



## Putting the Puzzle Pieces Together

Eighth Series: "The Right Edge" New Testament: Epistles

Lesson 24: I, II Corinthians

### I. Introduction

#### A. Paul's contact with the church at Corinth

1. Paul comes to Corinth on his second missionary trip preaching and supporting himself as tentmaker (Acts 18): Perhaps 51-52 AD. He is joined by Silas and Timothy. He lives in the house of Aquila and stays 18 months.
2. From Ephesus, Paul writes his "previous letter" (1 Cor. 5:9) a missing letter.
3. Paul receives reports from the household of Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11) and from perhaps a delegation (1 Cor. 16:17).
4. On his third missionary journey, he writes I Corinthians in response to the information gathered and questions asked (perhaps 56 AD).
5. He may have made a "painful visit" (II Cor. 2:1)
6. When he returns to Ephesus, he writes a "sorrowful letter" (II Cor. 2:4, 7:8, 9) which was carried by Titus. This is II Corinthians.
7. He may have visited them a third time (II Cor. 12:14, 13:1)

#### B. The Church in Corinth

1. A key city in Greece which lies on an isthmus (4-6 miles wide) between Aegean and Adriatic Seas in the southern portion of Greece. It became a major Roman colony and a strategic center for commerce with two ports.
2. The population included Romans, Greeks and Jews.

*"A church composed of people of these characteristics, with a large infusion of Jewish converts, educated in the midst of refined heathenism, surrounded by all the incentives to indulgence, taught to consider pleasure, if not the chief good, yet in any form a good, plied on every hand by philosophers and false teachers, might be expected to exhibit the very characteristics which in this epistle are brought so clearly into view." (The First Epistle of the Corinthians, p. viii)*

During this time frame there would have been approximately 700,000 people in the city with maybe 2/3 of them being slaves.

3. "Of all the cities of the ancient world, it was the most notorious for licentiousness." (Hodges)

4. The city was filled with shrines and temples, including the Temple of Aphrodite.
5. This church exhibits the pressures and struggles of a church “called out of a pagan society.
6. It was a wicked city. “The very term ‘Corinthian’ meant a profligate, and the verb ‘to Corinthianize’ meant to have intercourse with prostitutes.” (Lenski, p. 12)

## II. The Author and Themes:

- A. It is generally accepted that Paul wrote both epistles. He wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

*“The hand of the Holy Spirit is evident in all that he wrote. I Cor. 3:13. The only disproof of Paul’s inspiration that would be worth consideration would be the composition of some “letters” that are equal to this and are written by a man who is not inspired. The Holy Spirit guided Paul’s mind and thought so that the result bears the divine stamp. I Cor. 14:37-38. This written result is the real evidence of inspiration.” (The Interpretation of I & II Corinthians, p. 10)*

- B. Theme of I Corinthians: Paul’s corrective response to a carnal church regarding the problems he has been made aware of.
  1. Chloe’s report of divisions in the church
  2. The report of rampant sexual sins
  3. The need to address some practical questions regarding marriage, meat offered to idols, public worship and the resurrection.
- C. Theme of II Corinthians: Paul makes a defense of his own credentials and authority. He addresses the false teachers who are stirring up the people (II Cor. 4:5-6, 5:17-19).

## III. Dates of the Epistles

- A. I Corinthians – written from Ephesus in approximately 55/56 AD
- B. II Corinthians – written from Macdeonia in later 56 AD

## IV. Special Notes

- A. I Corinthians
  1. This is an extremely practical book
 

*“Unlike – Romans, First Corinthians is not rhetorically elegant; it is plain, earnest, and unvarnished. The unusual simplicity and directness of this letter is appropriate to the practical content. The sentences are uncomplicated, and Paul forcefully amplifies his thoughts with abundant literary devices (narrative, sarcasm, appeal, etc.)” (Talk thru the Bible, p. 383)*
  2. It is a long epistle (only Romans is longer) but it flows logically into three sections as Paul answers reports and questions.
  3. It was a difficult letter for Paul to write. He, himself planted and nurtured this church. With patience and love he addresses this needy church. It is a “source

book” of practical answers to church problems. There is not much doctrine in I Corinthians.

4. It has been called “the doctrine of the cross in its social applications.”
5. This epistle has been called “milk for babies.”

*“The Corinthians believers were babes in Christ, underdeveloped, undernourished, suffering from malnutrition, contentious, quibbling, fighting, criticizing, and acting like little children, looking for childish things such as signs and wonders, and seeking for miracles and tongues and manifestations, and other evidences which belong to the spiritual immaturity of the child of God, and are not for the mature Christian believer. Paul calls them carnal.” (Studies in I Corinthians, p. 12)*

#### B. II Corinthians

1. Paul wrote this letter because:
  - a. He was encouraged by the good report given by Timothy. “The situation at Corinth had improved immensely.” See II Cor. 2:6, 9, 12-14, 7:5-16.
  - b. He wanted to exhort the church regarding the collection for the believers in Jerusalem (II Cor. 8:6-11, 9:3-5).
  - c. He wanted to prepare them for his coming visit (II Cor. 12:14, 13:1-11)
2. This is a very personal letter. Paul exposes his heart and speaks of his own plan and struggles in a very personal way. “Second Corinthians is precious indeed.”

### V. An outline:

#### A. I Corinthians

1. 1:1-4:21                   Answers to Chloe’s report of divisions
2. 5:1-6:20                   Answers to the report of sexual immorality
3. 7:1 – 16:24               Answers to a variety of questions
  - a. Marriage: 7:1-40
  - b. Things offered to idols: 8:1-11:1
  - c. Public worship: 11:2-14:40
  - d. The resurrection: 15:1-58
  - e. Collection for Jerusalem: 16:1-24

#### B. II Corinthians

1. 1:1-7:16                   Paul’s explanation of his ministry
2. 8:1-9:18                   The collection for the saints  
Note the principles of “sowing and reaping” in 9:6-15
3. 10:1-13:14               Paul’s vindication of his apostleship

## **VI. So what?**

- A. Consider the balance needed in the Christian life – the balance between believing right things and doing right things.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. In your opinion, how does the church at Corinth compare with the 21<sup>st</sup> century churches of South Orange County?
2. What do these two books reveal about Paul's heart?
3. Would you enjoy having Paul as a pastor? Why or why not?