

8426U

WINFIELD BIBLE CAMP - 2003

OUR FAITH: CHALLENGES AND CONSOLATIONS  
THE CHALLENGE OF CORINTHIANS

Speaker: Bro. Michael Ashton

Study #1: Such were some of you

Reading: Acts 18:1-17

Based on Paul's letters to Corinth, the first thing, I think we ought to ask ourselves is, why are these letters in scripture? Well, you may say, what a silly question to ask! They are there, but it's well for us to reflect on why they're there! You might answer that question by saying, well, they're letters that the apostle Paul wrote to one of the early ecclesias. I would say, yes, but we know he wrote letters to other ecclesias that don't appear in the New Testament canon, for example, there's a letter to Laodicea that's mentioned in Paul's epistle to the Colossians. The ecclesia in Laodicea was to read the letter that went to Colosse, and the brethren and sisters in Colosse were to read the letter that went to Laodicea; but the letter to Laodicea has not been preserved. Equally, as we shall learn this week, there were at least 4 letters that the apostle wrote to the ecclesia in Corinth, but only two of them appear in our New Testament scriptures. So we do have to answer the question, why are they there? Why has it been necessary that they should be preserved for us? and the only conclusion that we can come to, is that there is a vitally important message, not only for those who first received the letter, but also for subsequent generations. The first thing I'd like us to be able to come to, as a result of this particular class this afternoon, is that one of the generations to whom the letters to Corinth were particularly written, is our generation. This is not only a message for first century Corinth, but it is very much a message **for 21st century western society!**

You're probably guessing now why the title is as we have it, '**and such were some of you**'. The situation and background of the brethren and sisters in Corinth, is a very good description of present day society. We've read in Acts 18, of the apostle Paul's first visit to Corinth. This is in the middle of the information that Luke brings forward to us, in the Acts of the apostles, about the second missionary journey, and part way through the second missionary journey, Paul finds himself in Corinth. He's arrived there, by what has not been a straightforward route. If you'd like to just go back to the beginning of the second missionary journey, and come to chapter 16, the apostle has left Antioch, he's moved first of all to (the last verse of chapter 15 tells us that he's been through the areas of Syria and Cilicia,) he's made his way almost immediately to Lystra and Derbe (those twin cities), I think he's gone there for a particular reason; this is

something which I'm hoping the teenagers are going to learn during the week; I think he went there particularly to pick up Timothy. He needed Timothy with him because John Mark had left Paul and Barnabus during the first missionary journey, now Paul and Silas need a companion, that companion is going to be Timothy. So he goes to Derbe and Lystra to pick up Timothy, and having left Lystra, he then has clearly in his mind that he's going to travel in a westward direction and he's heading for Ephesus.

But he can't go to Ephesus! Verse 6 says, 'When they'd gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they **were forbidden of the Holy Spirit** to preach the Word in the province of Asia, of which Ephesus was the capital city; so they swing through 90 degrees and head up north and go to Mysia, verse 7, 'After they were come to Mysia, they wanted to carry on going north to Bithynia on the southern coast of the Black Sea', an area that included Pontus (by the way) which is where Aquila hailed from. Aquila we shall meet shortly in Corinth. But they're not allowed to go there either, and so they have to move again, and they travelled once more in a westward direction; 'they assayed to go into Bithynia; but the Spirit suffered them not. And passing by Mysia they came to Troas' where there was a vision of the man of Macedonia calling them over, into what we know as Europe. This then is the first time that the gospel reaches Europe! and the preaching in the rest of Acts 16, is focussed on the work that the apostle Paul accomplished in Philippi.

From Philippi, he travels around (chapter 17), to Thessalonica; the Jews press upon him in Thessalonica and he moves to Berea; the Jews come on him again in Berea, they have to get rid of him from Berea; he goes from Berea to Athens. It is in Athens, verse 16 of Acts 17, that we really want to start our story of Corinth, because it's from Athens to Corinth which really doesn't sound like much of a journey, and geographically it is not, but becomes a very significant journey, for the apostle Paul. We know from verse 16 of Acts 17, that the apostle is in Athens on his own and he is waiting; he's waiting for Silas and Timothy to come to him, and he's there in Athens on his own, and he preaches in Athens on his own. It's from Athens that he's going to go to Corinth. Athens, of course, is a city of Greece, and Corinth is a city of Greece. Greece at that time, was conquered by the Romans, so although it was clearly a Greek country, it was under the control of Rome, and Rome had divided Greece into two parts. The northern part (we've already met) is Macedonia where Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea are all situated, and the southern part of Greece was called by the Romans, Achaia; and both Athens and Corinth were in that southern province of Achaia. So they've got a lot in common! They're both Greek cities, they're both in that southern province.

