

Lake Cities Community Church  
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Pastor Craig Schill  
Series: 1 Corinthians

**Growing Up. Building Up.**  
Acts 18:1-18

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When we lived in Flagstaff our church was blessed to have a missionary family as part of our membership; Tim and Julie Brown. They worked on the Navajo reservation proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They, at the time, had a son T.J. and a daughter named Hannah. In fact, I remember when Hannah was born - it is always exciting to be in a small church when a baby is born! Everyone anticipated the birth and celebrated our newest member. But it was not very long that it became clear there was a problem. Hannah had difficulty swallowing, and so they put a feeding tube to help her get started, but even after that she would not grow. They took her to doctor after doctor - specialists all over the country to try to diagnose the growth disorder, but without success. And so we prayed mightily for this little baby girl.

*Nothing is more natural than a growing child* and nothing is more concerning to a parent than when a child is not growing the way they should.

And that must have been to some degree how Paul felt about his four year old church plant in the city of Corinth. He expected to see a certain amount of spiritual growth – progress in their faith. But he didn't find it. They were not where they should have been spiritually. The title of our new sermon series in 1 Corinthians is "Growing Up and Building Up." Reflecting two major themes in the letter. In this book Paul is going to diagnose their growth disorder and provide them a prescription to start them growing again.

How about you? Are you where you should be spiritually? Given how long you have been a Christian and the resources you have had at your disposal - are you as mature as you should be at this time in your life? How about our church? We are about the same age as the church in Corinth - 3 ½ years old - we are not very old, but we should have made some progress in those years? Are we where we should be right now? These are the types of questions that our study in 1 Corinthians is going to confront us with.

The purpose of my sermon today is to orient us and to introduce this great book. To do that we have three tasks. First we will see the **legacy** of the church - by studying how the church was planted from Acts chapter 18. Second we will look at the **location** the city of Corinth itself, and with the legacy and location in mind, we will look at the **letter** and identify major themes and see how the legacy and location begin to impact our understanding of this book.

### **Legacy of the Corinthian Church. Acts 18:1-18**

Let's start with the legacy of Corinth. Turn with me now to Acts chapter 18, verses 1-18. It is interesting that this morning I taught the first of two classes in our LCCC information class. I tell newer people in the church that to understand where we are at today, you must know something about how we were planted, and some of the stories from those early times. That is what we are doing here. We will move the verses quickly and don't want to linger too long - but there are two things I want you to pay attention to: First who is in the core group, and second what conflicts does the church experience. Core group and conflicts.

Acts 18:1 After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. Here is a map of the area Paul has already been to around 10 cities in his second missionary journey, and now he makes the short trip from Athens to Corinth in modern day Greece what was then the Roman province of Achaia, and Corinth was the capitol. Acts 18:2 And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, Acts 18:3 and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers. To support himself Paul finds the tentmaker's guild and meets Aquila and Priscilla the first two members of his core group. They were already believers who had come to Corinth from Rome where the Jews had been expelled by Emperor Claudius in January in A.D. 49. God used that persecution to link them up with the Apostle Paul

Verse four: Acts 18:4 And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. Like every new church plant, there is intentional evangelism – primarily here to Jews in the synagogue, though some Greeks are there as well. Acts 18:5 But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. Silas and Timothy had been checking up on other churches and the rejoin Paul in Corinth, It was a joyful reunion as they brought good word from the church at Thessalonica and much needed funds from the church in Philippi, which allows Paul to stop working part time and fully devote himself to the Corinthian church.

Acts 18:6 But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the

Gentiles.” Paul was probably initially welcomed warmly into the Synagogue, but after a time, the Jewish leaders saw him as a threat and the opposition began. Paul refocused his priorities and strategy to the Gentiles in the City. [Acts 18:7](#) Then he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue. Another person joins the core group – Justus being a Gentile.

