

Paul's Work in Corinth



SABBATH—JUNE 27

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 1 Corinthians 1:1; Acts 17:16–34; Acts 18:1–3; Acts 18:9, 10; 1 Corinthians 1:11–13.

MEMORY VERSE: “But one night, the Lord appeared to Paul in a vision. He said, ‘Do not be afraid of those people who are against you. Continue to speak my message to the people here. Do not stop speaking to them. I am here with you. Nobody will hurt you. There are many people in this city who will believe in me’ ” (Acts 18:9, 10, **EASY**).

WILLIAM CAREY was a famous Bible worker in his day. Carey was also a shoemaker. Carey used to say that he repaired and made shoes for a living. But his real business was winning people to Jesus.

In the same way, Paul earned his living as a tentmaker (Acts 18:1–3). But Paul's real business, of course, was winning people to Jesus.

This week, we will look at Paul's work in the church at Corinth. As we will see, the church in this city was full of problems. We have many of these same problems in our churches today, almost 2,000 years later. For sure, anyone who serves in church work for a long time can ask the question: Is there any church group that doesn't have problems? Of course, we know the answer is No.

Paul had many problems to solve in Corinth. His answer to the problems was the Cross (1 Corinthians 2:2). We must solve our church problems the same way, too: with the Cross. As we will learn this quarter, the messages of 1 and 2 Corinthians are for our lives, too.



Paul earned his living as a tentmaker (Acts 18:1–3).

PAUL: GOD'S CHOSEN TEACHER AND LEADER
(1 Corinthians 1:1)

Paul starts his letter to the Corinthians with these words: “God chose me to be an apostle [leader and teacher] of [for] Christ Jesus” (1 Corinthians 1:1, EASY; compare with 2 Corinthians 1:1). Paul became a leader and teacher for the church “just as God planned” (1 Corinthians 1:1, NIV). Paul starts most of his letters this way. For sure, he understands who he is and what God wants him to do.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:1 and Romans 1:1. What two parts of Paul’s work for God do we read about in these verses?

Paul says that his work is part of God’s plan for His church. Paul believes that God, and not men, chose him to preach and teach. God chose Paul before he was born, the same as He chose Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:5). God’s choice of Paul shows His love (Galatians 1:15, 16) to the non-Jews.

In 1 Corinthians 15:5–7, Paul talks about the people who saw Jesus after He woke up from the dead. Paul includes himself as one of those people (1 Corinthians 15:8). A few verses later, Paul talks about what happened when he met Jesus. Because of their meeting, the Lord chose Paul to be a leader and teacher (1 Corinthians 15:9–11).

The words “an apostle [leader and teacher] of Christ Jesus” (1 Corinthians 1:1, EASY) teach us some important ideas. First, the words “of Christ Jesus” can mean “for” or “from” Jesus. These words show us that Jesus sent Paul. Second, these same words show us that Paul is a servant of Jesus (Romans 1:11; Titus 1:1; Galatians 1:10). Third, Paul is a preacher and a teacher (1 Timothy 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:1). Fourth, Jesus is always the topic of Paul’s preaching and teaching. In short, Jesus sent Paul and gave him his work. So, Paul is both an apostle **from** Jesus and **for** Jesus.

Jesus is also the most important part of Paul’s life. Just look at how many times Paul talks about Jesus in his letter! Paul loves to talk about Him. Paul wanted to share Jesus with the church so they would love and follow Jesus, too.

God chose Paul to be a preacher and teacher. What did God choose you to do? How do you know He chose you? If you don’t think God chose you to do anything, why do you feel this way? Why not go to God right now and ask Him to show you the work He chose you to do?



Jesus sent Paul and gave him his work.

FROM ATHENS TO CORINTH (Acts 17:16–34)

Where was Paul before he went to Corinth? Also, what did Paul do there before he went to Corinth? Read Acts 17:16–34 for the answers.

Acts 17:16–34 talks about Paul’s preaching to the Athenians before he went to Corinth. Paul didn’t plan to visit Athens at that time. But he went there with the help of some friends after he left Berea. Paul left Berea because Jews came to Berea and caused trouble for Paul.