What else do we know about them? Well, they were only 45 miles apart; now 45 miles in those days took rather longer to travel than 45 miles does for us today, but still they're comparatively close cities. You would have thought, therefore, that they would have had a lot in common between Athens and Corinth, and perhaps they did! Well, they had this in common, Paul preached in both cities, of course, the preaching was rather different as we shall see; there was no synagogue in Athens and Paul finds himself preaching on Mars Hill. There is a synagogue in Corinth, and so as his custom

is he preaches in the synagogue in Corinth. But it's more the response that was different: you see, he travelled to Corinth immediately he left Athens, and all that we're told about the preaching in Athens is right at the end of Acts 17 verse 32, 'When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: others said, we will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit **certain men clave unto him**, and believed: among them was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them'. But the implication of that verse is that there were **not many others with them**, and there were only 2 main people. So a brother and a sister and a handful of others. With that comment at the end of Acts 17, we've almost heard both the beginning and the last of Athens in the New Testament account. We never learn that there is an ecclesia at Athens, we don't know anything else about it, that the preaching was so (dare we say it?) unsuccessful that there was just that small number of brethren and sisters in Athens.

So although there are all of those things in common: both citizens of Greece, both in Achaia, only 45 miles apart, both heard the apostle Paul preaching, yes, only 45 miles apart, but really a million miles apart from each other in lots of other ways. It is really turning over a new page in the Acts of the apostles, when we leave behind the preaching in Athens and turn to the preaching in Corinth, and this is surprising because there are so many things in Athens that you would have thought, it would have made it a fruitful ground for preaching.

Let's look at differences now between Athens and Corinth.

Athens was known for it's worship of Minerva, the Roman goddess. She was the goddess of wisdom, the goddess of medicine and the arts; and you get some flavour of this, don't you? in Acts 17, in all of the things that were spoken about on Mars Hill. They always wanted to hear **some new thing**. They were interested in **knowledge**; the application of knowledge, of course, was a different thing, but they were interested in knowledge.

Now Corinth was different! In Corinth they worshipped Venus or Aphrodite, the goddess of love, and you spell love- **lust**! That was the sort of the goddess who was worshipped in Corinth. Of course, there's not much contact, is there? between Aphrodite and Minerva. It's a different sort of thing, they're characters are different, and that's because the people in Athens were different, very different than the people in Corinth.

Athens has a very long and distinguished history: Athens was a **heritage city**, that's how the Romans viewed it, that they liked to preserve the antiquity of Athens, because as a conquering nation, conquering Athens now Rome was able to suggest that it had subsumed all of ancient Greek culture and was superior to it! So Athens was like a time capsule, this was ancient Greece, somehow held in time, and people would like to visit it because it had a sort of faded glory about it, in much the way some ancient European cities, still have that faded glory and tourists flock there and take their photographs, so people will visit Athens and take photographs. Well, they would have done, if they had

had cameras to take them with. But you know what I mean, they would have gone to Athens for that purpose!

Corinth was very different! Corinth had been captured by the Romans in 146 BC. and 100 years later, Julius Caesar, the caesar of Rome at that time, ordered its rebuilding as a brand, spanking new **Roman city**. Yes, it was in Greece but it was going to be built as a Roman city. So you can begin to see the differences, can't you? between Athens and Rome, and as the differences add up, so the powers diverge. Athens very much on one hand, Corinth very much on the other. You thought of Athens' faded splendour in contrast to that, Corinth was a modern (well first century modern) modern commercial seaport with everything that went with that; everything to do with commerce and business and business. That was the character of Corinth!

Well, in Athens, the pace of life was much slower; you had time to go to Mars Hill, you could listen to every new thing. In Corinth it was all hustle and bustle and things were moving, things were happening! So a great difference between the two cities. For that reason, Athens lived very much in its past, in **the past**, Corinth was a modern city, it was living in **the present**, bustling, vibrant with activity; and as we saw, Athens was Greek. The epitome of a Greek city and although Corinth was in Greece, well Corinth is a Roman city, and when the Romans came to choose a provincial capital for this south province of Achaia, their thought was 'well, he's got to choose us! he's got to choose Athens, Athens' a city that's been here since the year 'dot!' But the Romans chose Corinth because it was more of a Roman city. So all of the Roman offices was centred in Corinth, everything to do with Rome happened in Corinth and not in Athens. Athens becomes a back water, Corinth becomes situated on one of the major routes, and the one thing we all know about Rome, is that all roads lead to Rome! So on one of those roads Corinth was situated!

