

1Corinthians 17-11-05a

Well, good morning. This is Sunday, the 5th of November, 2017. We begin a new study this morning in the book of 1 Corinthians, to which you can be turning.

Let's take a moment as we begin our worship to dedicate our time and our fellowship to the glory of the Lord Jesus and ask God's blessing on us as we look at the truth of His Word. Shall we pray? Father, what a wonderful privilege it is to spend this time together on another Sunday morning where we remember the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are so thankful for the new life that we have in Him, the potential and the opportunity that is ours because we are in Him, our relationship to You, the privilege of coming before You as we do at this time to express our thankfulness and our desire to live a life that is pleasing in Your sight.

We pray that as we embark on the study of this letter from Your Apostle that God the Holy Spirit will make it meaningful and add it to the resources of our souls so that we can benefit from it. It will rebuke, correct and instruct us, show us where we are falling short, enable us and empower us and give a voice through the Holy Spirit to instruct us and teach us in the way that we should go. We pray that our distributed spiritual gifts that are present in each one that has gathered here or via a technology link will be an evidence that we can be a blessing to one another through that which You have so graciously bestowed on each one of us.

And as a result, we will find ourselves motivated and encouraged and strengthened for the time that remains to us in this life as we prepare for service in the next. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, as I said, we are starting to look at 1 Corinthians and I suspect we will go on to 2 Corinthians. But because these are both rather lengthy epistles, we are going to, I say we, that's sort of the plural of majesty here. I am going to try to move with some sense of momentum.

I'm not going to posthole in any one spot or place. We remember that these were letters that were sent. They were probably dictated by the Apostle Paul.

And written down by a secretary or amanuensis. We get the idea that this letter may have been recorded as Paul paced up and down the room and spoke his thoughts out loud by our brother Sosthenes who is mentioned in verse 1. He is not otherwise referred to. And you would guess that perhaps Paul is acknowledging his workmanlike penmanship and so on here by mentioning him at the beginning.

It is a letter that is written to a church that Paul founded in the city of Corinth. So what we are going to look at here in our first session is the city of Corinth because the context is underneath my left arm. The context is set in a church that exists in a Roman city.

This is the capital of the Roman province of Achaia. And it's a very interesting place. It had a long history.

The earliest settlement of Corinth went back to sometime around 4000 B.C., the archaeologists tell us. And, of course, in the Old Testament centuries, say the thousand years preceding Christ, it was a Greek city-state. If you want to turn to the maps in the back of your Bible, get one of the last ones that shows Paul's missionary journeys and take a look at where Corinth is.

You will see that Greece itself extends down into the Mediterranean Sea, if you will, pretty much in the center. And it looks kind of like a raggedy sleeve, kind of hanging down from the larger portion. You can see the boot of Italy to the left.

You can see Asia to the right. And that center large land mass there of Macedonia and so on has this extension that sticks down. As I say, it looks sort of like a raggedy sleeve that points more or less southeast.

And then if you look closely, you'll see that there's something that looks like a detached right hand just below it. And that kind of a three-fingered hand is a cartoon hand, like the Warner Brothers characters have. But you can see there's a thumb there, and then three sort of south-pointing extensions.

That land mass there is the Peloponnesus. You've heard of the Peloponnesian Wars. And it would be an island, if it were not for a small isthmus that connects it to the main sleeve land mass up there in the northeast section.

And right on that isthmus is the town of the city of Corinth. And it kind of attaches where you'd expect the larger knuckle of the thumb to be. And Corinth sits on the Peloponnesian side of that isthmus and therefore controls it.

And you can see that there are two harbors. There's this very lengthy harbor that comes in from the west, pointing east. And that is the port of Lechium on the left.

That's L-E-C-H-A-E-U-M. If you travel in through that long, almost looks like a fjord. It's a long, skinny inlet there.

