

Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians

A Problem-Filled Congregation and a Faithful God

1 Corinthians 1:1-9; 15:56-58

1. The City and History of Corinth

Corinth was historically a very wealthy commercial center because it was the “master of two harbors” which connected Italy with Asia. It was a principle city of the Achaean League during their revolt so it was utterly destroyed by Rome in 146 B.C. and left desolate for 100 years. In 44 B.C. Julius Caesar established a city there again and humbly named it the “Colony of Corinth in Honor of Julius.” It was to be populated with the freedman and former Army veterans who were crowding many cities of the empire. The lack of an entrenched aristocracy and its location made it a most unique and inviting opportunity for many who sought to climb the social and economic ladder.

2. The Culture and Religion of Roman Corinth

The new city of Corinth quickly became wealthy and saw the flourishing of both vice and religion. The philosopher Aristophanes (450-385 B.C.) coined a word “corinthazo” for the previous city’s reputation. This is translated “to act like a Corinthian,” meaning to commit fornication, and the modern Roman city embodied this identity. The city’s wealth and Roman culture put it at odds with the poorer inhabitants of the rural country around it who saw the city’s inhabitants as not truly being Greek. While there were many religious influences in Corinth, the most prominent was temple of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, and the most important was the imperial cult which worshiped Caesar as lord.

3. The Problems of the Corinthian Church

Though there was a significant theological problem in the church regarding the truth of resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1ff), the church at Corinth was not primarily wracked by theological assaults which denied or compromised the gospel (cf. Gal. 1:6). Their problems stemmed more from a lack of maturity, wisdom, and obedience to do what Paul had previously instructed (cf. Acts 18:11). Their problems stemmed from the fact that they had allowed their culture to influence and direct their activities far more than the truths of the teachings of Christ.

4. God is Faithful

Though Paul will write to correct the Corinthian’s problems, which were shocking in both number and in type, he is thankful for God’s grace given to them (1 Cor. 1:4) and is confident that He will sustain them to the end (1 Cor. 1:8-9; 15:56-58; cf. Phil 1:6).