As Acts 17 tells us, 'the Athenians were scarcely interested in the gospel', and surprisingly, very surprisingly, were told in Acts 18, 'the Lord had much people in Corinth'. Fancy having much people in a city like Corinth, and we really haven't yet heard the half of Corinth, we haven't yet got our minds just around what this first century Corinth was like! Well, there's one of the photographs they could have taken, I suppose, they could have seen Corinth like that! All the beautiful buildings were there, and you could wander around them, they were comparatively new, so the marble would have been gleaming in the bright sunshine. It looks nice from a distance, yet get close to it and it's very different. I can always remember when I went to Guyana and going to Georgetown, because Georgetown was built in a time when Guyana wasn't Guyana but was British Guyana, and was built as a sort of colony of Britain, and the architecture was all colonial architecture. From a distance, you would have thought that Georgetown was built from stone, beautiful pillars and pediments and architraves and everything was there, just wonderful you'd have thought, and then when you got closer you realized that the buildings weren't made of stone at all, they were all made of timber. Because the climate in Guyana is so hot and humid and damp, it's a very good breeding ground for termites; the termites then start to attack it all from the bottom, and

all the buildings are starting to crumble away. So from a distance it looks wonderful, get close to it, and it's not wonderful at all; and Corinth was like that. See it on the picture postcards and it looks nice, but go into Corinth and walk its streets and you find it not quite so good, because by the time you got to the end of Main street, well, you'd no longer have your wallet! you might not even have your life! because remember, this is a **seaport**. It was **cosmopolitan**, all sort of nationalities would be in Corinth, people would pass through because it was on one of the main routes to Rome; it was a centre of **vice** because that's one view of Corinth, but according to Corinthian law, in that temple 1,000 prostitutes were provided. Some male, some female, take your choice, because the law wanted to provide for everybody; so it might look good from the distance, but not very good when you got closer to it; and remember, it's this city that the Lord had 'much people' in. That's what we're being taught and it's a lesson that we need to learn.

Well, what about the geography of Corinth? Well, there they are! just 45 miles apart; there's just a little snapshot of the centre of Greece; the main part of Greece is up in the north, and as you travel north, yes, Thessalonica and Philippi are there, then the rest of Europe, and you move into the Balkans and so on, and you go up north into Europe. If you go south from Corinth, well, you've just got a peninsula, haven't you? which looks like a hand hanging down into the Mediterranean Sea. It's called the Peloponnesian peninsula and as we said there was a road running to Rome through Corinth and that road was going east-west, so you could travel from Rome over into Asia Minor and you would pass through Corinth. You could come back from Syria and Asia Minor, pass through Corinth and end up in Rome. You say, well, there looks, by the way, to be a mighty lot of sea, for there to be a road travelling through! and you're right! there is a mighty lot of sea and so the road is partly a sea route. So leaving Ephesus, Ephesus to the east, to travel across to Corinth, then you have to cross the Adriatic Sea, and for first century mariners, who never liked to sail out of sight of land, the Adriatic Sea was a big bonus, because the Adriatic Sea is littered with islands. So it was possible to island-hop across the Adriatic Sea until you reached Corinth, then you got a choice; you either then sailed south from Corinth and you went all the way around that rugged coastline of the Peloponnesian until you could then set off again across the sea towards Italy.

Or you had another option you could take, and the other option was this, since Corinth is on that big narrow isthmus of land that just goes across between Athens and Corinth, and there are two ports (Corinth itself was not a port, Corinth was on the land, it had no sea frontage itself as a city); but it had a port Cenchrea which is mentioned in the Acts of the apostles. Do you remember what happened there? the apostle Paul shaved himself there because he had a vow, so Cenchrea was on the east and on the west was another port which was called Lechaeum and that was the port which faced towards Italy. So if you were travelling from Asia Minor to Italy through Corinth, you would come by boats to the port of Cenchrea, and then rather than sailing all the way around that peninsula, you would unlade your cargo, put it on a cart, take it across that narrow isthmus of land, put it again into a ship in the port of Lechaeum and the ship

would set off again, and that's what most people did. And vice versa, if you were travelling from Rome back across towards Asia Minor, so you can imagine how people were constantly passing through Corinth. Things were always happening in Corinth! The roads were always full.