Then Paul’s traveling companions left Athens and went back to Berea. Paul sent these men with a command for Timothy and Silas to join him right away (Acts 17:15). Acts 17:16–34 tells us what Paul did while he waited for Timothy and Silas to join him. Paul talked about Jesus in the Jewish church, the market-place, and the Areopagus. The Areopagus is the Greek court in Athens. Paul couldn’t stop talking about Jesus! Paul talked about Jesus everywhere.



During his time in the city, Paul spent “all his time preaching to the Jews.”

What does Paul do when he arrives at Corinth? Read Acts 18:1–11 for the answer.

Paul went to Corinth during his second preaching trip. Luke tells us that Paul stayed in Corinth 1½ years.

Paul always started his work for God at the Jewish church (Acts 18:4–6; also read Acts 17:1, 2). Paul believed that “the good news was for the Jews first” (Romans 1:16, WE; Acts 13:46). Then Paul preached the Good News about Jesus to the non-Jews. Paul followed this plan. This plan was the same one that Jesus gave to His followers (read Acts 1:8).

Finally, Silas and Timothy joined Paul in Corinth. During his time in the city, Paul spent “all his time preaching to the Jews. He taught that Jesus was the Christ [Savior]” (Acts 18:5, NLV). Paul was busy “teaching God’s message to the people” (Acts 18:11, ERV). At this time, Paul wrote these famous words to the Corinthians: “While I was with you, I decided to teach you only about Jesus Christ. I taught you about his death on a cross. I wanted to forget everything else” (1 Corinthians 2:2, EASY).

Paul preached the Good News about Jesus everywhere he went in Athens and Corinth. Think about the places you go every day. Who do you meet in those places? Ask God to give you the words to touch their hearts with His love for them.

THE CITY OF CORINTH (Acts 18:1–3)

Read Acts 18:1–3; 1 Corinthians 5:9–11; and 1 Corinthians 8:4. What do these verses teach us about business, behavior, and religious life in Corinth?

Corinth was an important center for trade in ancient times. The kingdom of Rome destroyed the city of Corinth in 146 B.C. Julius Caesar rebuilt the city as a Roman colony in 44 B.C. This new colony was the Corinth that Paul wrote about in the New Testament. In Paul's time, Corinth was one of the most powerful cities, along with Athens. In some ways, Corinth was a more powerful city than Athens. Corinth had two important shipping harbors. These harbors made business easy for people who sell things. These merchants could buy, sell, or trade their goods easily in these harbors.

Paul chose Corinth because it was an important city and was in an excellent location. "God gave Paul success in sharing the Good News in Corinth. The church in Corinth became an important religious center. From there, God's followers shared the Good News everywhere on earth."—Ellen G. White, *Sketches From the Life of Paul*, page 99, adapted.

Paul easily supported himself in Corinth. He made and sold tents for a living while he preached the Good News about Jesus there (Acts 18:2, 3). For sure, Paul's work for God in that large and rich city wasn't always easy. The people in Corinth worshiped many gods (1 Corinthians 8:5). These gods included Apollo, Athena, Aphrodite, and the Egyptian gods Serapis and Isis.

Corinth was also famous for its sex sins. Strabo is a Greek history writer who talks about Corinth's sex sins. Strabo wrote that 1,000 prostitutes served the god Aphrodite in her temple at Corinth. A prostitute is someone who sells sex for pay. Many Bible thinkers believe that Strabo lied about the number of prostitutes. Why? To make Corinth look bad and to make Athens look good. Whatever the real number is, sex sins were a real problem in Corinth. Sex sins were part of daily life. This information helps us understand much of what happens in 1 and 2 Corinthians.

The city of Corinth was filled with sex sins and the statues of false gods. How different are our cities today from Corinth? What makes our sharing the Good News so hard in our cities and communities today? How can we share the Good News with success in these difficult places?



Paul chose Corinth because it was an important city and was in an excellent location.

“MANY OF MY PEOPLE ARE IN THIS CITY”
(Acts 18:9, 10, ERV)

What happened when Paul preached in the city of Corinth? Read Acts 18:4–8 for the answer.



Jesus Himself came to Paul at night in a dream.

