

CHAPTER 6

Problems in the Church

(1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians)

Problems From Within -- The Corinthian Letters

There are problems in any and in every church. Once a man saw all kinds of problems in his local church. He decided that he would leave this church and look for the perfect church. Before he left, someone gave him this sound advice: "When you find the perfect church, make sure that you do not join it, or you will ruin it!"

The church is made up of people, and people have problems. However, there is a real God who has real answers to the real problems that people face! No church is perfect, but "as for God, His way is _____" (Psalm 18:30) and God's Word or God's law is _____ (Psalm 19:7)! The Church has a perfect God and a perfect Book!

There was once a church located in the city of Corinth which had a multitude of problems. Before we look at some of these problems, let us first learn something about the city.

The City of Sin

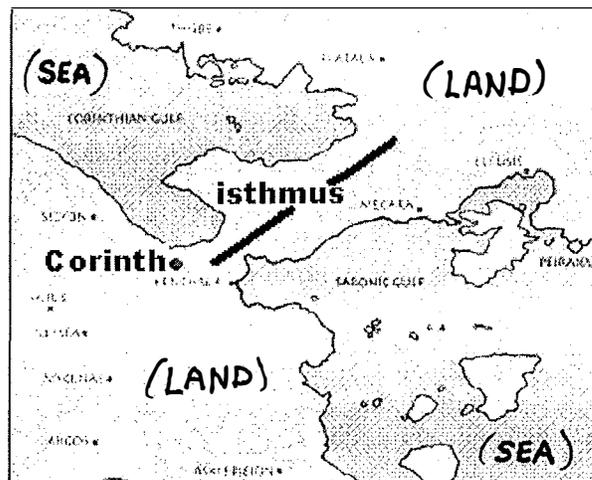
Look at the following map and locate the city of Corinth.



[The above map was taken from *The MacMillian Bible Atlas* by Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah (map #238).]

The southern part of the land of Greece looks very much like a large island except for a very narrow strip of land which connects the southernmost part with the mainland. Can you find this narrow strip of land on the map? The city of Corinth was located very near to this narrow strip of land which is called an "isthmus." [An isthmus is a narrow strip of land that connects two larger land areas.]

Corinth was a very important city, especially for those who traveled or traded. It was dangerous to travel around the southernmost part of Greece due to frequent stormy weather. It was much better to take a shortcut. Traders or travelers could get off their ship near Corinth, carry their cargo across the narrow strip of land (about 4 miles across) and then load it onto another ship. Smaller ships could even be moved across a wooden slipway (a ship tramway with wooden rails) which was laid down from one sea to the other. It was worth all the effort to cross this land, because not only was the other way more dangerous, it was also a much longer trip (about a 200 mile journey). To go the Corinth way not only saved lives but it saved time! The following map gives a close up view of the city of Corinth and the nearby isthmus.



In 1881-1893 a canal was dug which made it very easy for ships to cross this isthmus. This modern engineering feat is four miles in length, spanned by a 170-foot high bridge.

Because of its location, Corinth had a constant flow of visitors and travelers. It was a center of commerce and trade. There was a great marketplace in the city as well as many taverns where people would drink and get drunk. Many people became rich because of all the trade and business, and often they would spend their money in sinful ways. There was a great theater which provided the people with entertainment. The city was famous for athletic events. The well-known Isthmian games were held every two years. These were the most famous athletic events in the Roman Empire apart from the Olympic games.

Most of all, the city was known for its sin and wickedness. The people of the city honored the goddess Aphrodite (Venus) who was the goddess of love. Her worship is better described by the word "lust". Her temple was filled with 1,000 wicked, lustful women and the men who visited this temple would pay large sums of money to "worship" the goddess of lust. Such wickedness is described in the Bible by the word "fornication" (see what Paul wrote to the Corinthians about this--1 Corinthians 5:1; 5:9-10; 6:9; 6:15-20; 7:2; 10:8; 2 Corinthians 12:21).

People throughout the Roman Empire knew that Corinth was the city of sin. It had a horrible reputation. A good description of the pagan people of Corinth is found in Romans 1:21-32 (in fact, when Paul wrote these words to the Romans he was in the city of Corinth).

Paul's first visit to this city as a missionary is described in Acts 18:1-11. How long did he stay in Corinth (verse 11)? _____ At the beginning of this time, God encouraged Paul's heart by saying to him, "I have _____ in this city" (Acts 18:10). Even in this city polluted by sin, God was going to do a great work! There were many people in this city of sin that God was going to save and transform (turn their lives completely around)! You can read about some of these people in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. What are some of the descriptions of these people before God's grace reached them (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)?

