

The Corinthians: Lessons from an Imperfect Ecclesia



2010 Niagara Bible School: Bro. Steve Davis

Money, Sports and Promiscuity

1. Geography/Commerce
2. Isthmian Games
3. Religion/Immorality

Geography: Mediterranean Sea



Brief History of Ancient Corinth

- “Old Corinth”
 - Richest port and largest city in Ancient Greece
 - 5 times larger than Athens, the capital of the province
 - Destroyed in 146 BC after the city led the Achaean League revolt against Roman Rule
- “New Corinth”
 - Re-founded as a colony in 44 BC by Julius Ceasar and populated with Italian, Greek, Syrian, Egyptian and Judean freed slaves.
 - “New Corinth” was only 100 years old when Paul began to preach there in 50 AD

Corinthian Commerce

- Geographically perfect location for trade
 - Governed the North/South land route
 - Controlled the East/West maritime route
- Incredible wealth and prosperity
 - The duty and tolls paid on trade resulted in huge revenue
 - Olive oil, pottery and wine were major exports
 - Profitable marketplace (Agora) offering world-wide goods
- People moved to “New Corinth” to get rich
 - The “gold rush” of the ancient Roman world
 - Population grew from 90,000 in 400BC to 750,000 in Paul’s day
 - Mostly populated by Roman freedmen and Jews

A Powerful Commercial City



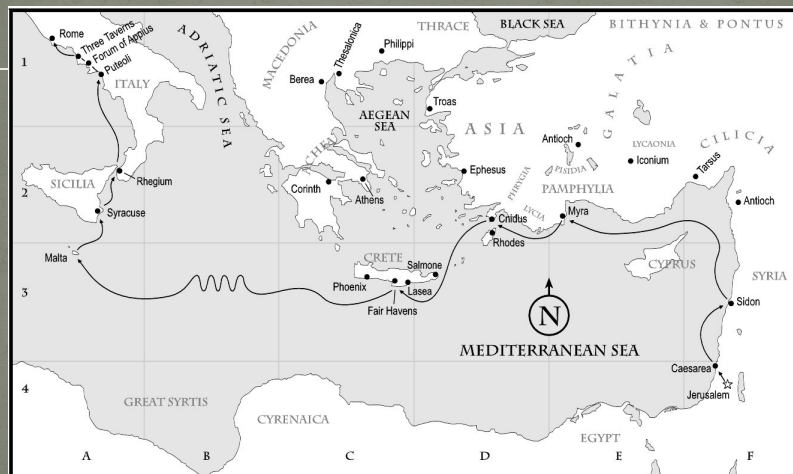
Strategically located guarding the narrow isthmus that connects the mainland to Peloponnesus (Southern Greece)

Two Seaports only 4 miles apart!

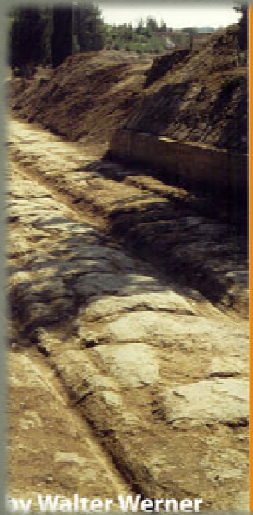
- The Corinthian harbor was the trading port to Italy in the West
- The Isthmian harbor was the trading port for Asia in the East



The Dangers of the Mediterranean



The Dialkos: World's First Railroad



by Walter Werner



1960 personal archive of

A short-cut designed to spare ships from coping with the wind-swept and dangerous route around Cape Maleae

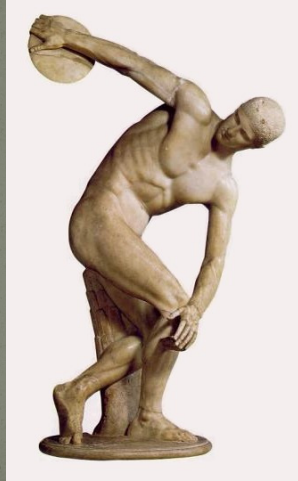
- Carried small boats
- Off-loaded and transported cargo from large ships

The Agora:



The marketplace was the center of social activity where people came not only to buy and sell goods but also to meet to exchange news and ideas.