Then a HUGE breakthrough for the church [Acts 18:8](#) Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized. Under the Rabbi, each synagogue had 1 or 2 leaders who helped with the services. They were influential people. Paul may have been frustrated with a lack of response from the Jews but Crispus was listening is convinced, and believes in Christ starting a revival in the city - It is a major spiritual victory. Perhaps the church doubles overnight. Things are going well, and get even better in verse nine: [Acts 18:9](#) And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid *any longer*, but go on speaking and do not be silent; [Acts 18:10](#) for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.” The simmering opposition from the Jews is apparently growing. Maybe Paul has received death threats. The Lord gives Paul a word of encouragement. Keep preaching the Word. I am with You. I have many people in this City. We are reminded that Jesus builds His church – we are but servants of Him.

And with that encouragement we read, verse 11: [Acts 18:11](#) And he settled *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. This is a long time for the Apostle to stay in any one place. He is highly invested in this church, personally shepherding its formation and its early growth. This is an important point to keep in mind as we get into the letter itself.

But the conflict that we read about earlier comes to a head: [Acts 18:12](#) But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat, [Acts 18:13](#) saying, "This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law." In other words, seeing the new Christian church growing with both prominent Jews and Gentiles, the Jews adjust their strategy, and bring a lawsuit against the church. This is a significant crisis that threatens to stop the positive momentum. [Acts 18:14](#) But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you; [Acts 18:15](#) but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters." [Acts 18:16](#) And he drove them away from the judgment seat. Gallio became a ruler in Corinth in the Fall of A.D. 51. His dismissal of this case is a major victory for the Corinthian church and an embarrassment to their enemies.

But the Jewish leaders do not go quietly: [Acts 18:17](#) And they all took hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and *began* beating him in front of the judgment seat. But Gallio was not concerned about any of these things. The opposition from the Jews turn violent, and another member of the core group, another synagogue leader no less, Sosthenes is beaten, and Gallio who told the Jews to handle it themselves stands by and allows it to happen. [Acts 18:18](#) Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his haircut, for he was keeping a vow. As Paul leaves now this 18-month old church, notice that we have a comment about hair length and vows. Just tuck that away.

In summary: The Core Group includes seven people listed by name: Priscilla, Aquila – persecuted Jews from Rome. Silas, Timothy Part of the church plant staff. Titus Jusus a new Gentile believer, Crispus and Sosthenes prominent Jews and former synagogue leaders. Pay attention and remember these people, because we will meet five of them we will meet again in 1 Corinthians.

How about the conflict faced by this church in the early months? Here is how I would describe it: *The Corinthian church faced emotional, spiritual, legal and physical persecution from enemies outside the church.* Inside the church we have no recorded strife or division, only the joy of new conversions and growth. Keep that in mind, too, for when we come to the book of 1 Corinthians it will be just the opposite; very little outside persecution recorded, but much internal strife and division.

But for now, what we learn from Acts 18 is that the Corinthian church has a great legacy of faith. We see clearly God's power at work, lives being transformed, the church growing, and God protecting and vindicating the church from persecution. It is a strong legacy of faith. And we also as a church have a strong legacy of faith from our mother church, and while that is a blessing it is no guarantee that the future will always be problem free.

### **Location – Background of the City of Corinth**

With that background, let's now consider the location of the City. What was Corinth like? I think if you remember the following four points, you will have a good perspective on Corinth.

**City of prosperity.** Corinth was the wealthiest city in Greece. As real estate agents like to say, "location, location, location" Corinth was - strategically located in the middle of

both land trade routes and it was a busy port city. They had a land bridge from which they would roll ships from one coast to the other. All the commerce and money flowed into this city. It offered the best in cultural and sporting events, boasting of a 18,000 seat theatre (same as AAC) and a 3,000 seat concert hall (Meyerson 2,000). It was the center of culture and business. Corinth was very prosperous.

