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*"The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light"*

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# THE FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS\*

DR. W. GRAHAM SCROGGIE  
SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

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## I. MATTERS PRELIMINARY TO THE STUDY

### (1) *Authenticity of the Letter:*

In studying the authenticity of any work, there are two main lines of evidence:

- (i) External Evidence
- (ii) Internal Evidence

\* The Notes of Dr. W. G. Scroggie's Lectures on Bible books given in various series whilst he was Pastor of Bethesda Chapel, Sunderland, appeared in the *Church Record*. Personal permission was kindly granted to us at the time to reprint them in the *Bible Student*, and we hope to give a *few* of these, as they possess an undiminished value still for every student.

As the character of these lectures is not apologetic, it will not be necessary to go into this subject at any length, but only to refer to the matter briefly.

(i) The External Evidence:

Prof. Glog says: 'The authenticity of 1 Corinthians has been almost universally admitted. None of Paul's Epistles is so strongly attested by external evidence. The allusions to it by the Apostolic Fathers are direct and incontrovertible.'

The following Apostolic Fathers quote from, or directly refer to, this Epistle in their writings:—

Clemens Romanus	...	...	A.D. 96	1 Cor. 1: 12
Ignatius	...	...	" 113	" 1: 10
Polycarp	...	...	" 116	" 6: 2
Justin Martyr	...	...	" 140	" 5: 7
Iranaeus	...	...	" 178	" 10: 1-2
Clemens Alexandrinus	...	...	" 190	" 14: 20
Tertullian Alexandrinus	...	...	" 200	" 15: 12

Of these seven witnesses let me quote the first only. Writing to the Corinthians themselves, Clemens Romanus says:

"Take up the Epistle of the blessed Apostle Paul.

What did he at first write to you, in the beginning of the Gospel?

Of a truth he wrote to you by the Spirit concerning himself and

Cephas and Apollos, for even then you formed factions."

The Epistle of Clemens was written before the Apostle John died, and shows that before the close of the first century, some at least of the New Testament writings were recognized as of Divine authority.

(ii) The Internal Evidence:

Internal evidence of the genuineness of this Epistle may be furnished along several lines; but the most convincing, perhaps, is that pursued by Paley in his *Horæ Paulinæ*. In twelve short articles, in chapter III of this book, Paley shows how minute and accurate are the historical correspondences between this Epistle and the book of the Acts; correspondences which lie far beyond the lines of mere coincidence, and which, therefore, prove the

Epistle to be absolutely true and to be the work, in all its parts, of none other than the Apostle Paul. Take the following for example:—

(a) The Epistle tells us that Paul planted the Church at Corinth, and that Apollos watered it; see ch. 3:6, and cf. Acts 18:11, 24, 27, 28, which confirms this.

(b) In the Epistle, written from Ephesus, salutations are sent from Aquila and Priscilla: See ch. 16:19, and cf. Acts 18:24–27 which tells us that they were at Ephesus at that time.

(c) In the Epistle, Paul declares his purpose to journey through Macedonia to Corinth, and to winter there: See ch. 16: 5, 6, and cf. Acts 20:1–3, which tells us that this what he did.

These and many other similar coincidences are given by Paley and Birks in their invaluable little book. In addition to this line of investigation is that which traces in this Epistle the traits characteristic of the Apostle Paul. These are so numerous and so varied as to make it impossible that this book is the product of any other than himself. Hence, the authenticity of the Epistle is established on historical grounds.

### (2) *The Place of Writing:*

There is no difficulty in determining this, for the Apostle says, in ch. 16:8, "I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost." He was, therefore, at that city when he wrote this Letter, and not at Philippi, as the subscription in our English Bibles says. Of course the Apostle was at Ephesus more than once, but it was on the occasion of his *second* visit (Acts 19) that he wrote it, not the first. This is proved by the fact that at the time of writing Apollos had already preached at Corinth. Now we read of Paul's *first* visit to Ephesus in Acts 18:19, a time previous to the visit of Apollos to that city, as verses 24–28 reveal.

