

1 Corinthians Class 1 Transcript

Greetings, and welcome back to FI Online. We're very excited to begin a new series in this class this evening, a series on the epistle that Paul sent to Corinth early on in his ministry—**1 Corinthians**. And we've called it *1 Corinthians: What Builds Up*. We'll explain that tagline as we go on just a little bit further. But we hope you'll find this series very, very helpful.

We're always excited to be able to present these FI Online classes, and we hope that you're able to benefit from them as you listen to them. We're not sure just yet how many [classes] will be in this particular series, but we'll let you know that as we develop.

So, if you would join me—one of the things that we always do at the beginning of one of these classes, is to recognize that we need God's inspiration, not only on the speaking, but on our hearing as well. So, if you will bow your heads, we will ask God's blessing.

[Prayer]

[1:47]

As we begin this new series on **1 Corinthians**, we want to establish a little bit of a background and an approach that we're going to take to studying this particular section of Scripture.

So, let's begin by considering why this book was written. Why did the apostle Paul have a need to write this, and not only that, but why did he preserve it?

One of the questions we often ask in our regular FI class is: "How many epistles did Paul write?" And of course, people come up with different answers. "Well, probably 14." That's what we study in the Epistles of Paul class. Some might say, "Well, 13 because we're not really sure about the book of Hebrews." But the correct answer is: "He probably wrote scores of epistles." We just simply have a certain number that are preserved. And the fact that they are preserved makes them very, very special.

God intended these epistles to be preserved for us because, throughout time, they teach us lessons that each of us needs to learn. They are timeless. While it's important to understand the context that Paul was writing in, we also are going to see that the principles that are taught are principles that stretch across time, and apply as much to our lives as Christians today as they did to our brethren 2000 years ago.

[3:08]

So, let's begin with some basic background information before we actually launch into the epistle itself. Paul is identified very clearly as the author. And, down through the ages there have been very few who ever disputed that Paul was in fact the one who wrote this epistle.

We will see, as we go a little further, it's probably not his first epistle to the Corinthian congregation, but it's the first one that we have preserved. He will talk about, as we go further, the things that he had written to them, and we don't have that record. So the chances are good there are more that he wrote to them, but this is the first one preserved for us.

When was it? Well, let's understand a little bit about the Corinthian congregation. It appears that the Church in Corinth was originally established by Paul on his second journey. This graphic shows Paul's second journey. You will note on the upper right-hand side of the pathway, there's Antioch in Syria. There were probably 16 different cities in the Roman Empire that were called "Antioch"—all given those names in honor of Antiochus, or that type of thing, as you went forward.

This one in Syria was the area where Paul used as his base of operations through the first part of his ministry. Operating from the Church in Antioch, he went up into what we today would call Turkey, or Asia Minor, along with Barnabas, in his very first journey, (You may remember that in the book of **Acts**.) after a period of time, and he had returned to Antioch. We go through the story of **Acts chapter 15**, the famous Jerusalem conference and the decision about what is required of gentiles to be a part of the Church.

[5:00]

After that conference Paul returned to Antioch, and we're told at the end of that **15th chapter of Acts** that Paul and Barnabas said, "We need to go back and visit the churches that we have already established." Unfortunately, there was a disagreement between them, and Paul and Barnabas ended up going in different directions.

But we still have the story of what Paul did as he traveled from Antioch up through the churches that he had established earlier on—Lystra, Derbe, Iconium and what we call [Antioch in Pisidia]. It appears that from there Paul wanted to go to the north, up to the southern edge of the Black Sea, the area called Bithynia, but he tells us in the book of **Acts**, his way was blocked, that God didn't allow that.

It tells us he went across what we see on the graphic as the northwestern part of modern Turkey, that was then called Mysia. But again, he simply had to pass through, and he ended up in the city of Troas. While he is in Troas, there is a vision that comes to him of a man from Macedonia saying, "Please come over and help us." And we are told that immediately they left and went over, landing in the area near Philippi. A Church is established there, which is a very important congregation in Paul's life.

From there he goes on to Thessalonica, to Berea, and from Berea, because of the hostility that came up from the Jews who had followed him from Thessalonica, Paul leaves and goes around to Athens. We have the famous story of Paul in Athens in **Acts 18**, where he really wasn't able to accomplish a great deal. The doors just seemed closed there. And from Athens Paul goes to Corinth.

It appears that by this time we're around 51 A.D., and that's probably when the Church in Corinth is established. Paul spent about 18 months there. At one point—and we'll see why as we go a little further—Paul was about ready to leave, but instead, he's given a message from Jesus Christ: "Stay here in Corinth. I have many people."

Now, again, we'll see as we go further, why it was that Paul might not have realized that, and

why he needed to stay there. So, he stayed there for that period of time, and as our map shows, he went back, stopped briefly in Ephesus, sailed along the coast of Turkey, and then back to Jerusalem, or Caesarea up to Jerusalem, and then back to Antioch.

[7:30]

After a short period of time there, Paul is ready to go again. And we have now his third journey. On his third journey—he had stopped at Ephesus, remember, in his second journey very briefly, but he didn't want to stay there because he was trying to get back to Jerusalem. But he saw that Ephesus was an area where he really should go. So, in his third journey he travels there, and he spends about three years in Ephesus.

It is while he is in Ephesus that he gets word from Corinth that there are some problems in the congregation there that he needs to address. So, he writes to them, and he says, "I'm coming. I want to come see you." But he wants to address these issues first.

So he leaves from there. He goes briefly up through the area of Macedonia, which is north of Corinth, then down into the lower part of Greece, which is called Achaia, and he comes back to Corinth, probably spending the winter there. From there then, again, his journey down to Jerusalem, which eventually leads to his being taken as a captive and taken ultimately to Rome. So, Paul hears about these problems in Corinth, and he recognizes, "I can't get there right away, but I need to write to these people."