And at the end of that, there was a town called Lechium, and it was connected by a couple of miles of wall and road and walkway and passageway to the town of Corinth, which was up on the elevation. And then above Corinth is the Acro-Corinth. Acro, just like acrobat, somebody that bats up high.

Acro meaning high. And the Acro-Corinth rose above and provided a fortress in the city of Corinth. And on the top of that was the Temple of Aphrodite, and it had been there for a long time.

It was a great center of pagan worship and prostitution. Then as you continue to the east, across the Isthmus is another port, and this is Cancria. And Paul visits Cancria.

You have it mentioned in Acts and so on. And this was the gateway to Asia. So you've got

Lechium and the Corinthian Gulf there that leads you over to Italy, and you have Cancria and that gulf which leads you over toward Asia and the towns that are accessible through the Aegean Sea.

And what they would do is it was so much easier, believe it or not, for shipping to come in if it's eastbound to come in through Lechium or if it was westbound to come in through Cancria and unload their goods at Corinth and transport them across this three-and-a-half to five-mile gap than it was to sail all the way around the Peloponnesus. And it was kind of like the tip of South America, Cape Horn and the Cape of Good Hope. And a lot of these are very dangerous.

If you go around the southern tip of Africa or the southern tip of South America, it's a storied place for shipwrecks. And it was the same on the Peloponnesus. And it was safer and more economical to go.

They would actually dock the ships and either transport the cargo across land or the smaller boats, they would actually drag boat cargo and all. They had special machines with rollers, and they would just drag it those few miles to get it to the other side, stick it back in the water, and continue their journey. So Corinth was a commerce and trade gateway.

And they would charge duties and taxes on stuff that went back and forth east to west and west to east. Also, because of Sparta and all of the other cities that were down in the Peloponnesus, trade and goods that were going north and south from the Peloponnesus up into the main part of Greece would also cross. So it's literally a crossroads between the shipping trade east, west, west, east, and the land trade from everything Peloponnesian into Greece and back down.

And so they became very wealthy by the import and export fees that they collected. And they had this tremendous religious center. There was a temple to Jupiter that had been there.

I think it was constructed in the 6th century B.C. And seven of its three dozen columns still stand today. And it's one of the major tourist attractions in modern Corinth is to go and see these seven survivors of that temple. Very impressive.

I think they're Doric columns. And then up on the Acrocorinthus, there still are the remains of the temple to Aphrodite. But because of this, it was a place where the Greeks really felt autonomous.

And when the war between Athens and Sparta broke out, Corinth took the side of Sparta. Sparta being down there in the Peloponnesian area. And you can see where Athens is across the Isthmus there.

So there was a real sense of almost hubris there. So much so that in 146 B.C., when the Romans were taking over and dominating the region, the Corinthian people and that whole region sort of rose up in rebellion. And so the Roman general Mummius went down there and destroyed Corinth.

Leveled it. Slaughtered all of the men. And took all of the women and children into slavery.

And the city was empty for a century. From 146, all of the Greek city-state identity was completely lost. It was just fugitives and vagabonds haunting the ruins for a hundred years.

In 46 B.C., and think about this, in 46 B.C., we're in the days of Julius Caesar, right? Well, Julius Caesar said, I need a capital for the Achaean region here. The Achaean, what are those things called? It's a Roman province. No, I'm not getting old and senile.

The Roman province of Achaia. He wanted to establish a capital there and he saw its strategic importance. The man's thinking strategically all the time.

He started out as a general. So he rebuilds it. And in 46, exactly a hundred years after it was destroyed.

Rome destroys it. Rome rebuilds it. So naturally now it has a strong Roman identity.

But there's still a lot of Greeks who come in and populate it. A lot of the slaves and the lower and middle class are Greeks. We also know that there was a synagogue there, although it was not very large.

But they've actually found the lintel stone that says, Synagogue of the Jews in the ruins of Corinth. They didn't even know there was a synagogue there. There's no real mention of it made.

But they found the sign in the rubble, the marble sign. And it says, Synagogue Judeon or whatever. And so they say, hey, I guess there was a synagogue here.

