

Why was this letter written? And why is it a part of our bible?

Before we attempt to answer these questions let's first consider a few of the basics.

I. Who is the author of this book?

1 Corinthians 1:1 ¹ Paul, called *to be* an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes *our* brother,

1. Paul is the author of this book; the same man who captured the spot-light in the second half of the book of Acts that we just finished studying wrote this epistle.
 - a. Paul authored 13 letters in the New Testament (NT has 27 books in total)
 - b. Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon
 - c. He may even be the author of Hebrews, but that has not been confirmed.
2. He authored as many as four letters to the Corinthians.
 - a. In 1 Cor 5:9 Paul speaks of a previous epistle
 - b. In 2 Cor 2:4 Paul speaks of a severe/tearful letter which he wrote to them
 - c. We don't have those other two epistles today, no doubt because the Lord did not want those additional letters to be canonized in our bible for the rest of the church age.
 - d. This epistle which is now called 1 Corinthians was written while Paul was in Ephesus during his 3rd missionary journey.
3. According to verse 1, Paul was an apostle. That was his calling through the will of God.
 - a. Paul is not unique, we all are called to do something or to be something through the will of God.
 - b. I know that I am called to be a husband.
 - i. God has blessed me with a wonderful wife that I am to care for and to nurture.

- c. I know that I am called to be a father.
 - i. God has also blessed me with 4 amazing kids and it is my responsibility to raise them up in the ways of the Lord.
- d. I know that I am called to be a pastor and teacher.
 - i. God has blessed me with the opportunity of overseeing this ministry and I need to faithfully tend to, care for, and feed this flock.
- e. What is your calling?
- f. What you are currently doing and what you are currently involved in may or may not be what you are called to do.
 - i. I could have stayed in the Marine Corps, I did not have to get out.
 - ii. I could have continued with my civilian job on the base, I did not have to quit.
 - iii. But had I remained in either, I would have been outside of the calling God placed in my life.
- g. I challenge you to prayerfully consider what calling God has placed in your life and to be faithful to walk in that calling.

4. Joining Paul in the opening greeting is a man named Sosthenes.

- a. Do you know who he is? The believers in Corinth did.
- b. According to Acts 18, he was the ruler of the synagogue and evidently he was the one who brought the charges against Paul to the Roman official named Gallio.
- c. But when Sosthenes failed to get Gallio to act on their behalf, the Jews turned on Sosthenes and in their frustration they beat him.
- d. It's not recorded, but Sosthenes later came to Christ and is now with Paul in Ephesus as he writes his letter to the Corinthians.
 - i. Make the clear: Sosthenes is with Paul, but he did not help write this letter.

- ii. Have you ever called home, and when you are talking to dad on the phone, you hear mom yell in the background... *"Tell him I said Hi!"*
- iii. Same idea, but instead of a phone call, it was a letter and that letter was delivered by Timothy.

II. Who is Paul writing to?

1 Corinthians 1:2 ² To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:

1. The initial recipients of this letter are Christians in Corinth, a city in Greece
2. How is it that there is a church in Corinth?
 - a. During Paul's 2nd missionary journey, again back in Acts 18, Paul stayed in Corinth for an extended period of time, over a year and a half in that city.
 - b. In Acts 18:8 it says, "And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized."
 - c. The church in Corinth was established as a result of his ministry in that city during his 2nd missionary journey.
3. Many churches were founded and established during Paul's three missionary journeys.
 - a. In most cases though, Paul had spent only a very short amount of time in many of those cities.
 - b. But Corinth was one of the exceptions, he had stayed there long enough to know the city and the Christian believers there well.
4. Info on Greece and the city of Corinth:

GREECE:

- a. Greece started Western Civilization as we know it.
- b. Mountains cover most of the land, rocky w/ little fertile soil
- c. Legend- tells that God sifted the earth through a strainer while making the world. He made one country after another with the good soil that sifted

through, and threw away the stones left in the strainer. According to the legend, these stones became Greece.

- d. No part of Greece is more than 137km/85m from the sea. Greeks are seafaring people.
- e. The Greeks made magnificent achievements in government, science, philosophy and arts.
- f. Greece is divided geographically into two parts, southern and northern, which are connected by a small 4 mile wide isthmus (narrow strip of land connecting the two larger land areas).

CORINTH:

- a. Corinth is a city on the isthmus that connects Peloponnesus with the rest of Greece and Europe.
 - i. Show Map
- b. Corinth was the wealthiest city in ancient Greece
- c. It's population was between 600,000 and 700,000 people.
- d. All land travel going north and south passed through Corinth making it a huge trade center.
- e. What's more, Corinth had harbors on both sides of the city. (In the Gulf of Corinth connected to the Adriatic Sea on the west and the Saronic Gulf to the east.)
- f. 4 miles across between these two harbors.
 - i. Emperor Nero began to have a canal dug during this time period, but that project wouldn't be completed until the 19th century.
- g. Since there was no canal in place, sailors would put their ships on rollers and roll them across the four miles stretch of land rather than sailing the 250 miles of treacherously dangerous waters to get around the southern tip of the country.
- h. This city saw and benefited from huge volumes of both land and sea travelers passing through.

5. The city had an acropolis plateau 1800-2000 feet high used for defense and worship.
 - a. On the acropolis, there was a temple dedicated to Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty.
 - b. This temple had as many as 1,000 prophetesses that would come down into the city at night to offer their services... as religious prostitutes.

