

# 1 Corinthians (July 8)

## Reading 1 Corinthians

A variety of shops line the walls of the marketplace or *macellum*. Along with people bartering in Greek, Latin, and other tongues, hogs grunt, sheep and goats bleat, chickens cluck, doves coo, and cattle low. The animals smell and see the fresh produce and baked goods close to their pens. The smell of blood and cooked meat hangs in the air, wafting from the market area and from the dining halls in the nearby temples. Worshipers gather in the temple to make sacrifices, and businessmen recline at tables to discuss the latest issues, while Asclepius, Serapis, and other gods stand in mute approval. Outside these temples, members of a new piety walk past the temples to the macellum in search of food for a private supper to be hosted by their Lord.

The cosmopolitan markets at Corinth supplied a diverse population of settlers, travelers, and slaves. The interest and differences between these groups influenced the divisions in the house churches at Roman Corinth. Paul's letter provided detailed instructions about these dividing issues and directed the Corinthians to what he taught them before – Christ crucified unites all who believe.

## Author and Date

Paul is acknowledged as the author both by the letter itself and by the early church fathers. The letter was written circa AD 55, toward the close of Paul's three-year residency in Ephesus.

## Recipients and Purpose

It has been estimated that in Paul's day, Corinth had a population of about 250,000 free persons, plus as many as 400,000 slaves. In a number of ways it was the chief city of Greece: a crossroads for travelers and traders where typical Greek culture existed and a high premium was placed on wisdom. It was an extremely religious city, containing at least 12 temples, but it was also a center for open and unbridled immorality.

Paul had received information from several sources concerning the conditions existing in the church at Corinth. Factions had developed in the church, and immorality had plagued the Corinthians assembly almost from the beginning. Paul had written previously concerning moral laxness, urging believers "not to associate with sexually immoral people" (5:9). Because of misunderstanding he now found it necessary to clarify his instruction and to urge immediate and drastic action. It is clear that although the church was gifted, it was immature and unspiritual. Paul wrote to instruct and restore the church in its areas of weakness, to correct false teaching concerning the resurrection, and to give instruction concerning the offering for poverty-stricken believers in Jerusalem.

The letter revolves around problems in Christian conduct in the church. Paul was concerned with the Corinthians' problems, revealing a true pastor's (shepherd's) heart, approaching the difficulties with the gospel of God's grace.

## Blessings for Readers

In 1 Corinthians, Paul describes a divided and struggling congregation, not unlike struggling congregations today. As you read and study, consider how the Lord brought the Corinthians through their struggles, using the sound theology and counsel of the apostle Paul, focusing on salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. History shows that, despite early struggles, the congregation survived and prospered. Just as the Corinthians came to view Israel's struggles and God's mercies for them as examples and instruction, let us receive the things recorded in Paul's letter as examples and instruction for today. Avoid their excesses and sins. Rejoice in God's promises to the Corinthians, especially the promised unity through the gospel.