So much did it dominate these two seas, the one to the west and the one to the east, that it was called **the bridge of the sea**, the Greek writer Pindar called it that, and the Roman writers Horace and Ovid called Corinth the '**city of the two seas**'; and as far as the Greeks were concerned, they had a word for Corinth, or to be more accurate, they had a word based on Corinth that they applied in a particular way. The word is this one, they said you could '**corinthianize**', and if you 'corinthianized' then it was someone who was a follower of fashion. Now I don't want any of you to admit it, but those of you who like historical, romantic novels, may have heard of the author George Ethelred, but if you read one of George Ethelred's novels, she's always talking about 'the dashing young men' as being true Corinthians; and that's what she means, they were the followers of fashion of those days. So you were a flap, you were a dandy, you were a person who just had the dress of that day; and when fashions changed, so you changed as well. That's where the word came from and it was used in the first century the same as it was used in the 18th and 19th century Britain.

But it also meant, and this was even a worse meaning, that you descended to the lowest possible level of immorality; and you can understand why, can't you? because Corinth was a sewer, morally speaking, and all the worst vices were carried out in Corinth. Corinth was the lowest of the low; Corinth was like our 21st century western society, where you could buy anything, anything that you wanted, and even things that you didn't want, you could buy that as well. That was the mark of Corinth, it was an awful place! Yet as we've already seen, that's what Jesus said, 'I've much people in this city!' So the first lesson for us, is that we should never think that the situation in the world is so bad, that the gospel cannot bring light to it! The Word of God is **more powerful than the worst sin that man can create or imagine!** The Word of God **can enlighten the darkest corners of the human mind**. The Corinthian ecclesia is the proof of that! and the record occurs in the New Testament to uphold that great truth so that we shall never forget it! that the Lord Jesus had much people in Corinth, and in exactly the same way, I fervently believe, that Lord still has much people! If we can be the instruments of calling, and what a wonderful thing that could be. It's much too easy for us to say 'we will not cast the pearls of the gospel before the swine of this world', when it's not for us to make that decision! So all that we can do is give witness to these things, as the apostle learned. It's only when we discover that the response is as the apostle found in Athens that you then move on somewhere else and try to preach there as he did.

So there was the city, 'I've got much people in this city', and Corinth had got an Acropolis just in the same way that Athens has an Acropolis, and it was on that Acropolis that the temple was built. You went up to the temple, and the temple was a place where immorality was worshipped; where immorality became part of the worship

of Aphrodite, and you became involved in that, as you were involved in your worship.

But one of the things which made Corinth a place which will be a fruitful ground for preaching, was some information that we read in Acts 18. That's about the banishment from Rome, do you remember? it's there in verse 2 of Acts 18 ; 'Under the emperor Claudius, we're told, that Jews were banished from Rome and many fled to Corinth'. Of course, they did! because there was a road that lead from Rome to Corinth, and we've already thought about it. It would be very interesting, wouldn't it? if we could interview a Roman and say to him, 'why is it that you're building all of these roads? and he'd say there are various reasons for building the roads. The roads are there (but we don't like to tell our conquered people this), but the roads are there so we can move our armies swiftly to any point where trouble might arise, and we can quell a riot and impose Roman law in that area. What's more it allows information to travel both from Rome to those provinces and from those provinces back to Rome. It means that you can be in Rome like a spider at the centre of a web and keep your finger on everything that's happening. We have to say with respect to our Roman, 'well, you may think that's the reason you built those roads, but it isn't the reason at all! The real reason that you built those roads, is so that the apostles could walk along them and so the gospel could spread along the roads to Rome'.

Because the Acts of the apostles is the record of the gospel, moving from Jerusalem to Rome, and the Romans kindly laid roads so that they could walk along them and take the gospel. Here's a second reason for the roads being built; it was to allow the banished Jews to leave Rome and travel in safety to these different area, and with them they would take

their knowledge of God, and they would also provide little areas where the gospel could start to spring up, because the apostles always **first** preached to the Jews; and that's what Paul is doing here in Acts 18. Amongst those that were banished was Aquila and Priscilla, and the banishment, so the biographer of the Seas of Sitonis said, 'that disturbances occurred in Rome over one called Christos'. Now you can only assume that he's talking about Christ, so in some way the Romans linked the Jews in Rome with teachings about the Lord Jesus Christ. It's an indication then, that the preaching that took place on the day of Pentecost when Jews from all over the Roman empire, had honed in on Jerusalem and then had gone back to the places where they lived, that some of that teaching had percolated back to Rome and the name of Christ was already being spoken in Rome, even though the apostle had not yet got there; it's his heart's desire to preach in Rome. Paul is after all, the appointed apostle of the Gentiles and the apostle of the Gentiles ought to go to the capital city of the Gentile world at that time. So Paul wanted to go to Rome, he didn't know that it would be as a prisoner on board a troop ship, but nonetheless, that was the way he eventually reached Rome, and the gospel would be preached there. But now we've got an indication, that long before he was there, the name of Christ was being spoken, and was already causing a division, because as the Lord Jesus said, He came not to bring peace but a sword! and it's happening, isn't it? that persecutions are going to arise because of **the name, and it's happening** and those persecutions are sending Jews to Corinth.