Get a map of Asia and Europe, and connect by a line Ephesus and Corinth and mark the geographical relation of these places.

### (3) *Date of the Letter:*

The place of writing having been determined, it is a simple matter to fix the date. From Acts 20:31, we learn that Paul stayed at Ephesus for three years, on his second visit to that city: and by tracing his movements from the time of the Jerusalem

Conference, A.D. 51 (Acts 15), we find that he must have arrived at Ephesus in A.D. 54, towards the end of the year, and that he must have left towards the end of A.D. 57. This being so, the First Epistle was written to the Corinthians almost certainly between Passover and Pentecost A.D. 57. (Compare 1 Cor. 5:6-8 and 16:8.)

You should trace the relation of this date to the other important dates in the Apostle's history. The following summary will shew some of these points of relationship: Taking those which *precede* A.D. 57 first:

- It was 20 years after his conversion, in A.D. 37.
- „ 17 years after his stay with Peter at Jerusalem, in A.D. 40 (see Gal. 1:17).
- „ 9 years after the commencement of his Missionary Journeys in A.D. 48.
- „ 6 years after the Jerusalem Conference in A.D. 51.
- „ 3 years (about) after his first visit to Corinth in A.D. 52-54.

Now take the dates *following* A.D. 57:

- It was 1 year before his last visit to Jerusalem, in A.D. 58.
- „ 4 years before his arrival in Rome, in A.D. 61.
- „ 6 years before his release from his first Roman imprisonment, in A.D. 63.
- „ 11 years before he suffered martyrdom, in A.D. 68.
- „ 13 years before the great destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, in A.D. 70.

(4) *Destination of the Epistle:*

“Paul, called to be an Apostle of Jesus Christ, through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, *unto the Church of God which is at Corinth.*”

Here two things command our attention, viz., the City of Corinth; and the Church at Corinth. One of the great gains of modern methods of study is this, that the geography and history of Bible countries and places have been employed to shed new light on what Scripture has to say about such, with the result that these distant times are made to live again before us.

## (i) The City of Corinth.

The ancient history of this city is in two parts: There was a Greek Corinth and a Roman Corinth.

*The Greek Corinth:* In the later days of Grecian history Corinth rose to great eminence. It was one of the richest cities in the world; the seat of learning and philosophy; wherein flourished also the arts and sciences. But this Corinth was totally destroyed by the Romans under Lucius Mummius in B.C. 146, and its priceless treasures perished. We are told that the historian Polybius saw pictures thrown upon the ground, and soldiers playing at dice upon them.

*The Roman Corinth:* The previous city thus lay in ruins for about 100 years, and was then rebuilt by Julius Caesar, who was impressed with the strategic importance of the place. This new city soon became a populous and flourishing centre.

Corinth was built at the Grecian end of the Isthmus which united Greece and Achaia. It stood at the foot of a hill called the Acrocorinthus, which rose to a height of 2,000 feet and threw its shadow half-way across the Isthmus. This hill was so difficult of ascent as to be deemed impregnable. It was a great military and mercantile centre, commanding as it did two seas. It had two harbours, Lechaëum on the western side and Cenchreae on the eastern, and thus became the great centre of eastern and western commerce. Poets gave it the title, "The City of the Two Seas". Pindar spoke of the Isthmus as the "Bridge of the Sea", and Xenophon called it the "Gate of the Peloponnesus."

In consequence of its unique situation and commercial connections, Corinth was a city of immense wealth and magnificence. In addition to this, there were "manufactures in metallurgy, dyeing, and porcelain, which grew up in connection with the import and export goods."