And, of course, we know from the Bible that there was. Because that's where Paul would typically start teaching. So that's a bit of the background.

But it has been said that Corinth, by the time of Paul, which is going to be about 100 years. They were gone for 100 years. Now they've been there for about 100 years.

Paul goes to Corinth on his first missionary journey. And establishes the church there. He evangelizes.

He links up with the small Jewish community. He meets Aquila and Priscilla there. All of this is in Acts 18-ish.

And so he starts out in the synagogue. But as happened in the previous towns, which were Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea, Paul would always start at the synagogue. The Jews would get all riled up and say, here's a guy that's trying to corrupt our religion.

And they'd run him out of town. And so he had this series of dismal reverses. And you get the idea that Paul was a little bit depressed.

But he comes to Corinth. And they do the same thing. He starts in the synagogue.

They kick him out. But there's a guy that's got a house right next door to the synagogue. And so Paul moves in there and begins teaching.

So the people who were interested, all they've got to do is go right next door. And there's a response there. And it is so successful that unlike most of the other places, Paul stays in Corinth for a year and a half teaching.

And that's the foundation of this church. He's then going to leave and go to Ephesus. He's going to be other places.

He's going to go back down and do other things. And he'll be gone for about a year and a half. So you remember at the, I think I said first missionary journey, Paul had come back from the first missionary journey and gone to the Jerusalem Council.

And they had decided, you know, here's what we're going to do with the Gentiles and so on. And so then Paul had had that journey with Barnabas. And so after they said, all we're going to do is say, don't eat things strangled.

And even that was still some legalism. But James was involved and you can hardly help that. So after the Jerusalem Council, which is in Acts chapter 16, Paul embarks on his second missionary journey.

And that's when he's going to found this church. That's when he's going to spend the year and a half. Because he was going to go to Asia.

But he gets a message from God in Acts 16.6. It says, don't go to Asia. And so Paul, Silas and Timothy went to Troas. And then you get the man from Macedonia vision.

You know, come over here. And you remember Macedonia is up in that sleeve area above the Peloponnesus. And so he goes to Macedonia and they go to Philippi.

And a lot of people are saved. A church is established. Then he goes to Thessalonica.

Then to Berea and then to Athens. And that's Acts chapter 17. So he's up in that main area of Greece.

Then from Athens he goes down to Corinth. And it has been described, Corinth has been described as sort of a combination in that day of New York, Los Angeles and Las Vegas. And you think about it, if you just subtracted everything in the middle of the United States, you got the port in New York, you got the port in San Francisco and you got Las Vegas.

If you just took all the rest of the country out and crammed those three cities together, that's sort of the milieu. It's a melting pot. There's a lot of money sloshing around.

There's intense immorality and prostitution. So much so that a couple of centuries before this, when it was still a Greek city-state, a new verb entered the Greek language, which was to Corinthiaomai or Corinthiazō. And to Corinthianize was to prostitute.

And a Corinthian kore, a Corinthian woman, was a synonym for a prostitute. That's its reputation. Strabo I think says that at one time that temple of Aphrodite up on the Aqua Corinthis had 1,000 temple prostitutes.

It was a huge thriving business. And by the way, at the top of the Aqua Corinth, they had the temple of Aphrodite. At the base of it, they had the temple to Asclepius.

Do you remember who Asclepius is? He's the god of healing. Because they would go up there and get infected with STDs and then they would go down to the temple of Asclepius to get healed. Corinth was also blessed with a really great water supply.

And a lot of these waters were channeled to the temple of Asclepius. And they seemed to use a lot of water in the healing process trying to mend people up. It was thought that they were kind of like mineral baths that they used to have in Claremore.

But they had an abundant supply of fresh water. They were noted for that. And so even though it was a unique combination of natural attributes.

