

(S) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn to know the Bible. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Today we introduce the letter 1 CORINTHIANS - PART 1. We will learn about the writer and the recipients of the letter, the date, place and purpose of writing and the division of the letter.

### **POINT 1. CORINTH AND THE CORINTHIANS**

#### **First. The city of Corinth.**

In ancient times, Corinth was notorious for her gross immorality, especially the worship of the female idol called Aphrodite Pandemos. Her temple had more than a thousand temple prostitutes. The Romans destroyed the city in 146 B.C., but the Roman emperor called Julius Caesar rebuilt the city in 46 B.C. Corinth was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia to which nearly all of Greece and Macedonia belonged. The city was the residence of the Roman proconsul, that is, governor. While Athens was the centre of wisdom and science, Corinth was the centre of political administration, commerce and social life of Achaia. Corinth was the most important city in Achaia, because she lay at the cross-roads of the most important trade routes from east to west and from north to south. It was an important international trade city and had a harbour on both sides of its neck of land, which connected the southern Peloponnesus with the northern mainland of Greece. Small ships were dragged across this neck of land from the one sea to the other sea, but passengers and goods of large ships in one sea had to be loaded over into large ships in the other sea. Only after the time of emperor Nero, a channel was dug to connect the two seas. Along the southern end of the neck of land there was a mountain ridge running from east to west which blocked the entrance to the Peloponnesus. The city of Corinth was situated on the slope of this mountain ridge which rose from the plain to the Acro-Corinthos, a 550 meters high rocky mountain. The ruins of buildings can still be seen today.

#### **Second. The citizens of Corinth.**

Corinth was a Roman colony. Many Romans lived there. They were Roman governing officials, Roman merchants and Roman descendants of the early colonists. Note the Roman names of people at Corinth (Acts 18:7-8; Romans 16:21-23; 1 Corinthians 16:17). The Romans formed the local aristocracy. The majority of citizens however were Greeks. There was also a large Jewish community (1:22-25; 7:18-19; 9:20-21; 10:32; 12:13). The Jews even had their own synagogue (Acts 18:4) and had kept their religious beliefs and a strong moral standard.

#### **Third. The cultural and social life of Corinth.**

Corinth was the most important city of all Greece in Paul's day. It was a city of culture and art. The city abounded in studios of language and schools of philosophy. However, materialism, amusement and public immorality were rampant in the city. Corinth attracted great crowds of foreigners from the east and the west. Their gods were gods of perverse pleasure and lust. It was the centre of a debased form of the worship of Venus. The most characteristic sins of the citizens of Corinth were sexual immorality, drunkenness and licentiousness (15:32-34).

#### **Fourth. The church in Corinth.**

The first letter to the Corinthians begins with the words, "the church of God in Corinth" (1:2). The majority of the church members were Greeks and Romans (12:2). Some of them had emerged from the gross sexual immorality, idolatry and corruption, which characterised the city of Corinth (6:9-11; 8:7). Some of the most prominent Jews joined Paul (9:20; Acts 18:4,8) and that led to tension between the Jews and Christians and even a plot against Paul. However, the majority of church members belonged to the ordinary and poorer people. 1 Corinthians 1:26 reveals that not many of the church members were wise, influential or of noble birth by human standards. Nevertheless, some church members were rich, prominent and influential, as for example Crispus, the synagogue ruler (1:14; Acts 18:8) and probably Erastus, the city's director of public works (economist, Romans 16:23; 2 Timothy 4:20).

#### **Fifth. The Christian workers at Corinth.**

Paul was the first to preach the gospel in Corinth and he was the founder of the church at Corinth (3:6,10; 4:15; 9:1-2). Silas and Timothy joined him in his work (Acts 18:5). They stayed about 1½ years in Corinth (Acts 18:11). When Paul departed, he took Priscilla and Aquila together with him to Ephesus (Acts 18:19). Priscilla and Aquila had become Paul's co-workers and they in turn explained the gospel more clearly to Apollos. During Paul's absence, Apollos came to Corinth and preached the gospel there. He preached the same gospel, but did it in another way, which undoubtedly was connected to his education in Alexandria in Egypt, where Greek philosophy and rhetoric flourished. Some

Corinthians preferred his eloquence and philosophic method of teaching more than the simple unadorned preaching of Paul. This led to tension and the forming of factions within the church at Corinth (ch 1-3; Acts 18:24-28).