Corinthian Sport: Isthmian Games



One of Four National Festivals

- Similar to the Olympic Games
 - Traditional foot races, wrestling, boxing, javelin, discuss, etc.
- Also included additional events
 - Horse races, chariot races, sailing regattas
 - Music, singing, poetry and drama competitions.
 - Competitors included men, women and children

Corinthian Sport: Isthmian Games

- Hugely Popular
 - Held in the Spring twice as often as the Olympics
 - 500 year history when Paul arrived
 - Isthmian Truce provided peace during the games
 - Drew multitudes of competitors and spectators



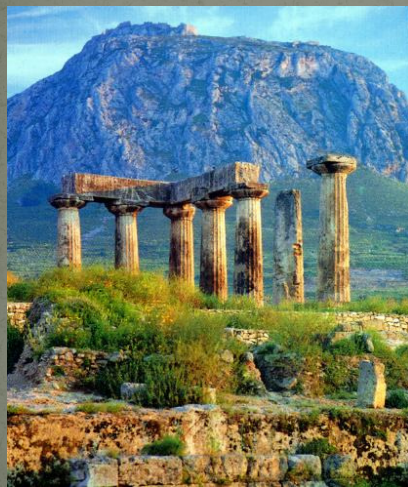
The Sport Metaphor



(1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.”

Immorality in the Name of Religion



The temple of Aphrodite



The temple of Apollo

Worship of Aphrodite:



- Aphrodite: The goddess of love, beauty, sex and fertility

The temple of Aphrodite was located at the summit of the 2,000' acropolis (fortified citadel) called the Acrocorinth

- 1,000 cult prostitutes worshiped there
- These "priestesses" often advertised their services to Sailors and other travelers by sounding gongs and tinkling cymbals to lead the men up the mountain.

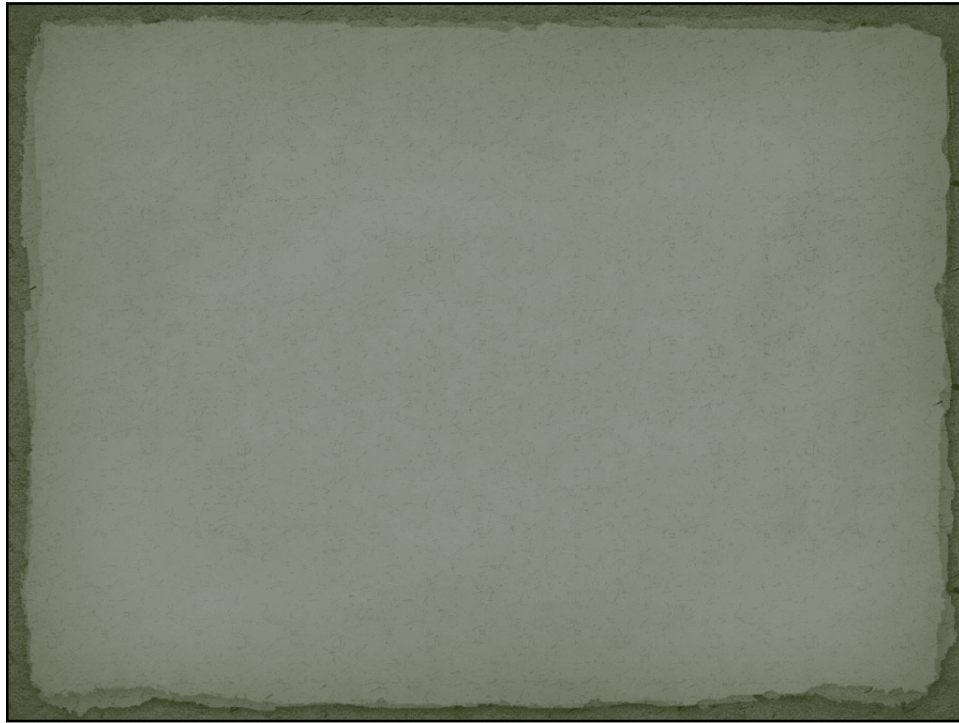
Corinthian Immorality



• The word *Corinthianize* became part of Greek language and was a synonym for immorality.

• The word *Korinthia Kore* became a part of Greek language and was a synonym for prostitution.

- In Paul's day, Aphrodite's temple was in ruins, but its legacy lived on.
 - I Cor. 13:1
- In Greek plays, Corinthians appearing on stage were always shown drunk.



