

***What's the purpose of the Bible Study?***

- *We are called to make disciples. Obeying and teaching what Jesus taught is a key part of that - Matthew 28:20 'teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you'. The scriptures are where we find these teachings - both the Old and New Testaments*

***What is the format of the Bible Study?***

- *A combination of teaching from the front and group discussion*
- *Table leaders will facilitate discussions.*
- *You will receive notes to take away.*
- *Anyone can join at anytime.*
- *All experience levels and ages are welcome - we want to learn and grow together!*

**Session One: Introduction to First Corinthians**

**Overview**

When you see the entrance of a maze and are asked to navigate to the centre of it, it can sometimes be impossible to figure out the way because of all the twists and turns. The same is true when you move into a new city; finding your way around can be a task and without a satnav there will be many wrong turns. However, when we can raise our perspective and have an overview view of the maze and see where the twists and turns are, we can more easily navigate the centre of the maze. The same is true about a new city, if we can look at the arial view or a map and see how places connect we are much more clued on as to how to get around.

When we approach the book of 1 Corinthians, it can seem like a maze with endless twists and turns. However, when step back a bit and have an overview of the book we can see properly the reason behind this very important letter that Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. Let us have a look at Ancient Corinth.

**Corinth:**

Ancient Corinth was one of the largest and most important cities of Greece, with a population of 90,000 in 400 BC. The Romans demolished Corinth in 146 BC, built a new city in its place in 44 BC, and later made it the provincial capital of Greece.

In New Testament times, Corinth governed the Roman province of Achaia, which comprised almost the entirety of Greece. As a locus of political power, it hosted the residence of the regional governor, or proconsul.<sup>1</sup> The city had been rebuilt by Julius Caesar in 44 BC and repopulated with freedmen from around the Roman Empire, ending the desolation the city had endured at the hand of the Romans when it had been destroyed in 146 BC.

This influx of outside ethnicities made Corinth very diverse and pluralistic, one of the early cosmopolitan cities. It was a booming place of commerce where many religions existed side by side, and many syncretistic belief systems resulted. The city housed numerous temples to various deities, including a temple to Aphrodite, the fertility goddess. Corinth featured both the cult prostitution associated with such temples and the street prostitution that one frequently finds in such booming port cities.

Corinth was extremely wealthy because of its strategic geographical location. It lay on the isthmus connecting the southern mainland of Greece, the Peloponnesian Peninsula,

## New Life Bible Study – Term Two

### Session One: Introduction to 1 Corinthians



to the northern border of Greece and the provinces of Macedonia and Epirus, thus commanding access both to the Adriatic Sea on the west and the Aegean Sea on the east.

Along with economic and financial stability, Corinth again began to host the Isthmian Games, in which Greeks and Romans from all over the Empire competed not only in athletics but also in drama, music, and oratory. The Isthmian contests were held every two years and lasted several days, being conducted in Corinth's huge stadium as well as in its two theatres, one outdoors that seated eighteen thousand people and another indoors that held three thousand. These games were not only popular but also known for their extravagance and immorality.

#### **Paul's Ministry in Corinth:**

The year was AD 50. After a full year of hard travel over land and sea from Antioch, across Asia Minor, and through Macedonia, preaching the gospel with Silas and Timothy, Paul pressed ahead into Athens, the centre of Greek philosophy and culture (Acts 15:40-17:15). Having just escaped the ire of Jewish agitators who had hounded him since he was in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-13), the battle-weary apostle's arrival in Athens could have brought him some much-needed R & R (rest & recuperation) had he not felt driven by an inescapable passion for proclaiming the risen Lord.

From the famous city of Athens, where even Paul's critics exhibited common courtesies, Paul crossed the narrow Isthmus of Corinth. That two-day journey along the coast of the Saronic Gulf marked a transition from the famous to the infamous—from what most consider the centre of Greek intellectual culture to what we would see as the pit of Greek immoral corruption: from Athens to Corinth. Nevertheless, Paul's zeal to spread the gospel far outweighed whatever apprehensions he may have had about the abject depravity he was sure to find in that cesspool of self-indulgence.

At the beginning of what could have easily become a dark and demoralizing ministry in Corinth, God provided two bright lights, Aquila and Priscilla. Paul met this Jewish couple, who recently had left Italy when the emperor Claudius ordered all Jews out of Rome (Acts 18:2). In God's providence, they shared the trade of tentmaking (Acts 18:3). Drawn together by their Jewish heritage, common trade, and status as displaced residents, Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla struck up a friendship that would last the rest of Paul's life (see Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19).

Paul disciplined them during the week and preached every Sabbath in the synagogue, "trying to persuade Jews and Greeks" that the Messiah anticipated by the Jews was, in fact, Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 18:4-5). Before long the Jewish leaders turned against Paul, and he left the synagogue (Acts 18:6-7). Among Paul's first disciples in Corinth was a Gentile, Titius Justus, a God-fearer whose home hosted the first Corinthian congregation of Christians (Acts 18:7). Also among this group was Crispus, the president of the synagogue, who converted to Christ with his entire household. So, from the very beginning, both Jews and Gentiles comprised the foundational leadership of the church in Corinth (Acts 18:8). Not wanting this budding work to perish and

encouraged to press on by a vision of the Lord (Acts 18:9-10), Paul spent a year and a half "teaching the word of God among them" (Acts 18:11).

