

## HIS SIGWORK - Principle No. 5 of 10 The Insider Scoop – 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians The Culture and the Context September 17, 2013

Gordon Fee wrote a book called *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987). The information is helpful in understanding some of the complex issues that the Apostle Paul addressed in this letter to the church in Corinth. This paper is a compilation of my brief notes. The **green** text represents my thoughts. The maps show the location of Corinth in Greece.

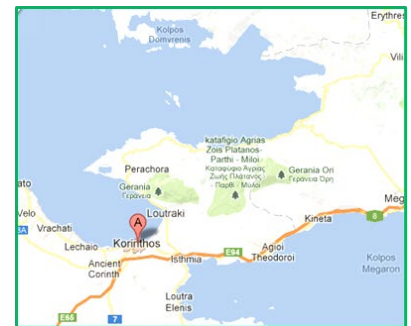
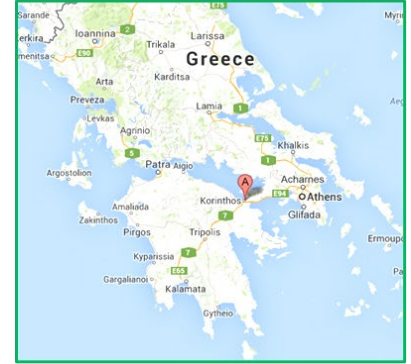
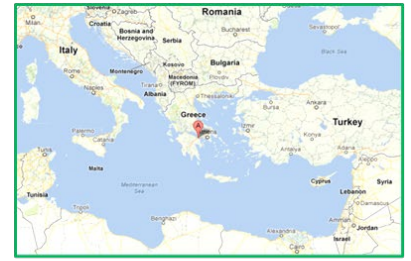
Jesus is central. Like a warrior, Paul passionately put forth his case when any error threatened to nullify the all-sufficient work of grace wrought by God through Jesus the Messiah on the cross.

### Corinth's History

- 5th century BC – **Flourished** in the Golden Years
- 146 BC – **Destroyed** by Rome
- Next 110 years – **Dormant**
- 44 BC – **Re-founded** by Julius Caesar as a Roman colony, because it was a strategic location, i.e, it had adequate water supply; it was the master of two harbors for east-west commerce; and it was home of the Isthmian games – second to the Olympics).
- **Repopulated** by freedmen from Rome. Freedmen were just above slaves; they were independent; many were artists. Locating the freedmen to Corinth was better for Rome, because Rome was overpopulated. This relocation would also rid Rome of potential trouble, and give the freedmen opportunity for advancement in society.

### Corinth's Character

- Rampant sexual sin and pagan temple feasts
- Diverse socio-economically, but mostly poor
- The evil practices of priestesses in nearby Delphi were infiltrating the church. Paul didn't want Christian women to resemble them in any way, thus, imposed codes for differentiation. Paul valued women as co-heirs and co-workers. (See my paper entitled *Missing Perspectives* for more information about the role of women in ministry.)
- Conglomeration of religious expression
  - Roman – Their laws, culture, and religion were dominant
  - Greek – Religion, philosophy, arts
  - The East – Mystery cults of Egypt and Asia
  - Jews – No Jews are mentioned in Paul's books about Corinth. Likely there were few Jews in Corinth. They had a "peculiar" belief in a single God.



## Paul's Goals with His Letter

In about 51-52 AD, Paul visited the Corinthians. He wrote them three years later (1 Corinthians). The purpose of his letter was:

- To perform radical surgery to get the Corinth out of the Christian without killing the patient.
- To bring the Gospel to bear in the marketplace.

## Other Facts that Affect our Understanding of 1st Corinthians

- Other leaders were teaching against Paul in his absence, so he reasserted himself in his letter. Therefore, he often appeared defensive. **However, Paul defended himself, not for himself, but for the gospel and for God's glory. The marring of his character would defame God Who he represented. Paul's teaching was truth; it was the truth that was being maligned.**
- We learn in the book of Acts, Chapter 18 that Paul spent one and a half years teaching the Corinthians. **He had a great love for them as their spiritual father. He was a zealous good shepherd over the flock God had appointed him to oversee. Paul was a warrior father fighting for his spiritual children.**
- In Paul's books to the Corinthians, he reasoned with them against the wrong thinking that had infiltrated the church from the surrounding culture. Following are areas of wrong thinking:
  - They had a wrong view of wisdom, so Paul defined true wisdom in Chapters 1 through 4.
  - **They idolized intelligence and elitism.** They wanted their superiors to be intelligent men they could patronize. Paul's tent-making vocation insulted them. Paul encouraged them to follow the Lord, not a person.
  - They believed that true spirituality comes from possessing "higher gifts." Paul said NO, it's LOVE. Paul emphasized unity on the basis of the diversity of gifts God had given to each person, not uniformity.
  - They believed that true spirituality came from wisdom and knowledge. Paul said NO. **In Chapters 1 and 2, Paul clarifies the definition of true spirituality – it comes from depending on the power of God and His wisdom.**
  - The church was tainted by Hellenistic dualism that taught that the body is insignificant. They believed that once the Holy Spirit came into a person, that person had reached ultimate spirituality and lived above the present evil age. Hence came the teaching about abstaining in marriage (asceticism) and living in immorality (liberalism) – neither mattered to them, because the body didn't matter. Paul said NO – the body matters and is part of the whole.