How would you describe them after God did His saving work in their hearts (1 Corinthians 6:11)?

Are there cities of sin in the world today? Are today's cities centers of purity and virtue and love? Can God do a work in the cities and towns of our land today? God delights in pulling people out of the filthy muck and mire of sin and in setting them on the ROCK, Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 3:11; Psalm 40:2)!

God's Answers to Man's Problems

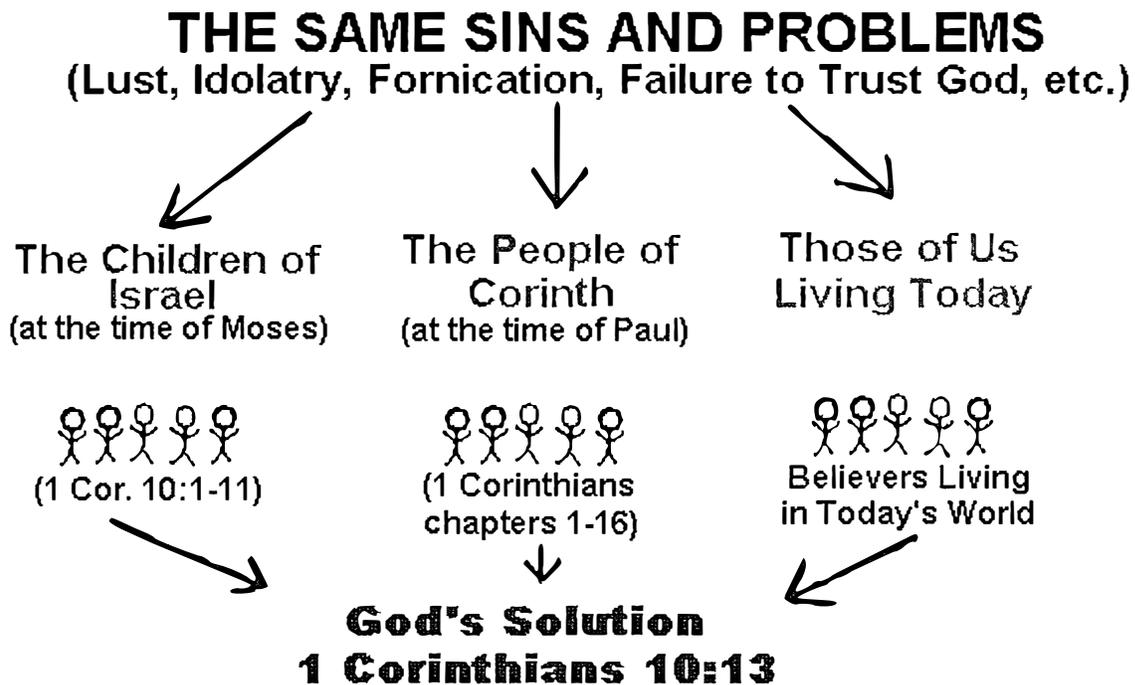
Paul's first letter to the Corinthians was written about 55 A.D. This was one of Paul's earlier letters. The book of 1 Corinthians reveals many of the problems that the Corinthian church faced. In fact, there is a problem in almost every chapter of the book. Paul wrote to the believers living in this city to give them God's answers to these many problems:

1. The Problem of Divisions in the Church (1 Cor. 1:10-13)
2. The Problem of Worldly Wisdom (1 Cor. 1:17-2:16)
3. The Problem of Carnality (1 Cor. 3:1-4)
4. The Problem of Immorality in the Church (1 Cor. 5:1-13)
5. The Problem of Bringing a Fellow Believer to Court (1 Cor. 6:1-8)
6. The Problem of Fornication (1 Cor. 6:15-20)
7. The Problem of Marriage and Divorce (1 Cor. 7:1-40)
8. The Problem of Meats Offered to Idols (1 Cor. 8:1-13)
9. The Problem of the Role Men and Women Should Have in Christ's Church (1 Cor. 11:1-17)
10. The Problem of Abusing the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:20-34)
11. The Problem of Spiritual Gifts (1 Cor. 12:1-31)
12. The Problem of a Lack of Love (1 Cor. 13:1-13)
13. The Problem of Speaking in Tongues (1 Cor. 14:1-40)

14. The Problem of Wrong Teaching About the Resurrection of the Dead (1 Cor. 15:1-58)
15. The Problem of Collecting for the Saints (1 Cor. 16:1-3)

The Corinthian church was plagued with problems! Churches today face many of these same problems in one form or another. Paul wanted these believers to know that there is a God in heaven who is a great PROBLEM-SOLVER! God's people need to make sure that they follow god's directions and instructions given in His Word. The problems can be solved, but they must be solved GOD'S WAY!