He tells them in **1 Corinthians 16 verses 8 and 9**, and **verse 19**, that he is writing from Ephesus. So we know where he was when he sent the message, and approximately the time. If we put the chronology together—and it's not crucial, but it's kind of helpful—we feel this was probably around 55 A.D.

Now, we have traditionally said that we thought the book of **1 Corinthians** was written basically during, or around the Days of Unleavened Bread, and part of the reason for that is, in **1 Corinthians 5**, when we get there, we will see that Paul very clearly talks about keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread. But I personally feel that it was actually written just a little bit before that. I think it was written in those days leading up to Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, and I'll explain my reason for that—not that, again, it's crucial, but when we get to **1 Corinthians 11**, Paul gives some very detailed instruction about the way the Passover should be kept, and correcting some problems in the way it was being kept. But when we reach the end of **1 Corinthians 11**, the very last verse, **verse 34**, Paul talks about these things being done, and then he says: "The other things *I will set right when I come.*" That indicates to me that Passover hadn't taken place yet. If it had, then it's going to be a year before they keep Passover again. There was no reason for him to spend all this time addressing those issues in **chapter 11**.

I think he's addressing them prior to the Passover—probably a matter of no more than a couple of weeks before Passover—but addressing them prior to Passover so that that can be handled properly. And the other issues that he deals with in this epistle, he says, "I can deal with many of those when I get there." So, it indicates to me that, I think, it was written in that period of time just before Passover, just before the Days of Unleavened Bread.

[10:50]

Now, again, that's not crucial, but I think it does help us understand some things, because we're going to find some unique references in the book of **1 Corinthians** that most people don't pay attention to because they don't keep the Holy Days. We're going to find several times where Paul talks about a person being "puffed up." To a person who keeps the Days of Unleavened Bread, those are special words. We hear them, and we think, "Oh, wait a minute, I remember hearing about 'puffed up.' I know what that's talking about." So, it indicates to me that Paul probably was writing to address those particular issues at that time, and it adds a certain dimension to our understanding of this book.

If we consider a little bit more about the area of Corinth—this map gives an indication, kind of a satellite view of what the area of southern Greece, or Achaia as it's called, looks like. And you will notice several things about it. You will see that Athens is on that northern peninsula that stretches up into Macedonia and actually up into the continent of Europe. But the southern part of Greece is almost an island. Other than the very narrow connection, the isthmus between the northern part and the southern part, it's basically isolated as an island. On the one side we see that—on the west we find what's called the Corinthian Gulf, and you will see there, on this indication—on this map, a number one, which is Lechaem. Lechaem was a port that served Corinth on one side of the isthmus.

You will also see a two, and that's Cenchrea. Cenchrea is the port city on the other side. And that isthmus, at its narrowest part, is about four miles. Now we're going to see as we go further, that this was very, very significant. Anciently, people saw a need for a canal that went across there, but they didn't have the technology to be able to do that. So they establish something else. Now, what we find as we go further in this particular illustration, and as we understand this, is that virtually all of the traffic north and south that's going to move into the southern part of Greece itself, has to travel across that narrow isthmus.

Now it doesn't show on this particular map, but in that Peloponnesus area we would find the famous city of Sparta. Over on the western portion you see Olympia. Again, a very, very important area for Greece. A very mountainous area. When we visited Greece, I had no idea that Greece was quite as mountainous as it is—a very mountainous area. But anything reaching that southern portion in all the cities that were there had to travel north and south through that isthmus.

[13:44]

But there's also another aspect of this as well, and that is that the southern tip of Greece is called Cape Malea, anciently. There's another name for it now. Cape Matapan, it's called. But like many of the southern capes that exist throughout the world—the Cape Horn, and so on, that exist—the weather can be quite dramatic in those areas, and sailing around there can be really quite difficult. And that was true for the southern tip of Greece as well.

There were several ancient legends about those who were going to travel around there—they needed to make out their will before they left because it was dangerous. So, when traffic is

coming from, in this case let's say it's coming from the east, the areas that we would today call Constantinople, or Istanbul—the areas that actually the ancient Silk Road connected across there—those areas, when the goods were sent across, had to find a safe way to sail to get to Rome in the west. And therefore, much of the trade, instead of trying to go around the very dangerous Cape Malea at the southern tip of Greece, the ships would come in and anchor at Cenchrea, and one of two things would happen. If it was a smaller ship, they would literally haul it out of the water, and there was a road that was called the “Diolkos” that stretched across that four miles, and they would put it on rollers and haul the entire loaded ship across, put it in in the port at Lechaem, and then it would sail through the Corinthian Gulf there and sail directly across to Italy. Of course, traffic could go the other way as well.

If the ship were too large to haul out of the water and do in that way, it was quite common that they would unload the ship in Cenchrea and haul the cargo across, and reload it on the other side to sail, because it was safer and literally took less time to do that than to sail around the tip of Greece. So, therefore, not only did all of the north and south traffic have to travel through Corinth, the east-west traffic also traveled through there. So there's a tremendous amount of merchandise traveling through an area, and of course, that lends itself to the creation of a great deal of wealth.

Corinth was anciently established, and it was called “the Bridge of Greece” by some. It had a great deal of fame anciently, not only because of its trade, but also what were called the Isthmian Games, which were second only to the games at Olympia. The Isthmian Games took place there. And the games in Olympia were every four years, and the ones in Corinth were every four years, and they alternated two years apart. So, they were very, very famous, and there were a lot of people who came through there.

[16:51]

When the Roman Empire was expanding, there was a great resistance in Greece to the power of Rome. So, there was what was called the Panhellenic League that was formed, and Corinth became the dominant city in the defense against the Roman encroachment. But the Romans were far too powerful, and they came through, and when they got to Corinth, since it had been the leading city opposing their expansion, they devastated the city. They brought it to the ground. This was like 146 B.C., and for basically a century it lay in ruins without any of those things going on.