Paul’s work with the Jews at Corinth wasn’t a big success. Paul hoped for so much more. But many of the Jews in the city hated Paul. The Bible says that “they insulted him” (Acts 18:6, EASY). The word “insulted” in this verse shows us that the Jews in Corinth said evil things about Paul. They wanted to destroy his good name. They also planned to stop his work from being a success.

But Paul’s work in the Jewish church wasn’t a complete waste of time. God was in charge. God promised, “ ‘What I promise to do will certainly happen’ ” (Isaiah 55:11, EASY). Some Jews didn’t expect Crispus to accept Jesus as the Savior. Crispus was the leader of the Jewish church in Corinth. Crispus and everyone living in his house got baptized (Acts 18:8). Also, “many other people in Corinth also listened to Paul. They, too, believed and were baptized” (Acts 18:8, ERV). Some Bible thinkers believe that these Corinthians accepted Jesus because of Crispus.

How did Paul feel about his troubles in Corinth? How did God encourage Paul? Read Acts 18:9, 10 for the answers.

Right after Paul left the Jewish church, he had a surprising experience that gave him hope. Jesus Himself came to Paul at night in a dream. Jesus’ words to Paul help us remember Isaiah 41:10: “ ‘I am with you, so do not be afraid’ ” (EASY). This message was just what Paul needed to hear most. Later, Paul tells the Corinthians, “I lived among [with] you as someone who felt weak. I was very afraid” (1 Corinthians 2:3, EASY). You will remember that Paul left Berea to go to Athens because some people fought against him. Did Paul think he must leave Corinth for the same reason? For sure. But God did not allow that to happen. Jesus says to Paul: “ ‘I am here with you. Nobody will hurt you. There are many people in this city who will believe in me’ ” (Acts 18:10, EASY). God chose Paul to share the Good News about the Savior with the people in Corinth.

Read Isaiah 41:10. What wonderful promises does God give you in this verse? What hope do they give you right now in your daily life?

PAUL'S LETTERS TO THE CORINTHIANS
(1 Corinthians 1:11–13)

Read 1 Corinthians 1:11–13; 1 Corinthians 4:14; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 1 Corinthians 7:1; and 1 Corinthians 14:37, 40. Also read 2 Corinthians 1:12; 2 Corinthians 2:9; 2 Corinthians 11:3; and 2 Corinthians 13:10. How do these verses help explain why Paul wrote to the Corinthians?

Paul was in Ephesus when he wrote 1 Corinthians (1 Corinthians 16:5–9). Chloe's family told Paul about some problems in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:11). In 1 Corinthians 1–6, Paul talks about some of these problems. The problems included small groups of bossy people, sex sins, going to court, and prostitution. Prostitution is selling sex for pay. Paul also got a letter with questions (1 Corinthians 7:1–11). Paul answers these questions, starting in chapter 7. The questions were about marriage, divorce, staying single, food offered to false gods, correct behavior in church, spiritual gifts, and waking up from the dead. The church at Corinth had many problems.

Don't we have some of the same problems in our churches today? Thank God, Paul's letter has much advice to give us. Ellen G. White says that 1 Corinthians is "one of the most helpful and powerful of all Paul's letters."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, page 301, adapted.

Some Bible thinkers believe that Paul wrote three or four letters to the Corinthians (compare with 2 Corinthians 10:9). Paul wrote a letter to them before he wrote 1 Corinthians (1 Corinthians 5:9). But this letter is lost. Before Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, he also wrote a letter that Bible thinkers name the "very strong letter" (2 Corinthians 2:3, 4, 9; 2 Corinthians 7:8). This letter is lost, too. But some people believe that Paul's very strong letter is 1 Corinthians or part of 2 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians helps us understand that church members loved the things of this life too much. They liked to win. They liked power and money. All these things can be problems for our church today. Paul tried to help the church to make Jesus and His Good News the most important thing in life. We must do the same thing today.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:4 again. What does this verse tell us about how much Paul cared for the Corinthian people? Compare Paul's love for the Corinthians to the love in your heart. How much love do you have in your heart for other people?



Chloe's family told Paul about some problems in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:11).

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read Ellen G. White, “Corinth,” pages 243–254, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“Paul preached the Good News about Jesus in Corinth. Paul’s plan for preaching was different from his plan at Athens. . . . Paul decided to avoid long sermons and talks. He decided ‘to teach’ the Corinthians ‘only about Jesus Christ’ and ‘his death on a cross. I wanted to forget everything else’ [1 Corinthians 2:2, EASY].”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 244, adapted.