**City of Pride.** And perhaps their prosperity led to their pride. From their great prosperity was an attitude of self-sufficiency. But they also had much municipal pride. Corinth was a new city, recently re-settled in 46 BC by Julius Caesar with many retired military people and freed slaves. It had grown quickly to about 80,000 people at the time of 1 Corinthians. As a Roman Colony, Corinth had political rights and freedoms like no other city in the area. Rowlett recently celebrated being named the 24<sup>th</sup> best city for our size in the Country and that brought much municipal pride. Corinth would have been #1. They believed they were better than the cities around them.

**City of Philosophies.** The people at Corinth were enamored with the latest and greatest teachers and philosophers. One philosophy they embraced had to do with the elevation of eloquence – they admired beautiful speech – form over content. We will their love of speech in 1 Corinthians. Greek philosophy was popular too, which exalted the spirit over the flesh – we will also see this in the book. Others held to the philosophy of hedonism – indulging the flesh and its desires - which is also in the letter. Also, I would also put in here their worship of the pantheon of Gods. Corinth was an equal opportunity religious smorgasbord. They had at least 26 different temples and shrines. Here are ruins from Corinth of the temple of Apollo, ruins of the temple of Aphrodite, reported to have 1,000 temple prostitutes at one time, and a shrine for Emperor worship – this one to Octavia.

Corinth was a prosperous city, it was a prideful city that embraced many, many different philosophies and religions. Finally Corinth was known as a:

**City of Promiscuity. There were a couple ancient phrases** – “To live like a Corinthian” and a “Corinthian girl” – neither were complements. Many of the philosophies and religions of the day (as well as the general Roman and Greek cultures) exalted sexual expressions and experimentation. Sometimes we think that only our generation has a serious struggle with sexual sin. Though they did not have Internet pornography, they did have a society that was more open to sexual expression and sin openly than we have today. This struggle with immorality is a major theme in the book

What you need to know about Corinth is that it is City of Prosperity, a City of Pride, a City of Philosophies and a City of Promiscuity. In summary, I love what Gordon Fee says in his commentary: “Corinth was at once the New York, Los Angeles and Las Vegas of the ancient world.” (Fee 3).

### **The Letter - Overview**

**Corinth had a great legacy and a challenging location.** Let’s now look at the letter itself – pull out the book chart I made for you in your bulletin. You might want to keep this handy during our study of this book.

Starting with the purpose statement: Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthian church in response to alarming reports he had recently heard and read. Paul exhorts the young church to set aside worldly wisdom, division, immorality, and arrogance and to instead pursue love and godly living based on sound theology.

It had been about three years since Paul left the City of Corinth and he received alarming, disturbing reports on how the church was doing. In response to those reports he writes this letter. The letter is akin to an intervention a loved one might do with a family member. “You’ve got to stop this behavior and this direction, and instead pursue love and godly living.”

I take the key verse to be 1 Cor 13:13 – **But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.** The core problem in the church is that they are not acting according to love, but out of selfishness and pride. At the end of the day, without love, what we do is meaningless. The Corinthians had forgotten that - which is why in the midst of one of the most negative letters in the Bible we have (by contrast) perhaps the most beautiful passage of Scripture in chapter 13.

After an introduction – which we still study next week - the book breaks down into two major sections. From chapter one verse ten to chapter six verse 20 Paul is responding to what he has heard. **Verse 11, “I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe’s people that there are quarrels among you.”** Chloe’s people may be from Corinth, or they may be from Ephesus where Paul is writing the letter, and just back from a visit, we don’t know. But the report was alarming, startling and prompted Paul to write this letter. Four major issues are raised by Chloe’s report – issues regarding division, incest, lawsuits and immorality. Yes – that would alarm anyone, wouldn’t you agree? Division is arguable the controlling issues in the book, as Paul devotes nearly four chapters to that one topic. The topic of lawsuits is fascinating – because when the church was young and being persecuted by the Jews, they used a lawsuit to try to stop their ministry, and the judge threw it out. In a great turn of irony, the church is now suing each other!! And Paul is

pulling out his hair. The weapon of the enemy has been taken up by the people of God and turned on each other.