But, in 46 B.C., Julius Caesar said, “This is far too valuable a place.” So, they began to rebuild the city, and it again resumed its greatness. But now, instead of having ancient buildings, it had relatively new buildings, and Rome itself was funneling money into the area. And Corinth became a Roman colony so that they stationed troops there. Many of those from Rome would move there when they had the opportunity. There was land and so on—they would be granted land. So, it became a very important Roman city after about 100 years of devastation. It grew and prospered tremendously. There was a great deal of wealth in Corinth.

But, of course, like many places where a lot of wealth takes place, there is also a lot of vice. Port

cities throughout history have been known as places of vice where sailors, who have been at sea for a long time, come ashore, and gamble, and drink, and try to find the prostitutes who are available readily in those areas. And Corinth was certainly one of those cities, not only because it was a port city, but because it housed the temple there of Venus. And that temple which sat on a very high hill called the Acrocorinthus (We'll show you some pictures of that in a moment.), was a place where there were temple prostitutes. We are told by some in history that there were a thousand of them who would come down into Corinth and ply their trade in the evening. This was considered—it seems strange to us—but it was considered an act of worship of the gods. Many of the gods were fertility gods, so they were supposedly pleased with this kind of thing.

[19:25]

There's also another aspect of Greek culture that, again, I think it's important to understand to get the picture of this. In the Greek culture the men were educated. Women were not. Women were expected to stay at home, keep the home and so on, but they were not educated. So, if a man wanted to have an intelligent conversation with a woman, the regular women, even his wife would not really be able to carry on much of that kind of a conversation because she'd never been educated, she didn't have that information. However, there was one particular class of women who did receive an education, and that was the temple prostitutes. So the men would tend to gravitate there—they would spend time.

In the typical Greek home, a woman didn't even expect her husband to be faithful. It was just the norm that they would visit the prostitutes, and they would have a wife at home, but they would visit the prostitutes and so on. And this was the norm for that society.

Now, in the midst of Corinth, as in many other cities in the Roman Empire of that time, there was a Jewish enclave. There were Jewish people who lived there, and as throughout much of the Roman Empire, we should understand, there was a great deal of anti-Jewish sentiment that permeated the Roman Empire, and there were the equivalent of the pogroms that took place from time to time.

We will even see in the history of Corinth, if you examine it, when Paul first came there, he comes across Aquila and Priscilla, and they are refugees from Rome. They are there because Claudius has issued a decree running all the Jews out of Rome, so, they've come to Corinth. They will go with Paul to Ephesus. They will eventually be back in Rome.

But, there was this anti-Jewish bias that existed in the Roman Empire, and of course, when you study the history, the Jews were rather hostile to the gentiles as well. But, in all of these cities, there was an area where the Jews would live together. And many times, those were very often in many ways a cultural center for the city as well.

[21:38]

So, in that area where the Jews were, they obviously were not going off and getting involved with the temple prostitutes. That was a part of idolatry. That was a part of the worship of pagan gods. The Jews would see that as a terrible thing, as anathema. So, they didn't do that. And

therefore, Jewish homes were very stable. Jewish homes were places where—and again, it's not like they were perfect homes, and the marriages were wonderful—but they were a whole lot more stable than what took place in the gentile areas.

And, there were many people who would look at what was taking place in the Jewish community, and they would say: “They've got something here. There's something about their values that's producing some good results.”

So what we find throughout the book of **Acts**, and certainly we find it in Corinth as well, is that in the synagogues, not only did the Jews gather on the Sabbath days and the holy days, but there were also some others who were called the “God-fearers.” They were gentiles who came, who were not permitted to participate in any way, but who kind of sat in the back and listened and learned. God's word was read every Sabbath day, and they would hear these things, and they would hear them, to a certain extent, expounded, at least from the Jewish perspective. And there were many things that were good in that. So, these individuals, men and women both, would sit in the back of the synagogue and listen, and they were God-fearers.

Now, to become accepted by the Jews, they would have to become proselytes, and that involved three steps. It involved a ceremonial washing—not particularly a problem. It involved giving a sacrifice at the temple. Well, they obviously couldn't go there, but they could hire someone to do that or pay for a sacrifice. But the third was all the males had to be circumcised. And again, in the Greek society, that was very much frowned upon. And so, it became very difficult for gentiles to actually be accepted among the Jews. But still, they learned.

And when Paul came to Corinth, we see he went initially to the synagogue, and there were individuals who listened. There were a few Jews, but there were also many Greeks. Remember that in the synagogue, the gentiles are okay to be there, but they're not really accepted as a part.

[24:00]

But when Paul comes on the scene, Paul is teaching very much the same set of values, the same Ten Commandments, the same standards to live by in many ways, but, Paul is opening the door for the gentiles. They are welcome. They are fully accepted as a part of the congregation. So, there's going to be a great deal of appeal for some of those individuals, but they're living in the midst of a city that was probably one of the most corrupt of all time.

Here's what *William Barclay* says about Corinth:

There was another side to Corinth. She had a reputation for commercial prosperity, but she was also a byword for “evil living.” The very word *korinthiazesthai*, which was a Greek word meaning “to live like a Corinthian,” had become a part of the Greek language, and it meant “to live with drunken and immoral debauchery.” Aelian, the late Greek writer, tells us that if ever a Corinthian was shown upon the stage in a Greek play, he was shown drunk.

The very name “Corinth” was synonymous with “debauchery,” and there was one source of evil in the city which was known all over the civilized world. Above the

isthmus towered the hill of the Acropolis, and on it stood the great temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. To that temple there were attached one thousand priestesses who were sacred prostitutes, and in the evening they descended from the Acropolis and plied their trade upon the streets of Corinth, until it became a Greek proverb, "It is not every man who can afford a journey to Corinth."

This is the society in which these people lived. And, again, when we live in whatever culture we live in, it's very easy for us to accept that culture as normal. We do that today. There are many things in our society today that most people accept as just simply: "This is normal. This is the way things are done." When in fact, as a Christian, you may look at that and say, "Wait a minute. This isn't right at all. That's not the way things should be."