The city was also notorious for its licentiousness. So infamous was it that Dio Chrysostom termed it, "A city most licentious of all that are or ever have been." Venus, whose temple adorned the Acrocorinthus, was its favourite goddess; and sensuality took the form of a religious rite. To bear this in mind is of the first importance in the study of this Epistle because it explains the cause of the extreme corruption of the Corinthian Church, and the vehemence of the Apostle's rebukes.

The population of Corinth in Paul's time would be from six to seven hundred thousand. About one-third of these were freemen and the rest slaves. The Greek element prevailed, and the Greek language was spoken, but there was also a considerable Jewish population, who settled themselves in a place most convenient both for the business of commerce and for communication with Jerusalem.

Corinth was without question a city of great strategic importance, not only commercially, but spiritually, and the Apostle Paul was statesman enough to grasp the true significance of this fact. His method throughout his journeyings was to establish a church in some such populous centre, and thus to secure the spread of the Gospel into all the surrounding areas of a province. Such strategic centres were Antioch, Ephesus, Philippi, Rome—and Corinth.

(ii) The Church at Corinth.

All that we can learn about the Christian Church at Corinth must be gathered from the Acts of the Apostles, and Paul's Epistles to that Church. Read carefully therefore Acts 18, and the two Epistles.

Paul, who had been driven out of Macedonia, went to Athens, where he preached a famous sermon. Timothy and Silas, for whom he had waited, did not come to him, so he crossed over to Corinth (Acts 18:5; 1 Thess. 3:1). His reason for this step was probably two fold: (a) Because Corinth, holding as it did the keys of commerce, was a place from which the Gospel would rapidly and widely spread when once it was established. (b) Because numerous Jews were resident in that city, and a religion which was first to be planted in the synagogue, and was thence intended to scatter its seeds over all parts of the earth, could nowhere find a more favourable soil than among the Hebrew families at Corinth.

It was in the year A.D. 52, at the close of his second missionary journey, that Paul arrived at Corinth. He at once took up his abode with a pious Jewish couple, Aquila and Priscilla, to whom he was attached, perhaps because their trade of tent-making was that which he himself had learned at Tarsus, and which he intended at Corinth to ply. These persons, therefore, would be company for him at a time when he was particularly lonely.



Aquila and Priscilla who were natives of Pontus, had been driven from Rome by an edict of the Emperor Claudius. It is believed that this edict is the one referred to by Suetonius, who says that Claudius drove the Jews from Rome because they were incessantly raising tumults at the instigation of a certain Crestus. This Crestus is of course Christ; and this is the only occurrence of the name in profane writings contemporary with the Apostolic age. From the references to these two Christians, we learn that they were well-educated persons, and possessed, it would appear, of considerable wealth (Cf. Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19). Whether at this early date they were actually converted and called Christians, is doubtful.

Settled at Corinth, Paul wrought at tent-making during the week, and would naturally repair to the Jewish Synagogue, where for several weeks he preached Jesus as the Messiah to Jews and Gentiles.

Then he was joined by Silas and Timothy, who brought news from Macedonia. Their coming seems to have greatly affected Paul, for from that time he became engrossed with the preaching of the Word: (See Acts 18:5 as R.V. and Darby's translation, "Paul was *constrained* by the Word, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ." "He was wholly *absorbed* in the preaching" is another rendering; the same word occurs again in 2 Cor. 5:14 and Luke 12:50, etc.) Such preaching naturally precipitated great opposition, and led to a momentous breach in the Synagogue. Paul left that place then and went next door into the house of one Titus Justus, where henceforth he held his meetings. In this movement several accompanied him, including Crispus, the chief ruler of the Synagogue. This new work was eminently successful (See Acts 18:7, 8).

About this time the Apostle received a vision in which the Lord encouraged him to continue, in consequence of which Paul remained at Corinth for eighteen months. It was during this sojourn that Paul wrote his two letters to Thessalonica. During this time also, those who believed both Jews and Gentiles (more of the latter than the former), were gathered together, and became the nucleus of the Christian Church at Corinth.

(To be continued)