

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS - PART ONE

This hard hitting letter to a church in big trouble was written by Paul from Ephesus,(I Cor.16:8) in about 53AD only 2-3 years after his first visit to Corinth, described in Acts 18, and before his second visit in Acts 20. He was writing at least partly in response to letters or visits from Christians in Corinth telling Paul of problems in the church.(I Cor.1:11)

Corinth was a fast moving centre of commerce with an equally fast moving night life. It was a city of about 700,000, some 500,000 of whom were slaves. Situated on a narrow isthmus, between the Adriatic and Aegean seas, over which ships were dragged on rollers to avoid the dangerous waters to the south, it commanded the crossroads of trade. The Corinthians were preoccupied with two things, making money and spending it. To 'live like a Corinthian' was a saying in the Roman Empire which described 'living it up'. The temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, had 1000 cult prostitutes. Corinth had a large Jewish community. In such a city where does one begin to share the gospel of Jesus Christ?

The answer, according to Paul, was twofold, first in the work place and secondly in the home. He immediately began to do both by taking a live-in job with a Jewish couple, Aquila and Priscilla. Working alongside Paul as a tentmaker, Aquila had every opportunity through the quality of his work, his honesty as an employee, and his Christ-like character to see that the message he shared was true. Priscilla had the same opportunity to see kindness and helpfulness in the home from her boarder. Perhaps over the meal table they talked endlessly of the Christ of the Old Testament, and Paul's claim that the Christ was Jesus. Somewhere in this time Priscilla and Aquila put their trust in Jesus Christ.(Acts 18:2,3,18)

Paul frequently emphasised how he made it a practice to work for his support with his own hands rather than charge for the gospel.(Acts 20:34; I Cor.4:12)

The first base for the Christian church in Corinth was the home of Priscilla and Aquila in which people found love and acceptance, and heard the truth. When Paul's message was rejected by the Jews, he moved on to the house of Titius Justus, a worshipper of God, a Greek impressed by the Jewish faith. Being right next to the synagogue must have irritated the Jews. Paul's ministry in the synagogue was not wasted. Crispus, the Jewish leader, and his family were converted. Presumably his home became the third home church in the city.(Acts 18:4-8)

The Lord gave Paul special reassurance that he should continue teaching in Corinth for what, for him, was an unusually long time.(Acts 18:9-11) At first sight it is a puzzle that after so much good teaching the church should be in trouble so quickly. Because of the intense pressure of life in a place like Corinth it is likely that the church would not have survived at all had Paul not stayed for a year and a half to give them a solid grounding.

Finally, as so often before, trouble broke out with the religious people. Gallio is well known from Roman history. He was proconsul from 51-53AD. His action in throwing out the case against Paul demonstrates how even an ungodly legal system may protect our freedom to preach Christ. The Jews in frustration beat up their new leader and advocate, Sosthenes. When Paul left Corinth he took Priscilla and Aquila with him.(Acts 18:12-18)

1:1,2 Q.1 Who wrote this letter? How does Paul describe their relationship with each other? How does he describe his relationship with God? How does he describe the Corinthian Christians? Is it a surprise that he calls them saints in view of the rest of his letter?

1:3 Q.2 What resources did the Corinthians have as Christians? How would this be an important reminder in the light of what he was about to say concerning their problems? In how many other letters did Paul use the same greeting? Was he just being polite?

1:4-9 Q.3 How could Paul pray such a prayer of thanks for a group of Christians who were doing everything wrong? List all the things he thanked God for. If they had so much in Christ how could they have such problems? How did his prayer help before he went on to rebuke them?

1:10-17 Q.4 What is the main problem Paul dealt with in chapter one? What did he suggest is the root problem of division among Christians? Why did he make such a point of how few people he baptised in Corinth? Aren't we supposed to get as many converts as possible? Give modern examples of division in the church and the reasons for it. How can we help or hinder?

1:18-25 Q.5 What is the second reason given in this chapter why Christians become divided? Do we have to be stupid and uneducated to become Christians? How do the wrong attitudes to the gospel described in verse 22 still appear today? How in the light of this section should we present Christ to intelligent and educated people?

1:26-31 Q.6 To what three things are we called by God?(1:1,2,9) How are we supposed to respond to God's call to us according to verse 2? How is 'considering our calling' going to help problems of division in the church? How does boasting cause division? And how can it heal division? What four things have we received in Christ according to verse 30? What do these four words mean and how do they link together?