So their society, their people, lived in a culture that was a very bad culture. And yet, like people down through the ages, God could call those people, deal with them, and that's what we're going to find in this congregation in Corinth. It was a prosperous area in many ways. It was a wealthy area. It was a well-educated area. Many people had a good education. But it's also an area of great corruption. We could find cities like that all over the world today as well. So, Corinth was very much like that.

[26:49]

Now, a few years ago, we were able to take a trip to Greece during the Days of Unleavened Bread, an educational trip that we sponsored. So I'd like to share with you a few pictures of what modern Corinth is like, and to give you at least a little bit of an idea of what the ancient city would've looked like, and the area around there.

So, let's begin here. This is the modern harbor area of Cenchrea, near Corinth. Remember the isthmus is only four miles across. It's a very pleasant area today. The shoreline—much of it is quite rocky, and again, the beaches are kind of gravel beaches. But, again, a very pleasant area to be in, a very nice area to visit, as far as that's concerned.

This is probably the only part of the ancient harbor of Cenchrea that remains. It, again, goes back to Paul's time, the first century—that pillar. So, there are a few other things around that are just kind of remnants. But, that's probably all. But the whole area during Paul's time would have been very built up. It would've been almost looking like a city itself.

This is just up the hill from that area, and what you're seeing there are the remains of an ancient brothel. You can imagine the sailors coming in, and the first place they come across is this brothel on the street leading up from the harbor. That remains as well from the ancient days.

[28:21]

Looking across to what was ancient Corinth, modern Corinth lies—as what it looks like, this city at the base of it—and much of ancient Corinth was there as well. But in the background, you see the Acrocorinthus, the hill, the Acropolis of ancient Corinth. Now, probably if you went back to ancient times, the city, a small city was on top of that. But at the time of Paul, basically what was up there was the temple of Aphrodite and all the buildings that went with that. I will show you as

we go a little further some scenes from the top where later on, in Byzantine times, there were buildings and fortifications placed up there.

This is again a closer view, and if you notice at the top, you'll see some of those Byzantine buildings that are there. Now you may wonder how you get up there. Well, it's quite a climb. There's no other way to get up there other than walking up the roadway, but you can go up and visit that area today as well.

This is some of the entrance area, and again, these are Byzantine structures, but it gives an idea of what it was like. The roadway is on the right-hand side, and you walk up through that particular area.

This is the ancient pathway. And it does go back to the first century—these rocks—and this is where you walk up to the city. When you get up on the hillside, it's surprising that it's—again, there would've been many buildings anciently—but at this point, mainly just the ruins and kind of fields and wildflowers. Greece, at this time of the year—this was the spring time—has many poppies in bloom, many other wildflowers. It's really quite a lovely area, and you can understand why Corinth was a very popular place.

By the way, that reminds me that one of the things that I found in studying the history of Corinth is that actually, if you've ever had what's called a currant, which is a little, dried fruit, those became popular, and actually “currant” is a kind of a changed word, an altered word, but it comes originally from “Corinth,” because currants were grown in this particular area and shipped all over the world.

[30:40]

These again are some of the Byzantine structures that remain, but give you an idea, at least, where temples and all would've been on the top of this particular mountain. Again, it's quite a climb, and you get to see quite a few of these ancient things, but you have to keep climbing to get all the way to the top.

Looking back down from the top, this, in the distance, is ancient Corinth—excuse me, modern Corinth, but a little bit closer up would've been where we find the ruins of ancient Corinth that would've been there in Paul's day. Again, the area is quite built-up today.

Greece is, for the most part, a very rural country. Something like two-thirds of all the people in Greece live in Athens. It's that highly-populated and certainly a fairly large number in Corinth and a few other cities, but much of the rest of it is really quite rural.

As we descend to the ancient city of Corinth, this is one of the most famous structures. It probably goes back to at least four to five hundred B.C. It is the remains of the temple of Apollo. We'll see as we go further that Apollo, and the worship of Apollo, was very, very important to the Greek people. Apollo was the sun god and was one that was worshiped by them anciently, as they worshiped the various gods.

One of the things that you might want to note—it's a physical thing—but one of the things you

might want to note about this particular temple is that all of the pillars are monoliths. In other words, they are single stones. They're probably about 30 feet high, as you look at this particular picture, and all carved of single stones in smooth lines and so on, to stand, and they've been standing. And this area again—as much of this area—there are many earthquakes, so that's probably what happened to many of the pillars that are gone now. But these were monoliths.

When you come to Athens and the great temples that are built there, you no longer see monoliths, but the columns are built in sections and very carefully fitted together. Anciently you really would have difficulty even seeing the sections they were so perfectly put together, but they're not monoliths. These are probably the largest stones that they could handle and put together in this way.

[33:00]

Again, this is kind of from the other side, looking back on it. But you could see— (Let me back up there. I believe—no, that's all right; we'll leave it there.) in the background would've been the Acrocorinthus, the large hill that we've just looked at. This is in the area, (That's what I was looking for.) on the back left of this picture, you will note there's that temple to Apollo. You're seeing just a small portion of it. This area where we're looking is basically the Agoura or the market area. We'll see a little more of that in a moment. But this was a famous fountain. It's called Pyrene Fountain, and it was a source of water for the people of Corinth. And it had— everything in Greece was connected to some kind of pagan legend—it had its own legend about how the fountain came about from a goddess who was shedding tears over something that happened. And the priests would come along—and all those openings that you see, the priests of this particular goddess would throw the sacrifices and offerings through the doors, and they didn't go inside. It's an unusual thing, but it's still surviving there today.

This is what the Agoura or marketplace would've—what remains of it today. You can see in the background that it's been excavated out, and these were just various shops and stores that would've been there. It would've been quite majestic in its day, but of course, now all we see are the remains.

Now to the right of this is a very important structure, one that you will remember from the book of **Acts**. If you remember when Paul was in Corinth, the Jews rose up against the new Christians and claimed that they were doing things that were contrary to Roman law. One of the things—if you remember when we covered the book of **Acts**, or I think we even covered it a bit in the book of Ephesians—the Romans were very strict where religion was concerned. They only allowed two basic religions in the Roman Empire. One was polytheism, which means you can worship any god you want, any number of gods. You don't have to worship them all, but you can worship any number. That was acceptable. And the Roman emperors, at this point, were claiming to be gods as well, so you could worship them, and in fact, you were expected to.

