

Overview of 1 and 2 Corinthians

Central Idea: **"You have been chosen by God"**

General intro: [READ Blomberg pg17 paras 1-2]

Looking briefly at Corinth, Paul, and each of the two letters. (overlap)

Corinth:

Corinth was a major city in the first Century, and capital of the Roman province of "uh KI uh" Achaia(2Cor1:1,11:10). The Roman military had destroyed much of the city in 146 B.C., but Julius Caesar had it rebuilt as a Roman colony in 44 BC. It had a population of between 80-100 thousand people, made up of Greeks, Syrians, Jews and Roman citizens. There were also many slaves.

Corinth was famous for its prosperity, it was very multicultural, and most likely the wealthiest city in Greece. Corinth was strategically situated near an isthmus, with travellers and goods on the sea travelling through the city. An isthmus is a narrow strip of land with sea on either side, forming a bridge between two larger areas of land. The isthmus joined the peninsula to the mainland [REFER MAPS BELOW]. It was the meeting place of people from far and wide, from many nationalities because, with the isthmus, it was literally, a conduit for trade, between Asia and Western Europe, through its harbours.



(isthmus in Yellow)



Corinth was the centre of all that was left of a purely Greek way of life. While a wealthy city, there were also many poor people. One historian wrote of the, “sordidness of the rich and the misery of the poor,” a place “abounding in luxuries but inhabited by ungracious people^(Barnett pg. 8). Sounds similar to so much of the world’s cities today. When Paul arrived in Corinth, it was a time of great hardship for the poor due to a famine.

Corinth was an exceptionally religious city, with many temples to many gods. A temple culture with temple sacrifices and idol worship were everywhere and a very real stumbling block for the church. Many believers were enmeshed in temple culture. Paul dealt with this in ch8 and 10 in his first letter, and elsewhere.

Paul's converts were mainly Greek, and they had a joy of being alive, of physical existence, with a passion for personal freedom. They loved speech-making and languages. However, they also lived in the midst of the crudest moral corruption, and were undisciplined and self-conceited.

Paul:

Paul's birth-name was Saul^(Acts 13:9). He was an extremely zealous Pharisee, relentlessly persecuting the church^(Acts 8:3, gal 1:14,23). He was called by God to take the Gospel to the Gentiles.^(Acts 9:15, gal 2:9), and was an apostle, though not one of the twelve.

The “NLT Life Application SB” has profile pages for many Bible characters. Paul's begins, “No person, apart from Jesus Himself, shaped the history of Christianity like the apostle Paul.” God created Paul the way He did to enable him to do the ministry He wanted him to do. He gave him his personality, his character traits, skills and abilities,

temperament, his gift/s from the Holy Spirit, all, not tailor-made, but God-made from our loving Lord, so he could take the Gospel to the Gentiles, to plant churches, etc.

Here are three of Paul's key personality traits: 1: Paul had a "fierce intensity," first used to persecute Christ-followers. He had a frenzied persecution of Christians, as recorded in Acts. Paul's relentless, merciless oppression actually helped, perhaps even started, the dispersal of believers as they fled from Jerusalem. Jesus' command in Acts 1:8, to take the Gospel to Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth, began in earnest when Paul was at his worst. His fierce intensity stayed with him after his conversion, now directed towards the Gospel. 2: Very religious; trained under the Jewish rabbi Gamaliel, perhaps the best teacher of the Jewish law. So Paul became a Pharisee, and as such, he knew the Hebrew Bible. Therefore, when he received the Holy Spirit, his biblical knowledge along with the teaching he would have received from the apostles, enabled him to "see" how the Old Testament Scriptures pointed to Jesus, and that Jesus fulfilled those prophecies. 3: Wordsmith(skilled in using words) - he wasn't as charismatic or eloquent a speaker like Apollos, but he wrote in a way that clearly got his point across; good enough to have written, or to put it another way, for the Holy Spirit to have chosen 13 of Paul's letters to become 13 of the 27 NT books! Paul was chosen for God's service. And like Paul, you have been chosen for God's Service.

Following his conversion and acceptance in the church, Paul travelled extensively preaching the Gospel and planting churches all over the Mediterranean region.

During his second missionary journey, in AD 50 Paul went to Corinth, where he planted a church. He stayed at the home of Aquila and Priscilla, who, like Paul, were Jews,

and tentmakers by trade. It's most likely they also were believers. For 1½ years he taught the Gospel in the synagogue, first to Jews and later also to Gentiles(Acts18:1-4); Acts18:8 says that many believed and were baptised.