Well, let's see what happens, shall we? Acts 18 verse 4, 'Paul reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the **Greeks**', so the synagogue wasn't barred to those of other nations. The synagogue was there because of the number of Jews that were there; the implication, by the way, that Paul didn't go to a synagogue in Athens, is that there were virtually no Jews there at all. Just as there were virtually no Jews in Philippi (he didn't go to a synagogue in Philippi in Acts 16), and Jewish law demanded that you needed 10 Jewish men to establish a synagogue, so if there wasn't a synagogue in Philippi or Athens, the conclusion is that there was less than 20 Jews (assuming there was the same number of men and women) less than 20 Jews in Athens and less than 20 Jews in Philippi. But many more than that in Corinth, so he preaches in the synagogue. Then, although he'd gone to Corinth from Athens alone, he's joined there by Silas and Timothy, who come from Macedonia. They'd been up visiting the Thessalonians in particular, but probably farther afield as well. 'Paul was pressed in the spirit and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ'. The RSV of verse 5 doesn't say that Paul was 'pressed in the spirit', it says 'he was occupied with preaching'; the heading for the slide on the screen is from the NIV, 'he devoted himself to preaching'. As soon as Silas and Timothy came, he now feels he's able to get on with the job!!

We perhaps need to fill in a little bit of background here! Silas and Timothy have been back to Thessalonica where Paul had been banished from, very soon after his arrival in Thessalonica, when the ecclesia there was very new indeed! The brethren and sisters were very young in the truth and the apostle, as soon as he left Thessalonica, was extremely concerned as to whether they would hold firm to the truth that they'd embraced. He was not allowed to return because they had, in fact, taken bail for Paul, and one of the believers in Thessalonica would probably have forfeited his life, if the apostle Paul had darkened the city gates again. So Paul could never return to Thessalonica, he was able to send his companions back and he does, he sends Timothy and Silas back to Thessalonica to learn how the brethren and sisters are doing there. He tells us in 1 Thessalonians 3, that when Silas and Timothy returned with the news, 'the Thessalonians' faith is still fervent', that he feels so relieved that 'he's living again'. It is almost as if he's dying inside from worry about what was happening at Thessalonica.

We get the same flavour, don't we? here in Acts 18. Now with that burden taken off his shoulders, he now knows that things in Thessalonica are well, and the brethren and sisters are prospering, now he can get on with the job. You might say, 'well, he seems to be doing pretty well with the job already in verse 4, he was persuading **Jews and Greeks**. Now it seems he's going to make his preaching even more direct if that could be possible, and just as a sword had arisen in Rome causing Jews to leave, so now a sword arises in Corinth. 'I come not to send peace but a sword', so verse 5, 'when Silas and Timothy were come from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ'. You see, they'd been banished from Rome about matters concerning Christos, now they're being told who Christos was! He is the

Lord Jesus Christ! and it creates opposition. 'When they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, Paul shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads: I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. And he departed thence'.

So as we thought, he entered Corinth alone; verse 3 tells us he lodged with Aquila and Priscilla who were also tentmakers with him, and once Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, nothing could hinder his preaching. Paul devotes himself exclusively to preaching. And it's successful! We might have thought that the opposition would mark out its lack of success, but very much the opposite! Here is the success of Paul's preaching in Corinth. You see, he stayed in Corinth for more than 18 months, verse 11 of Acts 18, 'he continued there a year and 6 months teaching the Word of God among them'. But verse 7 tells us that he had to leave the synagogue; the Jews wouldn't allow him to continue on preaching in the synagogue that Jesus is the Christ, but he was able to still preach in Corinth. They didn't run him out of town, as he had been run out of Thessalonica and out of Berea or for that matter, out of Philippi. So he was able to stay for at least 18 months. He had preached, first of all, both to Jews and Gentiles in the synagogue; after being banished from the synagogue, he went as far away from the synagogue as he possibly could, NO, he didn't, he just went next door. We're told that, verse 7, 'He departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Titus Justus, one who worshipped God, whose house **joined hard to the synagogue**'. I wonder what the Jews thought of that? that Paul was now preaching just next door to the synagogue from where they had banished him?