The other religion that was allowed, that was considered a *religio licita*, a licit or legal religion, was monotheism. And that was the domain of the Jews. The Jews were the only ones who believed in one God. But, because of the difficulties the Romans had had with the Jews,

especially in the province of Judea, they had reached a compromise, and they said, “Okay, you Jews, you can have your monotheism. You can worship your one God. That’s up to you.” They viewed the Jews as being atheists because they didn’t recognize the other gods. But: “Alright, that’s okay,” because the Jews were not trying to convert the gentiles, for the most part, to monotheism. So, it really wasn’t a problem.

The Romans were very concerned that religion could really create a lot of problems and unrest. That is not something they wanted to have. So, any other religion was illegal. So when Christianity came on the scene, there were those who were claiming that it was a new religion and therefore illegal.

[36:26]

As we study through the book of **Acts**, one of the things that we see is that the Romans looked at the Christians, and they looked at the Jews, and they said, “These are the same people. Their practices are the same. They’re Christians or monotheists. They worship the same God the Jews worship. They worship in many ways the same way. They worship on the same days. They follow the same customs, and they are Jews. And if there is a disagreement between them, that’s a Jewish problem. It’s not ours.” And that’s kind of what took place in Corinth.

Paul was accused—Paul and the Christians were accused by the Jews of being a new religion and therefore illegal. And they’re brought before the procurator, and the place where they are brought is this place, just to the right of what we were just looking at. You will note a little sign there. It is in both Greek and English: *bema*. The *bema* is the flat platform area where the procurator would render his judgments.

So Paul was brought to this spot. And if you were there today, you would see that this is what’s described in the book of **Acts**. This goes back to the first century. Paul was brought here. Now the procurator at this point listened to what they had to say and basically said, “It’s a Jewish problem. You take care of it.” And there was even a riot that took place where some of the gentiles began to beat on the Jews and drive them away.

So, if the procurator had said, “You are correct; this accusation is correct. This is an illegal religion,” Paul and all the rest would’ve had to stop preaching anywhere in the Roman Empire, because, again, it had legal authority everywhere. So, thankfully, the decision was that it’s not an illegal religion. And, therefore, even as they expanded into other areas, they can say, “Well, this question was already resolved by a Roman court. It’s a perfectly legal religion.” So it was a very important event that took place in this particular location.

So again, as you stand in this place—now in the background is where the Agoura was—you see the Acrocorinthus, the high city, or the high mountain well in the background. This road, where I’m standing, is the ancient Doilkos. It’s the remainder of that road that was used to haul the ships, to haul the cargo back and forth from the two sides of the isthmus. So even a portion of that remains today. It’s really quite fascinating to see.

[39:03]

Now, today there is a modern canal. This was actually constructed by the French in the 1800s, I believe it was. You can see a modern highway bridge that goes across the area. It's a very, very narrow canal, and you can see a great deal of rock. It would certainly not have been possible to build until explosives were available, and so on. So—but it is a very, very narrow one, and the ship that's coming through there is a merchant vessel, but it is a lot smaller than most of what we would think.

This is at the entrance on the Aegean side where Cenchrea would've been, and you see a ship beginning to sail into the entrance to the canal.

Again, here's the entrance, what it looks like as you're standing along the edge.

Here is, again, a relatively small ship, but you can see the—you get a sense of the size of what's there.

Now what you really can't see there is a bridge. There's actually a bridge, and it's an unusual bridge because it's underwater. Instead of it being a drawbridge that goes up, it's a bridge that drops down.

There it is at its elevated point. And when ships come through, they lower the bridge down below, and no one can cross until the ship goes through, and then they bring it back up. And then you can drive across, or you can walk across. Frequently there are fish that are trapped up there on the bridge. But this was, as we were there, what it looks like as you go through that particular area.

Looking on up the canal, again you see the highway bridge that's across there. There are more than one of those. But you see how narrow it is, and again, a ship, a merchant ship, beginning to sail through there.

We also wanted to give you a little bit of an idea of some of the artifacts that remain in the area. This is one of the statues—a portion of it at least—that remains. Often when we look at these statues, we assume since they were made out of marble that they were all completely white. That's what we generally see. But this illustrates that as a matter of fact, many times the statues were painted. They had dyes on them, and this one would go back to ancient days.

[41:25]

One of the things we found that was really quite interesting as well is that many of the statues are headless. And, the reason for that is that there was such a demand from wealthy people to have statues made of themselves that the sculptors would very often make up a whole stock of all kinds of different body statues, and you can choose whichever one you wanted, and then they would make a sculpture of your head and place it on top. So oftentimes, when we find these sculptures today, they're headless because the head wasn't a part of the original thing. But, it's also interesting to see the tremendous detail that's there. Look at all the folds of the fabric, and those are all carved out of stone.

We also find in the museums in Corinth and in Athens, especially, less so in Sparta, a particular

kind of pottery that has survived from that period of time. There's a certain style, and there's a style as you see here that primarily is black, and then the brown section that you see on the sides of some of these, these were all, of course, clay. So the brown is the natural color, but they would be stained black. And with the Corinthian pottery, it was quite common for the background to be brown and the figures in black.

With Athenian pottery (And again, remember Athens is only about a half-hour away from Corinth, in traveling, so a relatively short distance.), it was just the reverse, that the figures were in brown and the background was in black. Now that's not consistent at all times, but it does give you at least a feel for what was taking place. And those who study art history are able to recognize what period the pottery comes from because at one point, Corinthian pottery was more popular, and [at] another point, Athenian pottery was.

Again, it gives you a picture of what some of these looked like as a bit of a close-up. And these again are ancient pieces that have survived. And there are scenes on there. Many of them are scenes from athletic events or historical events, and so on—wars, that type of thing.