## **POINT 2. THE WRITER OF 1 CORINTHIANS**

In 1 Corinthians 1:1, the writer of the letter to the Corinthians introduces himself as “Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.” In 1 Corinthians 4:14-21 he makes it very clear that he not only wrote this letter, but that he was sending Timothy to the Corinthians to remind them of Paul’s way of life in Christ, which agrees with what he teaches everywhere in every church. Also in 1 Corinthians 9:1-2 he emphasises that he founded the church at Corinth and that he was their apostle.

## **POINT 3. THE DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING 1 CORINTHIANS**

### **First. Paul’s second missionary journey.**

Paul’s second missionary journey was from spring A.D. 50 to spring A.D. 52. During the spring of A.D. 50, Paul was in Asia Minor. During the summer of that year he was in Macedonia, that is, in the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea, and in Achaia in the city of Athens. Acts 18:12-17 speaks of the proconsul or governor of Achaia, called Gallio. According to an inscription on stone found at Delphi in Achaia, Gallio was proconsul or governor of Achaia for only one year starting from 1<sup>st</sup> July A.D. 51. Thus, Paul was in Corinth during the year A.D. 52. Paul was in Corinth for one and a half years, from the autumn of A.D. 50 to the spring of A.D. 52. From Corinth he wrote three letters, the letter of Galatians, 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians, all in the autumn of A.D. 50. During the spring of A.D. 52, Paul travelled to Ephesus and Jerusalem (Acts 18:18-22).

### **Second. Paul’s third missionary journey.**

Paul’s third missionary journey was from spring A.D. 53 to summer A.D. 57. During the spring A.D. 53, Paul was in southern Galatia. Paul was in Ephesus for three years, from the spring A.D. 53 to the summer A.D. 56. From Ephesus he wrote 1 Corinthians in the spring of A.D. 56. From the summer to the autumn of 56 A.D., he travelled in Macedonia, from where he wrote 2 Corinthians in the autumn of A.D. 56. From the winter A.D. 56 to the spring A.D. 57, he was in Achaia, particularly Corinth. From Corinth he wrote the letter to the Romans in the spring of AD. 57. In the spring of A.D. 57, he was in Jerusalem again.

### **Third. Much communication between Ephesus and Corinth.**

According to 2 Corinthians 13:1, Paul paid three visits to Corinth. He also wrote three letters to Corinth. This is an attempt to reconstruct the events.

One. First visit - A.D. 50-52. Paul spent a long time in Corinth during his second missionary journey. He became closely attached to this church.

Two. Second visit - A.D. 56. During his absence from Corinth, there was nevertheless much contact between Paul and the Corinthians. This was possible, because both Ephesus and Corinth were situated on the main trade route between the east and the west. The journey from Ephesus to Corinth took about three weeks by sea. While he was in Ephesus, Paul soon received disturbing news about the state of affairs in the Corinthian church. There seemed to have been serious moral problems. During his last year in Ephesus, in A.D. 56, Paul probably paid a second short visit to Corinth, about which we have very little information. He probably crossed the sea from Ephesus to Corinth and back. He described this as “a painful visit” (2 Cor 2:1). It caused him much grief.

Three. First letter - a lost letter, A.D. 56. According to 1 Corinthians 5:9, shortly afterward, Paul wrote a letter to Corinth, probably from Ephesus. It was carried by the hand of Titus. In it he admonished the Corinthian Christians not to associate with sexual immoral people. This letter was misunderstood by the Corinthians and was subsequently lost.