The many problems that the Corinthians faced were very similar to the problems that the children of Israel faced long ago. Today these same problems still exist!



The book of 1 Corinthians is perhaps best known for its great chapter on LOVE (Chapter 13) and its great chapter on the RESURRECTION (Chapter 15)!

Paul the Apostle

The book of 2 Corinthians was probably written around 56 A.D., less than a year after 1 Corinthians was written. This is the most personal letter from the pen of Paul that we have. We learn more about Paul (what kind of a person he was, his life, his ministry, etc.) from this letter than from any other letter in the New Testament. Of course, we also learn a great deal about Paul's life and ministry from the book of Acts.

Reading 2 Corinthians is almost like reading an autobiography. In this divinely inspired letter we see Paul's great love for the Corinthians and the great concern which he had for their spiritual progress (2 Corinthians 2:4; 6:11; 11:2; 12:14-15; 12:19; 13:10).

Here is one example of how we learn about the life of Paul from this book. In Acts 9:16 the Lord said about Paul, "I will show him how great things he must _____ for my name's

sake." Paul suffered for his Lord and Saviour! As you read 2 Corinthians 11:23-28, can you list seven ways in which Paul suffered?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

The Corinthians also needed to recognize that Paul was God's man and God's apostle. In both 1 and 2 Corinthians Paul helped the Corinthians to understand that he was really an apostle sent from God to care for the churches (1 Cor. 9:1-2; 2 Cor.10:1-18 and 12:11-12). Even today we need to recognize and respect those Pastors and those leaders that God has put over the local church to teach us, lead us and feed us (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:17). Have you been thanking God for your Pastor and for the other leaders God has given to your local church?

Problems From Without --The Galatian Letter

The Corinthians had problems from within the church--problems which they themselves had caused. The Galatians had problems caused by outsiders, even by false teachers who were troubling them and teaching them great error (Galatians 1:6-7; 5:10). Paul's letter to the Galatians was another of his early letters. It was sent to a group of churches (Galatians 1:2) located in what today is called Asia Minor (see on the map).

Galatians has been called Paul's fighting epistle. When Paul wrote this book he had on his war paint! Paul was greatly concerned about the false teaching that was being spread among these churches.

Nothing is more harmful than false teaching. People are usually careful about what kind of things they allow ourselves to eat. Would you drink a gallon of gasoline? Would you swallow a dozen poisonous mushrooms? Would you mix arsenic with your milk and then drink it? These things can all be deadly! Such things can destroy life!

In the spiritual realm, false teaching and false doctrine can be deadly. If a person is going to be saved and go to heaven, he must hear the true gospel (the gospel which Paul set forth in the book of Romans--see **Chapter 5** of these notes). The gospel that the cults teach will never save a person. A false gospel can never bring about a true salvation. In Galatians, Paul says that if anyone preaches a false gospel, ***God's curse will be upon him*** (Galatians 1:8-9)!

HOW CAN A MAN BE RIGHT WITH GOD? The false teachers were saying that a person must believe on Christ and also must KEEP THE LAW in order to become right with God (compare Acts 15:1-2). Is this true? Is a man saved (justified) by keeping God's law or by believing on God's Son (Galatians 2:16)?

_____ If a man could be saved by keeping the law, then why did Christ have to die (compare Galatians 2:21)? His death would have been for no reason at all.

HOW CAN A MAN LIVE RIGHT BEFORE GOD? The false teachers were saying that a

man should live the Christian life by trying to keep the law and observe feast days and holy days (Gal. 3:1-6; 4:9-11). Is this right? If we have **begun** the Christian life BY FAITH (that's how we were saved), should we not **continue** the Christian life by faith also (Gal. 3:2-6)? I was not saved by my own works, and I do not live the Christian life by my own works. The "works" that **I** produce are not very good (Galatians 5:19-21)! I was saved by trusting God to do a great work in my heart, and I must live the Christian life by trusting God to do a great work in me by His Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16,22-23)!

**Whenever I try I fail;
Whenever I trust, HE succeeds!**

The book of Galatians is best summed up by one verse:

GALATIANS 2:20

Is this true for you?

AWESOME SIGNIFICANCE