Paul stayed in Corinth until the middle of AD 51, when he left with Aquila and Priscilla and travelled to Ephesus. Later, Timothy left Corinth and rejoined Paul, telling him that there were problems in the Corinthian church.

It seems that the local leaders had formed factions, each with loyal followers. There was also much sexual perversion as well.

There are several issues that Paul addressed/confronted in 1 Corinthians:

- i. Paul's authority as an apostle, considering he'd met Jesus face-to-face.
- ii. The end times, death, judgement and the final destiny one has. There were doubts about the future resurrection of the body. So with no bodily resurrection there wouldn't be a judgement, meaning you could engage with bad behaviour with your body: adultery, sex with prostitutes, etc.
- iii. Worldliness and individualism. Some leaders paraded their spiritual gifts to show off and inflate their ego.
- iv. Sexual immorality, including the adultery of a man with his stepmother.

Paul addressed these problems more so in 1 Corinthians but also in his second letter.

The church asked Paul six questions in a letter they sent him, and he refers that letter in 1Cor7:1, "Now concerning the matters about which you wrote". The questions included sexual relationships, eating in a house with idols, speaking in tongues, and continuing to send money to help the Jerusalem church.

Paul:

Timeline of Paul and Corinth:

1. First visit to Corinth, in his second missionary journey. Spent 1½ years there.
 2. First letter to Corinth was lost.
 3. Second letter to Corinth (1Corinthians), from Ephesus during 3rd missionary journey
 4. Second visit to Corinth, a “painful visit” (2Cor2:1).
 5. Third letter to Corinth, also lost.
 6. Fourth letter to Corinth(2Cor), from Macedonia, written a year after 1Cor.
 7. Third visit to Corinth in the winter of 56-57. (2 Cor 12:14, 13:1)
- The two letters not in the Bible are mentioned in 1Cor5:9 and 2Cor2:3-4.

1 Corinthians:

1 Corinthians was written in AD54-55 near the end of Paul's three years' stay in Ephesus.

The people in the Corinthian church were mainly middle class, and from Gentile and pagan backgrounds of many different cultures. They were mostly tradesmen and workers(1Cor1:26). The middle class of the first century had a far lower standard of living than we have today. Yet, Paul was asking them to give generously for Jerusalem.

It was common in the early church to meet in people's homes rather than all together on one building. They were called “House Churches” and are mentioned in many of the New Testament letters.

The wealthy people of the church were the ones with the power. The Romans called the well-to-do people patrons, and each house church may have been led by a patron. They could make their homes available for people to gather together. Patrons provided land, jobs, money and protection for the poorer people. Patrons tended to wield the power in the church. Secular leadership in the church means people, not God, are determining what its goals are and where the church is heading. This patron leadership model was common

throughout the Roman Empire. The competing allegiances to Paul, Apollos and Peter in the Corinthian church may well have been down to the problems in the wider Corinthian church, with different house churches supporting one of these three leaders, as well as factions forming within a house church.

Paul planted the church in Corinth during his second missionary journey. He worked as a tentmaker, like fellow Jews Aquila and Priscilla, to whom he became friends. Paul lived with them in their house. There was growing opposition to Paul, and it's recorded in Acts that God spoke to Paul in a vision one night, saying, ***“Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people”***^(Acts 18:9-10), so he stayed a year and a half, teaching the word of God. His long stay here was much longer than in anywhere he had been, thus far in his travels. He would have started many house churches.

Paul wrote in I Corinthians 5:9, “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people,” so this was actually his second letter to the Corinthian church. The first letter was not added to the canon. The canon of Scripture, the books that are in the Bible, were decided upon in the 5th Century by the different Christian churches at that time. There would have been many other writings considered that were also rejected. So since all of Paul's letters to the churches he planted are not a part of Scripture, this tells us that what the biblical writers wrote was not always necessarily inspired by God, to the extent that they were in the Bible we have today.

Paul wrote this letter, in part to encourage them, but also to address their many problems, including immaturity, idol sacrifice, sexual immorality and factions in the church.

In addressing their problems and answering their questions, Paul, in his brilliance, writes five pastoral sermons to reshape the Corinthian church:

Structure of 1 Corinthians

1. True vs. false wisdom – ch1-4
2. Holiness in sexuality – ch5-7
3. Idolatry and temple worship – ch8-10
4. The gathered church – ch11-14
5. The abolition of death – ch15

2 Corinthians:

Date: AD55-56

During his journey through Macedonia, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, which was his most personal and intimate letter. In it, he bared his soul, and told of his profound love for the church, despite the changeability of their feelings toward him. He described the struggles he'd had in his ministry, the pain he felt at being criticised and misunderstood. Paul's biggest concern was the presence of false teachers, who claimed to be apostles themselves, while at the same time denouncing Paul's message and him as a person as well. So he wrote defending the Gospel, and that he, himself, was an apostle of Jesus Christ

Paul told them that the true Gospel had power. Romans1;16 says, ***“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.”***

The Gospel comes with God's power. We need to take hold of it because we have been chosen to serve God.