He even managed to convert Crispus the synagogue ruler, that's verse 8, 'Crispus, chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and **many of the Corinthians hearing** believed, and were baptized'. The Corinthians, the people we've thought about, the people who inhabited the sewer of Corinth, who contributed to Corinth being a sewer, many of them believed and were baptized'. We scarcely question the way of life that they lived before they accepted the truth of the gospel; more important, that they accepted it. But all of this had the affects that opposition from the Jews, just grew and grew.

As that opposition increased, and as the number of believers increased, so within Corinth something was beginning to fester, something was beginning to happen, and in the end it has to break out! and break out it does. You see there's a serious threat all of a sudden. Verse 12 of Acts 18, 'When Gallio was deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat'. There it is! **when Gallio was deputy or proconsul of Achaia**; now you probably know how accurate a historian Luke is, and once again, he shows his accuracy. He uses exactly the term that was applicable in Corinth which was different to the one that applied in Ephesus for its ruler. Ephesus you'll remember had a town-clerk, here Corinth has a proconsul; remember that Corinth is a Roman province; Gallio is a Roman appointee, he is Caesar's man. The other advantage of verse 12 of Acts 18, is that we can date; the archeologists have found an inscription to Gallio when he was deputy of Achaia, and there are fixes, verse 12 of Acts 18 as either AD 52 or 53, and any chronology of

the Acts of the apostles always turns on this verse, it's as if you can put a peg in the ground here and work backwards and forwards from it working out your time periods and dates in the Acts of the apostles. Gallio is mentioned in the accounts of the time as well as his name appearing on this inscription that the archeologists have found.

But why is this a particular threat? why is Paul's being brought before Gallio's judgment seat a threat? Well, it's because Gallio was Caesar's man and the second thing that you know about Rome, you knew of all roads leading to Rome, the second thing you know about Rome is Roman law. Roman law is known all over the world; Roman law is the basis of the legal system of most western countries. Changed almost out of recognition now, but nonetheless, the basis of western law was Roman law and just like most western law it works on **precedent**; So Roman law worked on precedent and a decision taken in one place would apply elsewhere because the law was a common law that applied, and Gallio sat at Caesar's judgment seat. It wasn't Gallio's judgment seat, it was Caesar's, he was deputed to undertake these tasks on Caesar's behalf. You get the flavour of this, you may recall, in that lovely centurion who comes to the Lord Jesus Christ, the centurion who's servant was ill. He asked the Lord if He'd heal his servant; he said, 'you don't need to come and lay your hands on him; because he said, 'I recognize in you the same sort of authority which is vested in me; I'm a Roman centurion and I say to this man, Go; and he goes because it's not I who 's speaking, it's Caesar's voice that the man hears! and if he doesn't obey me, then he's disobeying Caesar and he's forfeiting his life by disobedience; and just the same way, Lord, I recognize that your word is powerful because you are authorized by God Himself to speak the Word'. So the centurion saw what many Jews in Israel didn't see! So with Gallio, his word was Caesar's word, his law was Caesar's law, his decisions were Caesar's decisions! That's why it is such a serious threat! just think about it! This isn't some tin-pot magistrate (not that the magistrates in Philippi would like to be called that) this isn't some tin-pot magistrate who can put men in prison and decide to beat them or not beat them; this isn't some passing town clerk like the town clerk in Ephesus, who can quell or not quell a riot that takes place in his city. **This is Caesar's man** and the decision that this man makes is vitally important because **it's long lasting**. So if when Paul appeared before Gallio, Gallio said, '(you shall speak no more in the name of this man, Jesus Christ') Paul would have been barred from preaching throughout the Roman empire! I don't think we recognize just how serious the threat is here in Acts 18.

Now just think back, on Paul's upbringing. Paul had gone to the most prestigious university that the Jews had, the Jerusalem university. He studied under the leading professor in that university. He was already marked out as being the top student; he had a career of advocacy laid ahead of him, and that Paul, Paul of Tarsus, Saul of Tarsus, is just about to stand before Gallio, the Roman proconsul, and all his arts of advocacy are about to swing into motion. He's got all the points of his argument ready to come out, and even though the Lord had said to him, 'when you come to stand before kings and rulers for My sake, I shall give you a mouth and wisdom that will confound your adversaries'; don't you think there would have been a little bit of the old Saul of Tarsus there, ready with the words that were going to come, and the argument