And this is background because Paul is later in this letter going to be talking about gifts and things that God distributes that are naturally available and what do you do with those. And you can see the cultural background and the historical background of the city itself that it was gifted with a lot of natural resources and a lot of things that could either be used for good or ill. Because there is a lot of traffic through there, you have a great opportunity for missionary enterprise.

It was a wonderful place to found a church and have the gospel spread. Because people who might be there in passing would go throughout the Roman Empire. It was a real nexus.

So it was a very strategic place to plant a church. And you get the idea that maybe this is one of the reasons that Paul spent that year and a half there on his second missionary journey is he recognized and there was a great response largely among the Gentiles. There are only a few Jewish names that are even mentioned in Corinth.

And if you remember what you've read in the past in 1 Corinthians in particular, it's largely, you know, such were some of you idolaters and immorality types of various sorts. But you were washed, you were sanctified. He doesn't really say you used to follow the law of Moses, you used to... It's not like Galatians, you know, going back under the law.

It doesn't seem much of a Jewish presence. There are some, like Priscilla and Aquila, but not that many. And Crispus appears to be Jewish.

But it's a diverse population and you get this noted in 1 Corinthians 12, 13 where Paul says, by one spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free. There's this great not only ethnic diversity, cultural diversity, but also economic. We get the idea that there are some people who are well off.

Chloe seems to have a household and seems to have domiciles both in Corinth and in Ephesus. And we're going to find out that the people from Chloe who informed Paul of the situation in Corinth to which he's writing this letter may have been her emissaries, perhaps her, we say slaves, but these would have been her *oikimazoi*, the ones who were in charge of her business enterprises and that she was well off and she had these who traveled back and forth in the conduct of business. And so you've got Jews like Aquila, Priscilla, and Crispus.

You've got Romans. We have Fortunatus, Quartus, a brother. We have Gaius, Titius, Justus mentioned and these are obviously Romans.

And then you have Greeks like Stephanas, Achaicus, and Erastus. And these names tell us that you've got this mix. And so you think about our country today and the diversity of backgrounds and people you're liable to run into who are first or second generation off the boat, so to speak.

Their parents came over from another country or another culture and have perhaps preserved that culture and so you have this constant intermingling and the potential for people to become subjective. I am different than you and it is easy to move from observing a difference to deciding that there is a qualitative difference. If there is a difference of economic status, a difference of employment status, blue collar, white collar, a difference of ethnicity, or you name it.

Slave and free. Jew or Greek. Rich or poor.

Well off, not so well off. And you think about the things you already know about Corinthians. This is the letter where he's going to talk about not being sensitive to other people at the meal.

This is the letter where he's going to talk about you think your gift is better than somebody else's gift. This is the letter where he talks about one part of the body shouldn't be lording it over another part of the body. And you can see the potential for that in this tremendous diversity.

And you also know from I hear there are wars and divisions among you that this letter is a great call to unity. Right? So you can see how the background in this city and at this time with these factors at work influence the content of the letter. So what about this church that Paul founded and invested so much of his time in? He's teaching daily in this place.

We know because of the mention of Gaius they've actually found an inscription of Gaius who is the treasurer of the city. There's an inscription that talks about him being there in 51 A.D. Or A.D. 51 I should say. You know that's really incorrect to put the A.D. after the number.

It's number B.C. and A.D. thus and so. Anno Domini 51. So just so you know it's kind of like where do you put the apostrophe in its? Is it I.T.S. with no apostrophe or one with? You've got to parse the contraction or say it's a possessive.

Same thing here. So this is circa A.D. 50 to 52 we'll say. The church had already been founded previous to that and Paul is going to write the letter shortly after that.

So we're right around the mid-century mark in the first century A.D. years. And this is probably about three years after it was founded because we know that there were previous letters exchanged. So Paul established the church, taught into it, thought everything was good to go and then he left.

Well Gallio makes a ruling in Acts chapter 18 because the Jews that were opposing Paul as they had done in Philippi, as they had done in Thessalonica, as they had done in Berea, they tried to drag Paul up before the Romans and say this gospel that he's teaching is anti-Roman. He's breaking Roman law. But they had to be kind of careful because of course if it's because he's talking about God or a Messiah, well that would indict Judaism as well.