An Ecclesia is Born



An Ecclesia is Born

1. Timeline
2. Working/Preaching in the city
3. Love and friendship for the brothers and sisters



Paul arrives in Corinth

- Paul comes to Corinth during his Second Missionary Journey
 - Arrives after preaching in Athens
 - Lives, works and preaches in Corinth for 18 months
 - Leaves for Ephesus in order to continue his journey
- Maintains friendship and contact with the brethren
 - Brothers and Sisters visit him in Ephesus
 - They correspond via messengers
 - Paul comes back to visit

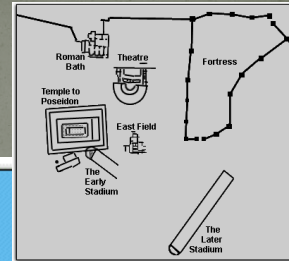
Paul's time with the Corinthians

AD 50-52	AD 53- 54	AD 55-56
Paul moves to Corinth. Stays for 18 months before leaving for Ephesus. Acts 18	Paul writes: "First" Corinthians	Paul writes: "Second" Corinthians

Isthmian Excavations

Archeologists have discovered a large stadium and theatre, but no permanent accommodations to house the thousands who attended the Isthmian Games

- Athletes and spectators likely stayed in tents on the surrounding grounds
- Acts 18:1-3



The Corinthian Synagogue



- This doorway lintel was discovered in 1898
- Paul preached in this synagogue every Sabbath
 - Acts 18:4-6

“Synagogue of the Hebrews”

The Christadelphian Ecclesia at Corinth

Partial list of members

- Priscilla, Aquila, Titius Justus, Crispus, Sosthenes, and Apollos (Acts 18)
- Chloe, Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (1 Cor 1 & 16)
- Phoebe, Lucius, Jason, Sosipater, Tertius, Gaius, Quartus, and Erastus (Romans 16)

Diversity of members

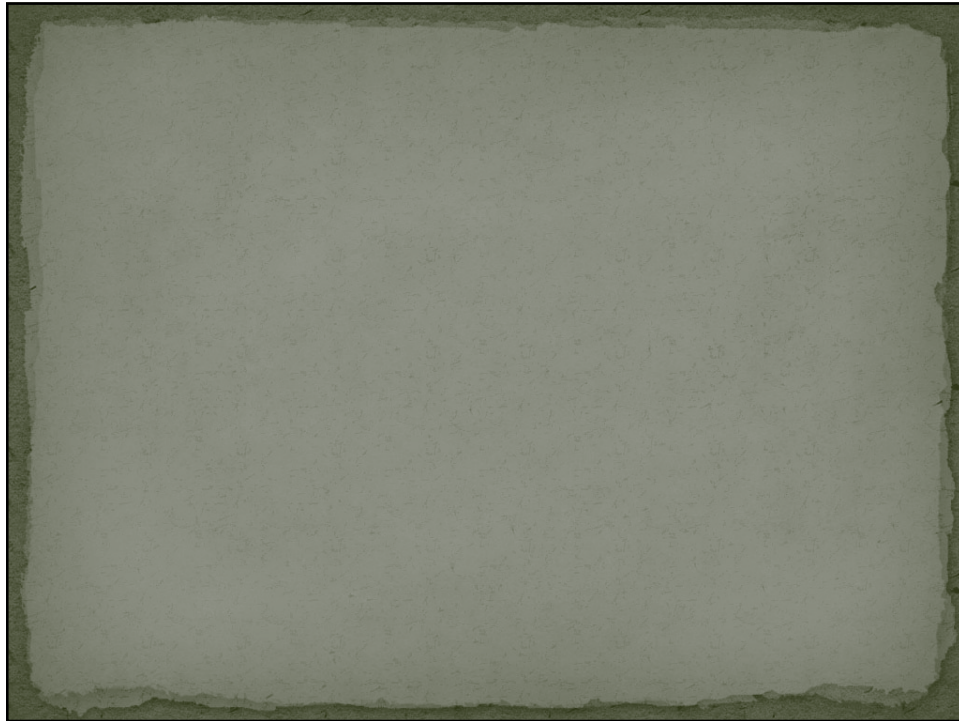
- Nobility (1 Cor 1:26-28)
- Slaves (1 Cor 7:21-23)
- Wealthy (2 Cor 8:14)
- Poor (1 Cor 1:28; 11:22)
- Jews (1 Cor 7:18)
- Gentiles (1 Cor 12:2)

The Erastus Stone

- This paving stone was discovered near the ancient theatre by archeologists in 1929



- Romans 16: 23 "Erastus, Commisioner of Public Works, bore the expense of this pavement."