The second part of the book runs from chapter seven, verse one to chapter sixteen verse four, where Paul responds to what he has read, 7:1, “Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is not good...” This is a good place to point out that the letter of 1 Corinthians is not the first letter by Paul to this church. There is reference in the book to another letter Paul wrote, which apparently was spurned by the church; and they write back to Paul rudely dismissing his authority over them.

In this section Paul takes up the topics of marriage, food sacrificed to idols, various issues associated with the Sunday morning worship service, the resurrection of Jesus and a special offering being collected for those in Jerusalem.

You can see that this is a topical book – we are going to move from topic to topic. Paul says – there is a problem with division – let’s talk about it. There is a problem with lawsuits – here is what you need to do, and so on.

If you look in the gray boxes on the right, some major themes in the book are division, sexual immorality as we have seen; but underlying all the issues is a theme of practical application. 1 Corinthians has over 100 imperative verbs. Do this. Don’t do that. This is applied Christianity – They became Christians, but never learned how to apply the faith to their everyday lives. This letter is Paul’s remedy to that problem. Associated with this is the theme of the importance of theology. Paul does not just say do this and that, but he provides along the way the theological reasons why they are to abstain from sin and love one another. He continues to preach Christ and the centrality of Jesus and the resurrection. Finally, Paul’s spiritual authority over them is a strong theme in the book. He

has been gone for three years, they have moved on from him, and are now following other more glamorous people, but Paul forces himself back to them arguing that he alone is their spiritual father and they must listen to his message.

You will notice as we go through the book that Paul often teaches by using contrasts. Wise / foolish; powerless / powerful; humble / proud; spiritual / natural; mature and immature. Contrasts are a great rhetorical tool to bring clarity to what is right.

Finally, you will notice as we go through 1 Corinthians that it has a sharp tone. It is intense – Paul loves them but this is a tough love letter. At times Paul is combative with them, almost attacking in his words. Incredulous, sarcastic at times. He says in chapter four: **1Cor. 4:8 You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; 1Cor. 4:10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor.** This is an emotionally intense letter full of spiritual frustration. But the way I like to think of it is not as mere criticism but confrontation. You can criticize from a distance – but you confront someone up close. Paul is confronting them with their sin and challenging them to change their ways. Sometime we are motivated by the carrot and other times we need the stick. This is a stick letter.

We have seen a great legacy, a challenging location and now an intense letter.

## **Conclusion / Application**

Let me leave us with two items of application as we conclude. First I want us to consider the tension of **Being in the world, but not of the world.** There are two major mistakes we can make as Christians. One is to disconnect and isolate ourselves from the

world and the second is to grow to love and be captivated with the world and its promises of wealth, fame and success. The Corinthian church fell off into too much loving of the world and all it had to offer. How about you and me? Are we too much in love with the world? The old hymn says: *This world is not my home, I'm just passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from Heaven's open door And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.*

The second area of tension is **Do your behaviors match your beliefs?** This letter argues that if you say you believe, then that has serious implications for your behavior. The Corinthians started out great – but their spiritual growth had stalled and their behaviors did not keep up with their beliefs. How about you? How about our church?

I reconnected this week with Tim and Julie Brown on Facebook as we had lost touch and I didn't know what happened to Hannah. What I found out is that she struggled with her growth disorder until junior high and then it resolved. Here is a picture of her with her dad – she is now 23 years old. Amazing! After going through a number of years, God granted her the growth she needed. Maybe you have been going through a number of years of your own struggles with spiritual growth? Now is the time to start growing again, as we study this book.

An old slave preacher wrote many years ago, listen closely as we end with this:

We ain't what we ought to be,  
and we ain't what we want to be,  
and we ain't what we're going to be,  
but thank God we ain't what we was.

That is spiritual growth in the Christian life!