Jesus Himself demonstrated God's power through His weakness. He suffered terribly and died when He was crucified. Paul modelled power through his weakness throughout his

entire ministry, which he very openly wrote about, particularly in 2 Corinthians, writing also of the relationship between suffering and the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul's sufferings exemplify the cross of Christ. His perseverance through persecution, with thanksgiving and contentment, rather than complaints and gloominess point to the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit. Paul's suffering as an apostle is what God used to reveal His glory(2Cor1:3-4).

2 Corinthians also gives us a clear picture of true Christian ministry and open relationships. Jonathon Lamb says 2 Corinthians “represents one of the most profound descriptions of authentic Christian service ever written.”

Paul went to Corinth to deal with the issues(2Cor2:1). But Paul's trip there proved to be very painful for him, as the church rebelled against him. So, he left rather than defend himself. Back in Ephesus, Paul wrote a very emotional(tearful) and harsh, challenging letter, and had Titus take it to Corinth. He warned them of God's judgement if they did not repent(2:3-4;7:8-16). That letter was lost. Afterwards, Paul had concerns for the Corinthian church, how they'd react to it. He left Ephesus and went to Macedonia, where he later saw Titus. Titus told him good news from Corinth; his harsh letter had had good effect. They had repented, much to Paul's delight. However, there continued to be a minority who still rejected Paul and the Gospel. So Paul immediately wrote another letter, which became 2 Corinthians. In this letter Paul continued to defend his legitimate status as an apostle. The letter can be divided into three purposes: he wrote to 1: to strengthen the majority stressing to continue that they act with purity, ch1-7; 2: to collect the money for Jerusalem, ch8-9; 3: to give the minority group one last chance to repent before he returned to judge them, ch10-13.

The overarching theme in 2 Corinthians is, “How to live as a Christian,” and includes:

1. Coping with suffering
2. Dealing with false teaching
3. Christian giving
4. Encouraging each other
5. Church authority
6. How to be weak enough to receive God's strength

Conclude:

Do you think you're not good enough to serve God?

Saul of Tarsus, this young zealous Pharisee, became an eager perpetrator of persecuting Christians. Paul said, late in his life, “Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost^(1Tim1:15).” Do you think you're not good enough? Think again. God doesn't use people who think they are good enough. He wants the humble/meek. You have been chosen by God for God's Service.

God chose Paul to do His work at this pivotal point in history. God created him to fulfil his calling. God created you and me to fulfil our calling.

Last year's study of Matthew's Gospel ended with Jesus saying, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..., teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you^(Mat28:19-20a).” Each of us has a role to play that is a part of fulfilling that command. Be encouraged.

Like in Paul's day, we have to be able to deal with true vs false wisdom, sexuality, idols in our lives, Christian giving, church authority, how we deal with suffering. We need to learn how to be weak enough to receive God's strength.

Paul worked hard warning and correcting those first Century Christians. We need to be careful ourselves as that sly and deceptive devil is very clever.

As we begin the study of Paul's two letters to the Corinthian church, we should remember that these were very personal letters written to those he dearly loved. His words of love and encouragement are for us as well.

You have been chosen for God's Service/by God

Finally, some might say that today's ideals, certainly in the Western World, would be: individualism, equality, freedom and distrust of authority. First Corinthians Commentator Craig Blomberg writes that the Greek ideals of the Roman empire in the first Century, which is basically what the New Testament writes about, are individualism, equality, freedom and distrust of authority_(pg19). So my question is this: do you feel that this study of 1/2 Corinthians is relevant for you today?

Let's pray: Father God, I ask for Your blessing on/to us as we embark on the study of 1-2 Corinthians this year. Holy Spirit, you are the Author of the Bible, the living Word of God. This year, as we read Paul's letters to the Corinthian church, as we study them, meditate on, share with each other, and commit some to memory, open our eyes to “see” wonderful things in your Word, open our minds to “clearly understand” your truth, open our hearts to enable you to plant those truths in us, to become part of us, that we might apply it to our lives and become more like Jesus, our Lord, in whose name we pray...

Jesus said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you...So we can confidently say,

“The Lord is my Helper_(Heb13:5-6)”.