The burgeoning work in Corinth, however, soon caught the eye of the enemy, who once again stirred up religious opposition from Jewish legalists (Acts 18:12). Likely believing they would find an ally in Gallio, the newly appointed proconsul of Achaia, Paul's Jewish adversaries brought Paul before the tribunal, charging him with preaching an illegal religion. Yet their hopes at a hearing were dashed when Gallio told the Jews that he refused to meddle in matters of "words and names and your own law" (Acts 18:15).

### **Overview of First Corinthians:**

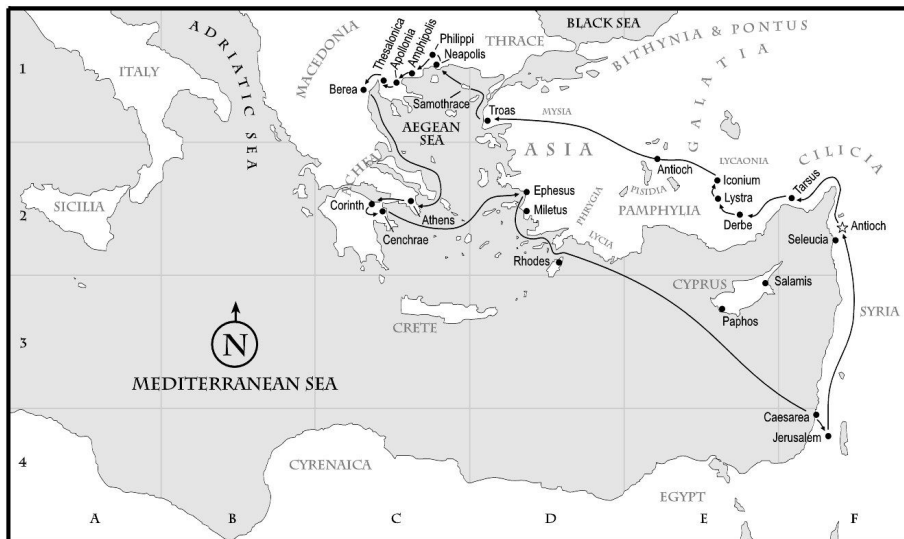
Paul's authorship of this letter is widely accepted. Moreover, we know it was not the first letter Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers (1 Cor. 5:9. The church in Corinth had misunderstood the first letter Paul wrote to them (1 Cor. 5:10-11), which has now been lost. So, he wrote 1 Corinthians to sort out some concerns the first letter raised and to deal with some new problems. Paul also penned at least two more letters to this group of believers: a letter written in response to a tough visit Paul made to Corinth, which we do not have (2 Cor. 2:1-13), and the letter we know as 2 Corinthians.

First Corinthians contains a frank discussion of issues that impacted the Christians in first-century Corinth. In fact, Paul addresses many matters we still face in our churches today.

Here is an outline of the breakdown of the book:

1. Introduction with Greetings and Thanksgiving (1:1-9)
2. Dealing with a Sectarian Spirit (1:10 - 4:21)
  - A. The contrast between human wisdom and divine wisdom (1:10 - 3:4)
  - B. The role of the gospel messenger (1:10-17; 3:5-4:5)
  - C. An open rebuke (4:6-21)
3. Incest Leads to a Problem of Internal Church Discipline (5:1-13)
4. Lawsuits between Christians Before Public Courts (6:1-11)
5. Warning Against Sexual Immorality (6:12-20)
6. Sex, Marriage, and Slavery (7:1-40)
7. Spiritual Liberty (8:1-11:1)
  - A. The basic principle of love versus knowledge (8:1-13)
  - B. Paul's personal example in foregoing these rights (9:1-27)
  - C. The application of the principle in attitude and action (10:1-11:1)
8. Principles of Public Prayer (11:2-16)
9. Behaviour and Instructions concerning the Lord's Supper (11:17-34)
10. Spiritual Manifestations Arising from misusing the Gift of Tongues (12:1-14:40)
  - A. The need for variety (12:1-31)
  - B. The need for love (13:1-13)
  - C. The need for control (14:1-40)
11. The Destruction of Death and the Reality of the Resurrection (15:1-58)
12. Concluding Personal Remarks (16:1-24)

**(Notes - Excerpts from Charles R Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights: New Testament Commentary 1 & 2 Corinthians* (Tyndale House Publishers, Illinois, 2017))**



### Table discussion

**Read: Acts 18:1-21**

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Why is it important to know the context and history of books of the bible?
  - *It helps us understand the reason behind the writings and also helps us know how to approach the writings in the book.*
2. What do you know about the background of the city of Corinth?
  - *It was a: Major Commercial Centre; Political Centre; Cultural Diversity; Religious Diversity...*
3. From the introduction to First Corinthians, what are some similarities that we can see to our world today?
  - *Love for the world; Immorality in the world and in the church; wickedness in the heart of the people; many religions...*
4. What are some issues that Paul addresses in this letter to the Corinthian church? Do these issues still need addressing today in the church?
  - *Division in the church; Sexual immorality; Marriage; the Lords Supper; Lovelessness in the church...*

### Memory verse:

**Acts 18:9 (NIV)** – “One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent.”

### **References**

- Daniel L Akin and James Merritt, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 1 Corinthians* (B & H Publishing Group, Tennessee, 2023)
- Charles R Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights: New Testament Commentary 1 & 2 Corinthians* (Tyndale House Publishers, Illinois, 2017)
- J. Ayodeji Adewuya, *1 Corinthians: A Pastoral Commentary* (Wipf & Stock, Oregon, 2019)