And so they're kind of walking a fine line. Well Gallio is a really smart guy and he makes a very significant ruling that you find in, he's the pro-consul. That's why he's in Corinth in Acts 18, 12 through 17.

So the Jews bring Paul up on charges and say he's not a faithful Jew and he's not a good citizen. Well Gallio, before Paul even has a chance to open his mouth and make a defense, Gallio throws the case out of court. And this is a very significant ruling because it sets a precedent throughout the Roman Empire.

And never again do you find somebody being brought up to a Roman court on these charges because Gallio's ruling as pro-consul is definitive. And he says basically Christians, from a Roman point of view, Christians are a sect of the Jews. We've already ruled that Judaism can exist and coexist in the Roman Empire.

And because the Christians are a subset of the Jews, we're not going to listen to Jews bringing the Christians up. He says this is an intermural squabble here. This is internecine warfare.

You guys settle your own stuff. Don't be trying to get us to adjudicate what is essentially an argument between Jews. And so he throws the thing out of court.

Now it doesn't mean that the Christians are not going to be persecuted by Rome, but that's going to come back up under Nero. And Nero is going to get a fresh excuse, I think with satanic inspiration, to start using Christians as nightlights to line the path and blame them for the burning of Rome, which he of course did himself. I don't know that the violin had actually been invented at that time.

But it's pretty well established that Nero himself set fire to Rome and then blamed it on the

Christians. At any rate, Galio didn't really care anything about the Jews, but he didn't want his court being cluttered up with this dispute. And so this is also part of the background, is this diminution of Paul by the Jews.

And oddly enough, we're going to see in 1 Corinthians that the issue, we always think, we read the first chapter or two and we say, I hear there are wars and divisions among you. I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos, I'm of Cephas, and Paul is calling them to unity. We think, well, the occasion of the letter is primarily to heal factions and divisions in the church.

Not to say that those factions did not exist, and I'm not the first one to observe this, but I agree with those who do think, and it's kind of a minority, but we're often in the minority. The occasion of this letter is not so much, because read the letter. He doesn't spend the bulk of the letter talking to one faction saying, you guys are right and this faction is wrong.

Or you guys over here, he doesn't say the poor are right and the rich are wrong. He doesn't say the Greeks are right and the Jews are wrong. He doesn't say the faction of Paul is right and the faction of Apollos is wrong.

He calls them all to unity, certainly, but what he is writing against is subjectivity. Eyes on people. Why are there these wars and divisions? And why are they dividing into denominations, if you will? It gives them self-importance.

When you say, I am of Paul or I am of Apollos, the emphasis isn't the Paul part of it. It is the I am part of it. I am better than you because I am of Paul.

I am better than you because I am of Apollos. And it is the subjective nature of this that reflects itself later in the letter. Well, I am Jewish and you're a Greek.

I have this spiritual gift and you don't. I speak in tongues and you don't. And it is this subjectivity that is manifested in dividing into groups with names.

But the division itself is not the problem. The subjectivity underneath it is the problem. And that is the common thread.

And so this is going to be a very helpful letter for us to study, not because we have a church that is suffering from divisions. Not because we have a group that is potentially going to divide over economics or over ethnicities or over one thing or another. It is because this letter teaches us how to watch for subjectivity and distraction and deflection that stems from it.

The examples in Corinth may not be directly pertinent, but the thinking that underlies those examples is. That's what we're going to be watching for in this letter. You can see the potential for it in the nature of the city, in the founding of the church.

And we're going to pause now and take our break. When we come back, we're going to see what happened in the intervening time between when Paul founded this church and spent a

year and a half. He's going to talk about this in the first part of the letter.

I laid a solid foundation. Others are building upon it. But something is going wrong in the building.

And we'll take a look at that when we come back from the break.