

Historical background on 1 Corinthians for Home Groups

Corinth was a hub, a crossroads, for trade and travellers across the Roman Empire. It has been described by Gordon Fee in his excellent commentary on 1 Corinthians as 'The New York, Los Angeles and the Las Vegas of the ancient world', meaning it was the centre of finance and trade, a creative place and seat of learning, but also a centre of vice with immorality rife among its inhabitants.

Paul started the church in Corinth during his second missionary journey, around AD 51-52. Paul had no intention at first of making the city a base of operations (Ac 18:1; 16:9,10) as he wished to return to Thessalonica (1Th 2:17,18). His plans were thwarted by a revelation (Ac 18:9,10). The Lord commanded him to speak boldly which he did, remaining in the city eighteen months.

Finding strong opposition in the synagogue he left the Jews and went to the Gentiles (Ac 18:6). Nevertheless, Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue and his household were believers and baptisms were numerous (Ac 18:8); but no Corinthians were baptized by Paul himself except Crispus, Gaius and some of the household of Stephanas (1Co 1:14,16) "the firstfruits of Achaia" (1Co 16:15).

One of these, Gaius, was Paul's host the next time he visited the city (Ro 16:23). Silas and Timothy, who had been left at Berea, came on to Corinth about 45 days after Paul's arrival. It was at this time that Paul wrote his first Epistle to the Thessalonians (1Th 3:6). During Gallio's administration the Jews accused Paul, but the proconsul refused to allow the case to be brought to trial. This decision must have been looked upon with favour by a large majority of the Corinthians, who had a great dislike for the Jews (Ac 18:17).

Paul became acquainted also with Priscilla and Aquila (Ac 18:18,26; Ro 16:3; 2Ti 4:19), and later they accompanied him to Ephesus. Within a few years after Paul's first visit to Corinth the Christians had increased so rapidly that they made quite a large congregation, probably quite a cross section of society, as there were some influential people such as Gaius and Crispus, but also those neither 'learned, influential, nor of noble birth' (1 Co 1:26).

Paul probably left Corinth to attend the celebration of the feast at Jerusalem (Ac 18:21). Little is known of the history of the church in Corinth after his departure. Apollos came from Ephesus with a letter of recommendation to the brethren in Achaia (Ac 18:27; 2Co 3:1); and he exercised a powerful influence (Ac 18:27,28; 1Co 1:12); and Paul came down later from Macedonia. His first letter to the Corinthians was written from Ephesus. Both Titus and Timothy were sent to Corinth from Ephesus (2Co 7:13,15, 1Co 4:17), and Timothy returned by land, meeting Paul in Macedonia (2Co 1:1), who visited Greece again in 56-57 or 57-58.

Study notes for Session 3

Chapter 3- What is the ministry of the Church?

Introduction

Specific issues	Disunity, immorality, lawsuits, prostitution, marriage, spiritual gifts, care for the poor and lowly, and resurrection.
Source:	Cultural influence Over-realised eschatology
Outcome	Dysfunctional church

Paul's teaching in Chapter 3

- Worldly wisdom compared to true life in the Spirit grounded in Christ (vv1-4)
- The true ministry of the church
 - Serving (as a team) - vv5-9
 - Building (together) vv 10-11
 - Giving (our best) vv 12-15
- The privilege and power of being God's temple vv16-23

What it means for us today

- Discerning God's plan corporately through prayer and guidance of the Holy Spirit;
 - Monthly Prayer Meeting, Home Groups, Prayer Cells.
- Working together to build the church
 - Being clear about our foundation in Jesus Christ;
 - Serving as apprentices for life, into eternity;
 - Building a church of integrity and service in our community.
- Excited about being church;
 - Importance of worship;
 - Freedom in the Spirit;
 - Belief that we have the power to change our world.