6. Corinth became widely known as a place of Debauchery & Licentiousness
 - a. Debauchery – extreme and unreasonable involvement in physical pleasures, drinking, sexual.
 - b. Licentiousness – marked by immoral or lawless behavior; especially sexually unrestrained behavior.
 - c. Throughout the entire region the name of the city became synonymous with moral depravity; if you wanted to describe someone who lacked morality and decency, you would call them a Corinthian.
 - i. Think Las Vegas, but like 10 times worse.

But, Paul’s audience is not limited to the Corinthians

Reread 1 Corinthians 1:2 ² To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:

1. He’s writing to you and me, we are included with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

2. Note that Paul uses the phrase, “the church of God which is at Corinth”
 - a. We are all part of one body.
 - b. Part of the problem in Corinth was that they didn’t see themselves in that way.
 - c. I hope that you don’t think that we are better than the people that are gathered at FBC, IAG, or the base chapel. We are all part of the same body.
 - d. We each have a unique style in our worship services, but we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, all part of the church of God.

3. Back in verse 2, Paul refers to the believers in the Church of God as being “sanctified in Christ Jesus,”
 - a. This term means “set apart”, “not for anything else”
 - b. Some of you ladies, you have a set of fine china dishes, the real expensive ones.
 - c. When do you use them? All the time? Of course not.
 - d. Only on special occasions; in other words, you set them apart for a special purpose.

4. For what reason or purpose would Jesus want to set us apart for?
 - a. Matt 5:16 *Let your light so shine before men, that they see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*

5. Paul also says that the believers in the Church of God are called Saints.
 - a. In know Gerard disagrees, but Paul is not saying you have to be a New Orleans Saints fan to be a part of the true church of God.
 - i. It’s okay to be a Colts fan.
 - b. Having the title of saints upon us means that we have been called to a life of holiness, or at least the pursuit of holiness.
 - i. The word saint literally means holy one.
 - ii. As born again Christians, we are holy because of the imputed righteousness of Jesus.
 - iii. But it is also God’s will that we live holy lives.
 - iv. Believers are both declared holy (positional sanctification) and called to a lifestyle holiness (progressive sanctification).

Paul concludes his initial greeting in his usual manner.

1 Corinthians 1:3 ³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. An almost identical greeting is found in Romans 1:7, here in 1 Cor 1:3, 2 Cor 1:2, Gal 1:3, Eph 1:2, Phil 1:2, Col 1:2, 1 Thes 1:1, 2 Thes 1:2, and Phil 1:3

III. Why did Paul write this letter to the Corinthians? And why is it in our bibles today?

1. The Corinthian Christians had many serious problems. As we study this letter we'll see that they had allowed envy, strife and division to take root in their church.
 - a. Most notably there were divisions over which church leader they were going to follow.
 - b. Such attitudes are often the root of the problem in church splits today.
 - c. It becomes a huge issue when people take their eyes off of Jesus.
 - d. Remember that Peter actually walked on water until he took his eyes off of Jesus (Matt 14:22-33).
 - e. We'll look at what Paul has to say about this in chapters 1 and 3.
2. Another huge problem was their acceptance of sinful behavior from those who were part of the church.
 - a. It was bad enough that everywhere they looked within the city all you could see was utter moral depravity, but those same immoral acts were taking place within the church and it was accepted.
 - b. No one is free from sin, no one is perfect. With that said, if the church looks no different than the world around it, then it should stop calling itself a church.
 - c. Romans 12:2 *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*
3. Next, the Corinthian believers had developed a skewed view of liberty and they had gotten their principles and priorities confused.
 - a. They continued to associate with openly and arrogantly sinful church members when in reality they should have broken fellowship with those unrighteous individuals.
 - b. In Chaps 5 & 6 Paul addresses these issues and provides great instructions on how we are to handle ourselves and these situations when they arise.

4. Other issues and topics that Paul boldly addresses with this epistle include:
 - a. Servanthood Ch 4
 - b. Liberty & conscience Ch 6, 8, 10
 - c. Singles & Marriage relationships Ch 7
 - d. Authority, Headship, and the Lord's Supper Ch 11
 - e. Spiritual Gifts Ch 12-14
 - f. The Resurrection of both Christ and the believer Ch 15
 - g. Stewardship Ch 9, 16
5. Remember, Paul knew these Christians well.
 - a. He had lived with them for over a year and a half and while his letter is direct and tough, it was out of love and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that he wrote this letter.
 - b. He wanted them to get it right. He didn't want them to miss out on all that is available in and through the Lord for those who have not defiled themselves with the ways of the this world.
6. We have some things in common with the church in Corinth.
 - a. Most notable that the church in Corinth was probably about 4 years old at the time in which Paul writes this letter.
 - i. (Written in about 53 AD and was in Corinth starting in about 49 AD.)
 - b. This church is 4 years old.
 - c. I'm glad we are not experiencing the type of problems that Paul is correcting in this letter, but we are never far from, nor are we exempt from experiencing problems of our own for we all have that sinful nature in us.
 - d. As we read this letter, let's pay careful attention to Paul's words of correction and exhortation, let's apply them to our life and our church, and let's make sure that we are truly living sanctified saintly lives in Christ Jesus our Lord!

- e. We are called to take the Gospel message to the world around us, but we won't be able to do that if we are struggling with the same problems the Corinthian church had.
 - i. Let's learn from them so that our witness and work won't be hindered.