Four. Second letter - 1 Corinthians, A.D. 56. In 2 Corinthians 8:10, Paul speaks of “last year”. He probably refers to some time in A.D. 55 when Titus had visited Corinth. At that time Titus with the co-operation of the Corinthian Christians had made a start with the collection for the needy Christians in Jerusalem. Possibly during Paul’s second visit or in this lost letter, Paul had revealed his original plan of paying Corinth a double visit by seeing them both on his way to Macedonia and on his return from Macedonia (2 Cor 1:15-16). The Corinthians replied, asking advice on certain matters, amongst them that of the collection for the needy Christians in Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:1; 2 Cor 8:10; 9:2). The questions of the Corinthians together with other serious news Paul had received from Titus, Apollos, Sosthenus, Chloe’s household and from Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (1 Cor 1:1; 7:1; 16:12,17) concerning the state of affairs in Corinth, caused Paul to do three things: First, he sent Timothy to them (Acts 19:21-22; 1 Cor 4:17). Then he wrote 1 Corinthians to them. Finally, he revised his travelling plans. Paul expected Timothy to arrive after the arrival of this

letter (1 Cor 16:10-11). He tells the Corinthian Christians that he would soon visit them and that it depended on them if he would come with “a whip” to discipline them or “in love and with a gentle spirit” (1 Cor 4:18-21; 11:34; 16:2-9). Paul had not abandoned his intended visit to Corinth, but he had changed his travelling plans. He would no longer pay them a double visit, but a single longer visit after he had visited Macedonia. The purpose of this change of plans was to spare the Corinthian Christians (2 Cor 1:23) and to give them time to set their house in order in readiness for his visit, because he was fully prepared to exercise the sternest discipline, if necessary (2 Cor 13:2). He intended not to just make a passing visit, but to stay longer and even spend the winter in Corinth (1 Cor 16:6-7). But before that he would stay on in Ephesus until Pentecost (A.D. 56), because a great door for effective work had opened for him (1 Cor 16:8). This shows that 1 Corinthians was written from Ephesus in the spring A.D. 56. His purpose was to teach that *the church is in the world but not of the world*. Titus was probably the bearer of this letter and the bearer of the reply of the Corinthians back to Paul (2 Cor 7:6-7).

Five. Third letter - 2 Corinthians, 56 A.D. From the summer to the autumn of 56 A.D. Paul travelled in Macedonia from where he wrote 2 Corinthians in the autumn of A.D. 56.

Six. Third visit - A.D. 56-57. From the winter A.D. 56 to the spring A.D. 57, he was in Achaia, particularly Corinth.

#### **POINT 4. THE PURPOSE OF 1 CORINTHIANS**

##### **First. Correction and instruction with respect to behaviour.**

The church at Corinth was failing, because worldliness had gotten within its walls. *In stead of the church being a light in the sinful city of Corinth, the sinful practices of Corinth got into the church!* The Corinthian Christians had lost sight of God. Their mind was corrupted by human knowledge. Their conscience was darkened by choosing to do what they please instead of being willing to do what they should. Their behaviour was perverted by giving full reign to their passions. The greatest danger to the Corinthian church was from within.

The main purpose of this letter is to correct and instruct the Corinthians with respect to Christian behaviour. Behaving as Christians ought to behave is the visible sign that Jesus Christ is their Lord! Paul had received disturbing news about various problems in the church at Corinth, especially about the divisions in the church (1:11). He had also received a letter from the church containing several questions to which the Corinthian Christians sought an answer (7:1). Paul wrote his beloved children in order to correct them (1:10; 3:18,21; 4:1,6; 5:11; 6:4), to admonish them to follow his example (4:14-16; 11:1), to answer their questions (7:1; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1) and to instruct them how Christians ought to behave themselves (10:14,25-27; 11:3; 13:1; 14:1; 15:1). He even gave them directions and the Lord’s commands how to behave in the church (11:17; 14:37-38)! Paul’s intention with this letter was to prepare the Corinthians for his coming visit, especially that his visit would not become a painful visit. He gave them a chance to solve their own problems *before* he would come, so that he would not need to come with “the whip” of discipline, but could come to them in love and with a gentle spirit (4:21).