Again, we see some of the pictures of what takes place here. And you see the variety of things, and it's amazing how much they are preserved.

[43:55]

In the background you see an interesting mosaic. This is a mosaic that again has survived with Apollo, the god Apollo at the center. And you see all of those curled forms coming out as we would kind of imagine—because he is the sun god—sunrays.

But I will say that as we were there (Mr. Dave Register and I were together on this particular trip, along with all the others who were there.), we saw something that threw us off. And it was this particular mosaic that survived. I'm sorry the picture is not clearer. Here's a little bit of a close-up of it.

But here is this image, and we asked our guide, because this was actually prior to first century, and therefore we were confused because, we said: "This looks just like the pictures of Jesus that take place in medieval art and the art of that period of time." So, we asked our guide, "Well, why are there pictures that look like Jesus here?" And she kind of laughed and said, "Oh, well, those aren't Jesus. Those are pictures of Apollo." It's fascinating to think that these pictures that look so much like what medieval artists used to describe Jesus were, in fact, pictures of the ancient sun god. And that again, I think for most of us, is quite relevant.

Okay. I think that's the end of our pictures there. So, let's move on now and get just a little more background before we actually get into the book itself.

Why did Paul write this letter? He tells us in **1 Corinthians 5** and **verse 9** that he had previously written, as we said. So we know it isn't his first letter to them, but it was certainly an important letter. He is in some ways responding. It appears (And again, we won't go through all the details.)—but it appears that there have been messengers from Corinth. They come from a lady who is apparently a deaconess in the area, who was well-respected and honored, and these

may be some of her servants. It may be some people who were employed by her. But they have come with a message—probably a letter that’s sent. It comes to Paul and tells him, “We’ve got some serious issues here. The Church is troubled.”

[46:17]

About the same time, it appears that Paul received an official letter from those who were there. How exactly that’s carried out we don’t really know. Probably—as Paul had placed elders in most of the cities—probably there were some elders in Corinth who would’ve been responsible and would’ve gathered up this letter because the letter is simply a series of questions that people are asking: “Well, what about this? How do we handle this? What’s the proper approach here?” And they had sent that letter to Paul about the same time he gets this report. Now maybe it came with the same people. We really don’t know.

But he gets the report that, “You know, we’ve got some issues in Corinth. We’ve got some problems in the congregation.” And Paul is listening, not only to the letter, but he’s listening to this report as well, because it comes from a very reliable source. So he has a need to address these things. And again, I get the impression that some of these things need to be answered right away. Paul is in Ephesus. He gets this report. He can’t leave Ephesus just yet, but there are some issues that need to be addressed. And obviously, if people are asking questions, it’s an opportunity to address some things.

It’s interesting, as we go through this, that actually the first question they ask is really not addressed until we get to **chapter 7**. So the first six chapters are leading up to that. But I hope we will understand, as we go through this, there is a special continuity in this letter that I think it’s important for us to understand. And therefore, I want to describe, just a little bit, the approach that we’re going to take in these classes on **1 Corinthians**.

[48:01]

There are a variety of ways we can study the Bible, and we should study the Bible in a variety of ways. Many times, when we hear a sermon or a Bible study, the person, the minister who’s presenting it will quote from one section of Scripture and then turn to another and then another in different passages to make a point, to cover a certain subject. That’s a perfectly legitimate way to do it. The Scripture shows us the apostles did that. Even Jesus did that. So, addressing things in that way is a perfectly proper and legitimate way to do things. But, in doing that, we often pull things out of context.

Now that doesn’t mean we distort the meaning, but we’re not really getting them quite in the context that they were presented in the first place. We will find that, for example, in **1 Corinthians**. We will find that there is a section—when the question, let’s say, comes up about, “Well, should the Church today have an employed ministry? Or should it be something that ministers work on the side—or work as their main occupation, and they take care of the Church on the side, as they have the opportunity? Should we have paid ministers to be ministers? Is that appropriate by Scripture?”

And very often to talk about that, one of the sections we'll go to is **1 Corinthians 9**, and that's proper. It does give very clear instruction there, and it shows that, yes, this is the proper way for the Church to conduct its business today—to have employed ministers who are there to serve God's people full-time is perfectly appropriate.

But what we're going to see when we get to **1 Corinthians 9** is that when Paul wrote those things, that wasn't the question he was addressing. He was addressing an entirely different question. In fact, it had to do with food offered to idols. Now we may look at that and say, "Well, what's that have to do with me today?" Well, hold on. When we get there, we will see that it has a great deal to do with the way we live today, and it has a great deal to do with that tagline we have on the title of these classes: *What Builds Up*. That's an important question, and we'll see it as we go further.

So, it's very helpful for us, in getting a full understanding, to be able to put passages in the context in which they were originally given. This epistle of **1 Corinthians** has a wonderful unity to it. And, quite honestly, I don't think until the last year or so—as I've been teaching this for a number of years—I really didn't recognize fully the unity that's there. We're going to see a couple of themes that go through the entire book, that tie it together in a very special way, and I think it enlarges our understanding greatly to do that.

[50:49]

So, while it's perfectly fine to pull things from here or there—after all, in the book of **Isaiah**, we read that God's truth is written *here a little and there a little*—it's also extremely helpful to go verse by verse by verse. And that's what we're going to do through **1 Corinthians**. We're going to study it verse by verse. Some verses we'll move through rather quickly. Some sections we can move through rather quickly.

And, of course, if you've ever studied on this kind of a level, you know that you could probably spend the rest of your lifetime going in detail on all that's here. But I think going verse by verse for a while is going to help us get a better picture on this. So that's what we intend to do—to understand the context in that way. So, let's move to our beginning portion.

What do we know about the problems that were in Corinth that Paul had to address? Well, probably the first thing most people would say, because we are at least basically familiar with the book, is, "Well, there was a problem with division." Yes, you are absolutely right. There was a problem of division. But what we're going to see as we go a little further is that the division was not really the problem; it was the result of the problem. It was a natural consequence of a couple of other problems that were deeper than that.

