



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Class Series Notes

Persevering in the Corinthian Context

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A - Some Things About Corinth

1. Corinth in Paul's day was about a century old: the original city had been burned by the Romans in 146 BC; Julius Caesar rebuilt it in 46 BC; it was the capital of the senatorial province of Achaia.
 - a. Its location made it a center of trade and very wealthy.
 - b. A Roman colony, dominated by Roman culture, laws, and religion.
 - c. Cosmopolitan population: Jews (trade), Romans (politics), Greeks (homeland); sailors, soldiers, salesmen, bankers, and others from across the Mediterranean.
2. Challenge for Christianity.
 - a. The Greco-Roman religious culture; Greek philosophy (though likely not like Athens).
 - b. As a boom town, the rapid growth and wealth contributed to relaxed social restrictions.
 - c. The people sought luxury, display, sensuality, and sport.
 - d. Moral laxness, a contributor to which was their religion (e.g., temple of Aphrodite).
3. Impact on the infant church: "A newly created city, with a very mixed population of Italians, Greeks, Orientals, and adventurers from all parts, and without any aristocracy or old families, was likely to be democratic and impatient of control; and conversion to Christianity would not at once, if at all, put an end to this independent spirit."¹

B - Beginning of the Corinthian Church

1. Founded by Paul on his second missionary journey, after his experiences in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens, most likely sometime in 50-52 AD (Acts 18:1-17).²

¹ Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Limited, 1986 impression), xv.

² We are confident in these dates because of the reference to the proconsul Gallio in Acts 18:12. An inscription at Delphi, in central Greece, "mentions Gallio as holding the office of proconsul in Achaia during the period of [Emperor] Claudius's twenty-sixth acclamation as *imperator* — a period known from other inscriptions to cover the first seven months of A. D. 52" (D. A. Carson & Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd Ed. [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005], 447). A proconsul's term lasted a year and typically began July 1, meaning that Gallio was either in office in 51-52 or in 52-53. Since Paul was there eighteen months (Acts 18:11), he must have arrived between early 50 and early 51.

2. He met Priscilla and Aquila (18:2), who later became Apollos's teachers (18:24-28; cf. 1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4-6, 22; 4:6; 16:12).
3. He went from there to Ephesus and then on to Jerusalem and Syrian Antioch (18:18-23) before returning to Ephesus where he stayed for two years (19:10). It was from Ephesus that he wrote 1 Corinthians (1 Cor. 16:8).

C - Interaction and Correspondence with the Corinthian Church **(A Likely Reconstruction)**

1 Corinthians

1. At least one letter was written prior to 1 Corinthians (see 1 Cor. 5:9 — "former letter"). We do not have it, but are not really surprised it would have been written since what we do have indicates that the problems Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians were not new.³
2. A report from Chloe prompted the writing we know as 1 Corinthians, especially the first six chapters (1 Cor. 1:10-13).
 - a. Division in the church, borne of pride, is the main focus of chapters 1-4.
 - b. Chapters 5 & 6 address other issues that had been reported (perhaps also by Chloe's people, but this is debated): a case of incest, prompting re-statement of instructions from a previous letter (5:1-13); litigation among church members in a culture where the government allowed groups latitude in settling some matters (6:1-11); a misunderstanding of spirituality that was leading some to think they were "free to engage in extramarital sexual unions, presumably on the grounds that this involved merely the body" (Carson & Moo, 416).
3. Chapters 7-15 deal with a series of questions and misunderstandings to which Paul responds: marriage (7:1-40); eating meat used in worship of idols (8:1-11:1); matters related to public conduct and worship (11:1-14:40); misunderstandings associated with the Corinthians' hope for resurrection (15:1-58).
4. 16:1-4 clarify concerning the collection; 16:5-24 give travel plans and send greetings to friends.