would flow? Now just notice in Acts 18, there he is prepared to do it, and verse 14, 'Now when Paul was about to open his mouth', the argument was all prepared, just ready to flow out, and he wasn't allowed to do it! You see, that part of his life would have to be put on one side; the apostle Paul had not been called to preach for the Lord Jesus Christ because he trained at the feet of Gamaliel; the apostle had been called to preach for the Lord Jesus Christ because **he had been humbled on the road to Damascus**. And prepared to be humble, 'who art Thou, Lord?' he asked, when in his heart of hearts he already knew that the glorified Lord that was appearing to him in that bright vision, was the same Lord who Stephen, when he was stoned said, 'was standing at the right hand of God and to whom Stephen commended his life. NO! Paul wasn't allowed to open his mouth, and it was Gallio who said to the Jews, 'if it was a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. And he drove them from the judgment seat'. He dismissed the case against Paul, no case to answer!

But just notice the previous point, decisions under Roman law applied across the whole empire. But you say, no decision was taken! oh! but it was! Can you imagine that Paul wouldn't have grasped that decision and on future occasions would be able to say to anyone, 'you can go back to Corinth and you can read in the transcripts, of Gallio's judgment and you'll find that a case was brought against me on this very point, and the case was dismissed; and on basis of Roman legal precedence, you cannot now bring that case against me again, unless you find evidence that wasn't brought forth at that time'. Paul would **rejoice** in this decision; he now knows that he's free to preach anywhere he will!

The Greeks who were frustrated, they took their anger out on Sosthenes, the new ruler of the synagogue, verse 17, 'All the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat'. (Keep your finger in Acts 18 and just turn over to 1 Corinthians 1 verse 1, and the letter which Paul wrote to Corinth starts) 'Paul called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, **and Sosthenes our brother**'. Well, could it be the same person? Highly likely, isn't it? if he managed to convert one ruler of the synagogue, why not two? What a wonderful preaching effort this was in Corinth, at the hands of the apostle. So the ecclesia over this period of 18 months is beginning to be established.

Now I titled this overhead, 'The Ecclesia and the World' because remember that the brethren and sisters in Corinth had really been members of the world, the first century world of that day. Because just think of the things which they brought with them into the ecclesia. One commentator has written about the Corinthian ecclesia, 'The Corinthian ecclesia was in the world and the world was in the Corinthian ecclesia', and both those statements are true, if you think about it! They denied the resurrection, that was one of the problems and 1 Corinthians 15, as we know, is Paul's answer to that. There was at least one case in the ecclesia of gross immorality, 1 Corinthians 5 in particular deals with that, doesn't it? We know that there was no decorum at the memorial meeting,

that's 1 Corinthians 11, isn't it? We know that sisters were usurping the brethren's authority, that's 1 Corinthians 11 and 14; we know that there were some openly eating at idol's temples, that's chapters 8, 9, and 10 of 1 Corinthians. We know that there were deep divisions in the ecclesias, and those divisions were fuelled by the existence of rival personalities, each gathering to themselves their own courtiers of followers, that's chapters 1 and 2 of 1 Corinthians. We know that the brethren in Corinth who had differences with each other, were sometimes taking those differences to the law courts, in order to have them settled, that's 1 Corinthians 6. We know that Paul's position as an apostle was being actively denied by some in the ecclesia. That is something that grows in particular and is the framework for what we know as Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. There are hints of it in the first, but it grows by the time we come to 2 Corinthians. We know as well that Spirit-gifts were being abused, that's 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, and we know as well that there were a whole host of marriage related problems, that's 1 Corinthians 7.

As you can see there wasn't any more room on the screen for any more! You know, the ecclesia was just jam packed full of problems! and we can identify with all of them, in one way or another, can't we? You may have heard of problems that would fit each of those headings; I hope you know of no ecclesia other than Corinth that had them all? But I know of ecclesias that have one or more of them, and I could put an ecclesial name against each of those, and probably you could too! It may be that you could put your own ecclesia's name against one or more on that list. You see, this is a message for **today**, isn't it? it's not only that the people from whom our brethren and sisters in Corinth were drawn, were like the people of today, but their situation is like our situation today, their ecclesias were like our ecclesias today, or more accurately, ours are like theirs was!

Well, what was Paul's sources of information for all of these things? What was going to happen? Well, turn to 1 Corinthians if you will, 1 Corinthians 1 verse 11 tells us, 'It has been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there be contentions among you.' (Don't worry about what the report said at the moment, what we're concerned about is that reports came from certain named individuals, and Chloe is one of those. So there was first hand information and we've already thought that there were people travelling to and from Corinth; when the apostle is writing 1 Corinthians, he's writing from Ephesus. So he's only just over the Adriatic from Corinth so it was possible for people to travel to him from Corinth, and Chloe or Chloe's people, were some who came to him. The impression you get from that verse in 1 Corinthians 11 is that this was **by word of mouth** from Chloe and not by letter from Chloe's people.