And we're going to find—as I read through this book, I am so amazed at how skillfully Paul was inspired—and I don't want to give all the credit to Paul, obviously—but how skillfully Paul was inspired to weave the issues into this from the very first verse. It's fascinating to watch. Now, I'm not going to tell you all of those issues right now. So I want you to be thinking about that: What can I find here? What can I find that's a part of this?

[52:46]

We tend to see, I think, each epistle as a collection of distinct but separate points. Now that's generally not the way Paul writes. Some of the general epistles are, in fact, written that way.

And, if you were, for example, to study the book of James, you would find that they used a method that was common in Judaism called *hiāraz*, which basically means “stringing pearls.” And you go through the book of James and you find a pearl, and then you seem to go to a different subject, although there's a little connection between them, and another pearl, and another, and another. And that's the way that the book is written. And it's perfectly fine.

But that's not really the way Paul addressed his epistles. And, frankly, addressing his epistles to a primarily Greek audience, that Jewish way of doing it would not have been especially effective. So, he has a theme, and he's very much inspired in the way he ties all of this together. There is a cohesiveness to this entire epistle that I think is really inspiring to see.

There were two interrelated issues that Paul had to address in the Corinthian congregation. We'll talk about them—and I'll talk about what they are as we go a little bit further on. But I'd like you to begin from the very beginning of this thinking: “What are those issues? What is it that Paul is dealing with?” And a big hint from that is: division is a problem, but it's the result of other problems, and we need to address those, or the division is going to continue.

[54:31]

So how do we begin? Let's begin here in **verse 1**:

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

So, Paul begins by identifying who is writing. This is the typical—we call it “epistolary form”—of the first century. It makes a great deal of sense. It tells you who we are, what authority we have to write. If you were to go to, let's say, hear a speaker in a public event, probably either the one who introduces the speaker, or the speaker himself, will take just a moment at the beginning to explain, “Here are my credentials. Here's why you should listen to what I have to say.” You'll find several examples of that in the Bible as well.

It's interesting to read **Genesis chapter 1** in that way. It is as if God from the very beginning is saying, “Here are My credentials. Here's what I did. Here's why you should listen to Me.”

We would find the same thing at the beginning of the Ten Commandments. Remember how it begins: [**Exodus 20:**] **1** “*And God spoke all these words (to Moses), saying:*

2 “*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.*”

Why does that begin **Exodus chapter 20**? Because God is establishing His right to say, “Here's how you should live your life.” So, in the epistolary form, the writer of the epistle very often begins with that kind of a statement. Paul says, “I'm called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ.”

All apostles—if you remember back in the book of **Ephesians** when we covered that—all apostles in the New Testament are apostles of Jesus Christ. He is the living Head of the Church. He is the One who sends them to fulfill that office. The only One who is called an “Apostle of God” is Jesus Christ Himself, because He was given that responsibility by the Father. But, He is the One who then “apostles” people.

So, Paul is not saying, “Look at me; I'm wonderful.” He's saying, “I'm sent to you by Jesus Christ. I came to Corinth in the first place because Jesus Christ sent me to Corinth, because He wanted me to come to Corinth, because He sent me with a message of hope, of salvation, of forgiveness that He wanted you to have. And I'm simply the messenger.”

And that's what an apostle is—he's a messenger of someone else's message. So that's what Paul is saying, “I was called to do this. This is why Jesus Christ called me in the first place—so that I could bring His message to you *through the will of God*. Okay, I came there because God opened the doors and made it possible.”

[57:07]

And he talks about *Sosthenes our brother*. We know little about Sosthenes. There is a mention of someone named Sosthenes in **Acts 18 verse 17** in Corinth. And we find that, in fact, when the Christians had separated from the synagogue, that the ruler of the synagogue at that time became a Christian, so there had to be a new ruler of the synagogue, and he was an individual named Sosthenes. And when the procurator refused the accusation of the Jews against Paul and the Christians, and the gentiles turned to start beating some of the Jews, one of them that's mentioned is Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue.

Now, is that the same Sosthenes that we see here? Possibly. But, understand that in the first century, Sosthenes was a pretty common name. It's kind of like Robert. You know, if you saw Robert written, referring to somebody who lived in your city, and then you saw another Robert, you wouldn't automatically assume they're the same person. So, we have to be careful with that. But obviously, Sosthenes was known among the brethren there. Is it possible that he was that second ruler of the synagogue who also became converted over time? Certainly possible. We just don't know. But they knew him.

Now one of the things that's brought out here by *William Barclay* I think is fascinating as well. He says:

In the first ten verses of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, the name of Jesus Christ occurs no fewer than ten times. This was going to be a difficult letter, for it was going to deal with a difficult situation, and in such a situation, Paul's first and repeated thought was of Jesus Christ. Sometimes in the Church we try to deal with a difficult situation by means of a book of laws and in the spirit of human justice. Sometimes in our own affairs we try to deal with a difficult situation in our own mental and spiritual power. Paul did none of this. To his difficult situation he took Jesus Christ, and it was in the light of the sacrifice of Christ, and the love of Christ, that he sought to deal with it.

Okay. Now Paul moves forward here, and we'll go just a little further today, probably no further than this next verse as we try to move forward here.

[59:28]

The next part of an epistle is to tell who it's written to. So, he says:

[1 Corinthians 1:] 2 (This is) *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:*

Now we can derive a great deal from this. We are told, for example, that this is written to *the Church of God which is at Corinth*. *Church of God* is a title that's used 12 times, singular and plural, throughout the New Testament. It is the title that the Church should have; that's what it's called, wherever it is. Paul, in one place, talks about the *Churches of God in Judea*. Okay. That's fine, but it was *Churches of God*. The whole group is known as the *Church of God*. It belongs to Him. It is something that is His.