Between the Letters (from Comments in 2 Corinthians)

5. 1 Corinthians did not resolve the problems, so Paul visited the Corinthians personally, a visit he called "painful" (2 Cor. 2:1).
6. Rejected by the Corinthians, he returns to Ephesus where he writes what has been called a "severe letter" (2 Cor. 2:3-9; 7:8-12).
 - a. Some think this is a reference to 1 Corinthians.
 - b. Some think it has been retained in the form of 2 Corinthians 10-13.
 - c. It is probably best to see it as a reference to a third epistle (and thus, the second Corinthian letter we do *not* have).

³ From reading 1 Corinthians, it is evident that the problems revolved around a mistaken view of spirituality and the influence of Greek philosophy, especially Sophist views with their emphasis on rhetoric and wisdom.

7. Things improved, so Paul wrote 2 Corinthians (see 2 Cor. 2:12-13; 7:5-7) where he summarized events, thanked the Corinthians, and concluded that the outcome made the ordeal worthwhile.

A Closer Look at 2 Corinthians

8. Commonly considered one of, if not the most personal of Paul's letters.
9. 1:12-2:13 — a defense of Paul's travel plans.
 - a. He denied he had acted in a fickle or worldly way (1:12-14), reviewed his plans (1:15-22), and explained his reluctance change them lest he cause the Corinthians more grief (1:23-2:4).
 - b. He instructed them on how to forgive and comfort one who had been properly punished, an apparent reference to earlier opposition to him and damage done to the church (2:5-11).
 - c. He then began to explain the events that led him to write 2 Corinthians (2:12-13); that explanation was interrupted by a section of praise and a lengthy statement of the nature and purpose of his ministry.
10. 2:14-7:4 — explaining the purpose of Paul's ministry.
 - a. 2:14-3:6 — insisting that God had made him competent for a ministry where he served as "the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing" (2:15).
 - b. 3:7-18 — comparing the new covenant with the old.
 - c. 4:1-18 — practicing ministry with integrity (1-6) because its treasure was contained in Paul and his work, despite his frailty (7-18).
 - d. 5:1-10 — encouragement from the expectation of transformation from this life's "earthen vessel" to a "heavenly dwelling."
 - e. 5:11-21 — a rehearsal of his motives: to please Christ and be committed to a ministry of reconciliation.
 - f. 6:1-7:1 — a plea for the Corinthians to have an open heart and to comply with the blessings and demands of a new-covenant community.
 - g. 7:2-4 — closing the section with an appeal.
11. 7:5-16 — resumption of the account (2:12-13) regarding the return of Titus and the encouraging report he brought to Paul.
12. 8:1-9:15 — believing his relationship with the Corinthians to have improved, Paul raised the issue of their completion of their pledge to give to the collection he was gathering for the Jerusalem church.
13. Chapters 10-13: a surprising, and abrupt change in tone.
 - a. The tone of conciliation from chapters 1-9 is replaced with a vigorous, intense defense of Paul's apostleship.
 - b. The targets of his defense are opponents in Corinth he sarcastically called "super-apostles" because, he said, they were "false apostles, deceitful workmen" (11:5, 13).
 - 1) 10:1-6 — appeal for obedient faith.
 - 2) 10:7-18 — condemning opponents for their boasting and one-upmanship.
 - 3) 11:1-15 — exposing false teachers who have usurped authority over the church.

- 4) 11:16-33 — a comparison of boasting rights: “inverting all the criteria of his opponents and boasting in things they would despise” (Carson & Moo, 419).
- 5) 12:1-10 — a claim that Paul's boasting rested in his weakness before God's glory.
- 6) 12:11-21 — chastising the Corinthians for not taking action themselves.
- 7) 13:1-10 — a warning to reconsider their course, followed by a promise to take strong action when he arrived if they did not.

D - As We Move Forward

1. What are we to make of the abrupt change of tone in chapters 10-13?
2. What are we to learn for our own lives of faith from Paul's very personal, intense response in chapters 10-13?

January 28, 2015