday ministry. The congregation of the parish seems to have been about the same make-up as the city as a whole – 2/3 slaves and low class types, though it did include the city treasurer and the head of the local Jewish synagogue. Paul spent 18 months in the city, one of his longest stays anywhere. But after he left for Ephesus, problems arose:

- The Moral Offenders (1 Cor 5:1-13)
- Role of Women in the Church (1 Cor 11:2-16; 14:34-36) (remember, this is about the women in *Corinth*, not the USA!)
- Eucharist (1 Cor 11:17-34/ 10:16-17)
- Resurrection (1 Cor 15:1-58)

Paul's major effort was always to convince the Christians to look and act like Christians, the women to look and act like women, and the men to look and act like men. It was important, Paul believed, that Christians set themselves apart from the debauchers.

We need to be alerted to the fact that the evils which threatened the Corinthian Church are also a threat to the Church today. Sectarianism, self-indulgence and worldliness are causing confusion and failure of the Church to meet the needs of a world in need of guidance and spiritual help. If we are given to degradation within the Church, we certainly cannot meet the need without. May God help us as we study and review these epistles to be guided into insight into the spiritual needs and concerns of the Church, as well as our own personal lives.