But the word is interesting as well. You will see on the slide that the word "church" is *ekklesia*. That's composed of a preposition at the beginning, *ek*, which means "out of"—(We still carry that over into English today.)—and the verb *kaleo*, which means "to call or summon." So, in one sense we could say that *ekklesia* means "called ones" or "called-out ones," and that's legitimate.

But quite honestly, Paul was borrowing an ancient Greek word that had a richer meaning to it than that. In the Greek culture an *ekklesia* was a group of citizens who are called out from what they are doing in order to come together to carry out an important responsibility. In the Greek culture, of course, it would've been a civic responsibility. But people were called out in order to come together. So, simply to say that *ekklesia* means "called-out ones" is incomplete. They're not simply called out. They're called out to come together in order to accomplish something.

So, it's a rich word that tells us what the Church of God is really about. When God calls people, yes, He calls them out of this world, but He doesn't call them out to just be "out," to just be "separate," to do their own thing on their own. He calls them to come together.

I heard someone recently say, "Well, *ekklesia* just means "a bunch of people, a group of people." No, it doesn't. It means "individuals called out for a purpose to come together and accomplish something." That's what the Church of God is supposed to be. So this automatically begins to lay a certain foundation.

[1:02:09]

Now there's another point—I kind of skipped over it in **verse 1**. Paul says he is *called to be an apostle*. He's going to emphasize that his calling, and those who are *called to be saints*, are both called by the same Authority for the same purpose. The calling of an apostle and the calling of a Christian, in many ways, are the same. Now there are different responsibilities, and we'll see that as we go through the book, but the calling is very similar. So, Paul is not saying, "Well, I was called." He is saying, "All of us are called. Whoever you are, wherever you are in the

congregation, whatever issues may exist in the congregation, that person sitting beside you was just as 'called' as you were." And that's an important foundation.

So, here is this group, that, as we know—we haven't gotten to the verse yet—but as we know, is suffering from some division. And, Paul is telling this group to begin with, "You know, I was called to this and so were you. And if God called us out to come together, what justification do we have for being divided, for choosing up sides?"

He goes on and says here, *to those who are sanctified*. Okay, let's look at that word too, because that's a very important word. *Sanctified* comes from the Greek root word *hagias*—or *ha-GI-as*, it should be—which basically has a root meaning of just "set apart." It's usually translated *holy* or *saint* or *sanctified*, as we have here. But it's all the same root word, and it does mean "set apart."

But I like to emphasize that there are really three aspects to this setting apart. First of all, the individual or whatever it is that is sanctified—or made holy, hallowed—is set apart "from" everything else that's of similar nature. They are set apart "for" a specific purpose. They are not just "set apart"; they are "set apart for a purpose." And, for it to be this word, *hagias*—*holy*, *sanctified*—God is the One who does the setting apart.

[1:04:20]

Now there are many examples, and I hope you will take the time sometime to just study the word *holy* or *sanctified* or *saint* and see the ways in which it's used and apply this principle of these three points.

But think of a very simple example, the Sabbath day. The Sabbath day is *holy* time. It is "set apart from" all other time. If God didn't set it apart and declare it so, you and I couldn't tell that Sabbath time was any different than any other. But, God takes a hand. He sets that day apart from all the other days that seemed very much like them. But it isn't just set apart, it's "set apart for" God's purpose. God sets it apart to accomplish something.

If we simply use the day as a day to rest, as some people I've known would kind of see the Sabbath as a day to crash. They just kind of sleep all day and rest, and then they can go back and do other things. Or that the Sabbath day is given as a day so we can rest up, and then we can get back to it and hit it hard the next week.

No. The Sabbath has a purpose in it. It is set apart "from"; it's set apart "for a purpose"; and God alone is the One who has the power to determine what's holy time, and what isn't. So, it's an example of that. He says these individuals who were called are *sanctified*, set apart *in Christ Jesus*. Now we don't literally come inside of Jesus Christ, but we do live within the sphere of His influence. That's a voluntary thing. We can move outside of that. We can live in the world that's under the sphere of influence of the god of this world. But, when God calls us, He brings us in to that sphere of influence of Jesus Christ, and we can live our lives there.

So we are set apart in that way, called in that way, summoned, and as he says here, *to be saints*. That's what we're called to be. We joke about that sometimes because in our society it's

common for people to say, “Well, I’m no saint.” And as a Christian, you could legitimately respond, “I am.” I don’t recommend you do that, but it’s possible, because you, just like these people in Corinth 2000 years ago, are *called* by God *to be a saint(s)*. Again, it doesn’t mean you’re perfect; it means you are set apart by God. That’s very important.

And then Paul continues with this concept *with all*, as he says here, *with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord*. So, he makes the point that all Christians are called, wherever you are, whatever your background is. It makes no difference whether you’re called in a third world country, a first world country, you’re called as a wealthy person, you’re called as a slave—the call is the same. No one has a distinct call that somehow sets them apart from other people. We may be given different responsibility, but the calling from God to be a saint is the same for all of us. No one is superior to anyone else.

[1:07:32]

And then finally, before we finish up for today, I want to notice there, he talks about *those who call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord*. Unfortunately, through the years there are people who try to make a big issue out of *name*, as if it’s some kind of a sacred sound, that we have to make some kind of a Jewish sound with our mouths, and somehow God is more pleased with that—that we must refer to Jesus as Yahshua or Yehoshua or something like that. That’s not what *the name* means. That’s not what it means in Scripture.

Here, let me just read this quote from *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*:

The term *onoma* or *name* used here, as in a number of other places, signifies the person and the inherent character of the person designated by the name.

In our world today, we often use names simply as a kind of a designation of a person. But, we don’t even stop and think about what the name means. God doesn’t do that. Jesus Christ is called our “Savior,” and that’s what His name points to. But when we “call upon the name,” it’s not some sound. It’s calling upon the character, the unchanging, perfect character of Jesus Christ. We rely upon that. Calling upon it means we are relying upon that for our lives.

Okay. Well, we’ve gone a little bit longer than I wanted to go this time, but that will conclude this very first class. We hope you’ll join us next time for class number 2.

[1:09:02]