“Paul had some success. But he didn’t think that Corinth was the best place for a church. So, he decided to leave the city. . . .

“As Paul thought about leaving the city to work elsewhere, the Lord came to him in a dream at night. The Lord said, ‘I am here with you. Nobody will hurt you. There are many people in this city who will believe in me’ [Acts 18:10, EASY]. Paul believed this dream was a command from God to stay in Corinth. The dream was also a promise. God would give him success. . . . A large church was started for Jesus in this city.”—Ellen G. White, *Sketches From the Life of Paul*, pages 106, 107, adapted.

“Paul worked for 1 ½ years in Corinth. During that time, he worked for other places, too. . . . Paul made Corinth his headquarters. . . . He started many churches in other places at this time. . . . Paul couldn’t be at all the churches. So, he wrote letters to the churches under his care. These letters were strong and powerful. The churches believed these letters were from God. . . . The leaders read these letters in the churches.”—Ellen G. White, *Sketches From the Life of Paul*, page 109, adapted.



“The leaders read Paul’s letters in the churches.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Paul believed that Jesus chose him to be a preacher and teacher. Why do we need to know who we are and what God chose us to do for Him?
- ② For a short time, Paul wanted to give up his work in Corinth and leave the city. What made him change his mind and stay in Corinth?
- ③ The church members at Corinth loved the things of this life too much. We also have the same problem today. How can we be part of this life (John 17:11, 15) and not let the things of this life cause us to turn away from God (1 John 2:16)?

THE BIBLE WORKER COMES BACK

I love visiting people who start new churches. I enjoy watching them meet with their small group of new Bible students. I had many exciting experiences with watching them in the past. I met with a Bible worker in a house church in a mountain village in Indonesia. I also watched a Bible worker teach Sabbath School under some trees in Africa.

Then I visited a church that was a completely new experience for me. The people who started the church left the country years ago. A school was next door to the church. The church had 125 members. The school is now one of the best in the city.

But when the Bible workers first arrived in the big city, there were no Seventh-day Adventists. The Bible workers went door-to-door and tried to sell Bible books. Nobody bought their books. They tried to rent a place to hold meetings. But people refused to let them rent any rooms. The Bible workers weren't welcome in this city.

Then the Bible workers got an invitation to work for God in a nearby town. So, they went. They rented a building and started to work. Before long, they had a small group of five baptized members. Then the Bible workers were invited to another town. Soon they started another group with 37 members.

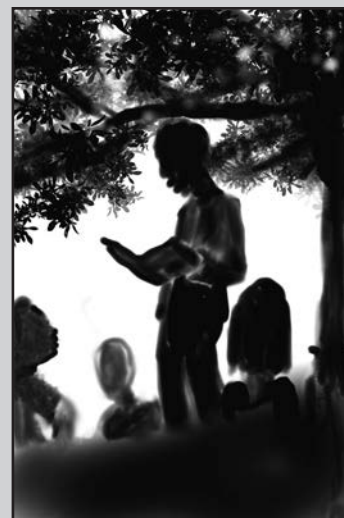
Many years passed before the Bible workers were accepted in the big city. They finally found a place in the city to meet. They started a small group. Soon, they had 30 members. Since then, this first group started four more churches. The small groups in the nearby towns also started more churches, too.

One of the Bible workers who helped start these churches went to visit the country with me. This Bible worker is now the manager for the Bible workers in that country. This man showed me that God blessed his efforts over the years very much.

Bible workers continue to go to places where people do not know about Jesus. Taguhi and Aghvan are two Bible workers who work in a place with very few Seventh-day Adventists. Please pray for these Bible workers and other church builders as they start new work in the large cities where people don't know Jesus. May God bless their work as they share the Good News and start new worship groups.

Church builders and Bible workers are sent to places where people don't know about Jesus. These workers start new worship groups in those places. The workers earn very little pay. Often they work in the countries where they were born. Learn more about church builders and Bible workers: bit.ly/GMPioneers.

INSIDE
Story
by RICK KAJURA



Rick also watched a Bible worker teach Sabbath School under some trees in Africa.