##### **Second. The Christian freedom.**

The Corinthian Christians were divided amongst one another. They were engrossed with Jewish and Greek philosophy in their preaching and arguments. They were puffed up about their own importance and judged one another and even the apostles. They neglected their Christian duties. They dragged one another to court and even tolerated sexual immorality in their midst. *All these sins were to a great measure the result of the Corinthian view of freedom.* Their point of departure was, “Everything is permissible for me” (6:12; 10:23). They thought that a Christian had been set free by Christ and therefore they were *free* from any kind of restrictions. This complete misunderstanding of Christian freedom led to gross licentiousness (5:1; 6:16), spiritual pride (1:31; 4:6,18; 13:1-4) and a misuse of Christian freedom in several areas. The Corinthian Christians misused their Christian freedom. They thought that Christians had the freedom to participate in religious festivals of another religion (8:10). They thought that Christian women had the freedom to behave like Christian men (11:5). They believed that Christians had the freedom to celebrate the community meals and the Lord’s Supper as they wanted (11:20-21). They believed that Christians had the freedom to exercise the spiritual gift like the speaking in tongues and prophesying as they wanted, no matter if it caused disorder in the church meetings (14:23,27-33)! Paul accepted Christian freedom, but he condemned the way in which the Corinthian Christians misused Christian freedom. He taught the Corinthian Christians how to live as Christians in the midst of godless pagans. Just like the prayer of Jesus in John 17:15-19, he taught that the Christian Church is “*in the world*”, but “*not of the world*”!

#### **POINT 5. THE DIVISION OF 1 CORINTHIANS**

The first letter of Paul to the Corinthians may be given **the title**: “1 Corinthians - the life of righteousness in the Church.” The letter portrays Jesus Christ as the LORD who should determine the behaviour of true Christians. **The theme** of 1 Corinthians is written in 1 Corinthians 14:33,40, “God is not a God of disorder but of peace. Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.”

The first letter to the Corinthians may be divided into two parts. The first part deals with Paul's *corrections* of the bad behaviour of the Corinthian Christians. The second part deals with Paul's *instructions* about how the Corinthian Christians ought to behave.

**Part one. Paul's corrections with respect to the behaviour of the Corinthian Christians.**

The first part of the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians is recorded in chapters 1-6. It consists of six sections, which almost correspond to the six chapters.

In chapter 1:1-17 Paul addresses the divisions in the church.

In chapter 1:18-2:16 he addresses their worldly wisdom.

In chapter 3 he addresses their spiritual immaturity.

In chapter 4 he addresses their spiritual pride.

In chapter 5 he addresses their neglect to exercise discipline.

And in chapter 6 he addresses their selfishness.

**Part two. Paul's instructions with respect to the behaviour of the Corinthian Christians.**

The second part of the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians is recorded in chapters 7-16. It consists of ten sections, which correspond to the ten chapters.

In Chapter 7 Paul instructs the Corinthians about how to walk according to their Christian calling, especially in the area of marriage or remaining single.

In chapter 8 he instructs them about the interplay between knowledge of Christian freedom and love that builds up.

In chapter 9 he explains why he is not making use of his Christian freedom.

In chapter 10 he warns against the misuse of Christian freedom.

In chapter 11 he instructs the women how to behave in public and instructs the church how to behave during their communion meals.

In chapter 12 he instructs them about the unity in the church on the basis of a variety of calling and abilities.

In chapter 13 he instructs them that love should determine all Christian behaviour.

In chapter 14 he instructs them that building up the church should determine all behaviour in the church meetings.

In chapter 15 he instructs them that the resurrection from the dead is an essential part of the gospel.

In chapter 16 he instructs them about Christian giving and some other practical matters.

**ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. During the next week, read 1 Corinthians 9-16. Next week we will introduce 1 Corinthians - part 2.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom" and Internet on [www.dota.net](http://www.dota.net)

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".