Then if you turn over to chapter 5 of 1 Corinthians verse 1 the apostle says, 'It's reported commonly (RV - it's actually reported) that there is fornication among you'. So there were some general reports, we're not told who it was that told the apostle Paul this, and probably from more than one source, and there was now a **report** and it was widely known that there was fornication in Corinth in the Corinthian ecclesia. Again, we're not

going into the issue at the moment, just concern with where the information came from. So **specific reports** from named individuals; more **general reports** from more than one source. Then if you turn to chapter 7, the apostle turns to answer **a formal letter** that he's received. Verse 1, 'Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me', and then if you turn to the last chapter of 1 Corinthians, chapter 16, it would appear that this letter was brought to the apostle by 3 leading brethren. Verse 17, he said, 'I am glad of the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus: for that which was lacking on your part they have supplied'. It's reasonable, I think to conclude that they were the 3 brethren appointed with the task by the Corinthian ecclesia of taking this letter, this letter with questions in it, to the apostle Paul. Go back to chapter 1, two of those three brethren were clearly leading brethren in Corinth, and one of them had been baptized by the apostle himself. Verse 16, 'I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other', so these were early converts in Corinth and therefore most probably leading brethren. So those are the three sources of information: specific reports from named individuals, unlikely to be written, these came by word of mouth to the apostle; in just the same way that he's heard reports from a variety of different people, the more general form about the situation in Corinth, but specifically a **formal letter** from the ecclesia which was brought by 3 brethren. Paul now has to answer all of these things.

Just go back to that list of problems that we've already seen, and ask yourself if this information had come to you, if it had come to me, now obviously you've somehow have got to prioritize these: which is the most serious? which is the biggest problem that Corinth had to face? and how are we able to apply some sort of priority? I mean, surely #1 on that list perhaps ought to be #1, oughtn't it? I mean, this is a serious doctrinal problem, **denying the resurrection- the resurrection is passed already?** Remember, it was in Acts 2, wasn't it? on the day of Pentecost that the most important plank of Peter's teaching, was that he had been a witness of the resurrection. As if he stands there with his hand up, saying, we saw the risen Christ! and the resurrection then becomes such an imperative to anyone who will preach, that to deny the resurrection is to say it's death rather than life. To say there is no future hope! and it's only in this life that we have hope in Christ; surely that will be the most serious?

But when the apostle comes to list them, assuming that he tackles them in order, and I think that we have to conclude that he does, the fact that he deals with the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, means that he sees it as secondary, well, much more than secondary actually, there are other things that he puts higher up the list. Also, ask yourself what he deals with first of all? What were the apostle Paul's priorities? which issues was he going to deal with? and that was the issue that he wanted to deal with first of all. What the apostle is telling us is that it is the most serious problem that brethren and sisters had to face in Corinth. It's the most serious problem that brethren and sisters today have to face! it is the most serious crime that we can commit as brethren and sisters, more serious than denying the resurrection. Now you may think that comment of mine is blasphemous, but I say it on the basis of 1 Corinthians and you need to disprove the order of 1 Corinthians in order to say that what I've just said is

blasphemous! **Sowing discord amongst brethren** is more serious than denying the resurrection! It is one of those things which the LORD hates, that's what Proverbs 6 verse 19 tells us. It's only after he's tackled that issue that he can then move on to other things.

You see, he moves on from that to the case of serious immorality, that's 1 Corinthians 5. He moves on from that to going to law before Gentiles, that's 1 Corinthians 6. All of those things, before he ever says in 1 Corinthians 7 verse 1, 'now concerning the things whereof you wrote to me', and that's the marriage chapter; and then there's eating food offered to idols, and then there's the lack of decorum at the memorial meeting; then there's the problem with sisters usurping the position of brethren; and then there's the problem of Spirit gifts; and all of that before you come to deal with the resurrection is passed already. Now, if this is the challenge of Corinthians, I challenge you to put them in that order! and you wouldn't have done it, you would just never have done it! We need to sit at the apostle's feet and learn from him, don't we? as to why it was that he felt **sowing discord amongst brethren** was the most serious problem of all!

Because he did! because that's what we're going to move on to in our next session tomorrow, to look at that first point, sowing discord amongst brethren and why it was that there were some of Paul and some of Cephas, and some of Apollos, and some of Christ!