Problems, Priorities & Principles

1. Problems arise after Paul leaves
2. Brothers and Sisters ask for help
3. Paul writes offering instruction and guidance about:
 - Morality
 - Doctrine

Paul's interactions with the Corinthians

AD 50-52				AD 53-54				AD 55-56
Paul moves to Corinth and preaches for 18 months before leaving for Ephesus	Paul writes the "previous letter" addressing moral problems (not preserved)	Visitors from Chloe's house report on divisions in the church	The ecclesia writes to Paul looking for guidance with problems	Paul writes "First" Corinthians	Paul visits Corinth briefly (painful visit)	Paul writes the "severe letter" (not preserved)	Paul sends Titus as messenger	Paul writes "Second" Corinthians
Acts 18	I Cor. 5:9	I Cor. 1:11	I Cor. 7:1		2 Cor. 2:1	2 Cor. 2:3	2 Cor. 7:6	

Doctrinal and Moral Problems in Corinth

Some of the Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

- Denied the Resurrection!
 - 15:12
- Were sexually immoral (including a case of incest!)
 - 5:1
 - 6:15-16, 18
- Sued each other in pagan courts
 - 6:1,7
- Got drunk and at the Breaking of Bread!
 - 11:20-21
- Had questions about whether idols were real or not
 - 8:4-7
- Attacked the credibility of Paul
 - 4: 10,14,18-19

Thanksgiving in the midst of schism

“I always give thanks for you...”

1 Cor. 1: 4

Paul’s appeal to the Brethren

“God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful. I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.”

1 Cor. 1: 9-10

Mending the Fabric of Fellowship

v. 10

“Be **perfectly united** (Gk. “katartizontas”) in mind and thought.”

Mt. 4:21

“And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James *the son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, **mending** (Gk. “katartizontas”) their nets; and he called them.

I Corinthians – General Outline

- I. Introduction (1:1-9)
 - A. Salutation (1:1-3)
 - B. Thanksgiving (1:4-9)
- II. Responding to Reports (1:10-6:20)
 - A. Cliques and Division in the One-Body (1:10-4:21)
 - B. Sexual Immorality (5:1-12; 6:12-20)
 - C. Litigation between Believers (6:1-11)
- III. Responses to Their Questions (7:1-16:12)
 - A. Celibacy or Marriage (7:1-40)
 - B. Eating Meat Offered to Idols (8:1-11:1)
 - C. Submission and esteem toward one another in Worship
 - Role of Women in Worship (11:2-16)
 - Etiquette at the Lord's Supper (11:17-34)
 - Proper use of Holy Spirit Gifts (12:1-14:40)
 - D. Disbelief in the Resurrection (15:1-58)
 - E. Charity for the Poor (16:1-12)
- IV. Conclusion (16:13-24)

Fellowship while learning to agree

v. 9

“Called into fellowship”

- If we have fellowship with the Father and his Son, then we enjoy fellowship as Christ's brethren: 1 John 1: 3-4, 7

v. 10

Don't divide, but exhort one another so that you can become perfectly united in mind and thought

- One Flesh: Mt. 19: 4-6
- One Body: Eph 4: 11-16; 1 Cor. 12: 16, 21
- One Temple: Eph. 2: 15-22; 1 Cor. 3: 16

Chloe's Report: Schism!

- I follow Paul
 - Founded the Corinthian ecclesia
- I follow Apollos
 - Great speaker: Acts 18:24
- I follow Peter
 - "Original Apostle" with Jesus: John 1:42

Contrasting the Gospel:

- Wisdom
 - 1 Cor. 1:18-25
- Social Standing
 - 1 Cor. 1: 26-31
- Eloquent Speech
 - 1 Cor. 2: 1-5

Fellow Workers

- Boast not in our “Associations”
 - 1 Cor. 3: 1-9, 21-22
 - 1 Cor. 4: 6-7

- Working Together
 - “...and Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only are my fellowworkers unto the Kingdom of God, which have been a comfort to me.
 - Colossians 4: 11 (KJV)

Withdrawal

- Objective: To prompt a recognition of sin and a need to repent
 - 2 Cor. 2: 6

- Withdrawal passages not addressed to brethren with failures of understanding, but to false teachers, those who lead division, and those who blaspheme
 - Romans 16: 17-18
 - 1 Timothy 1: 20; 6: 3-5
 - 2 John 10,11

The Weaker Brother

“ Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak... if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall into sin.” (KJV = offend)

I Cor. 8: 9, 13

Beware the Tyranny of the Offended

8: 13 “I will never eat meat if it cause my brother to offend”

- Offend does not mean that the weaker brother “feels offended”, has hurt feelings, or experiences anger, resentment or displeasure.
- Offend means that a brother will stumble and be led into sinning.
 - A Corinthian brother who might be pulled back into immorality by being in the vicinity of temple prostitutes.
 - Jesus being tempted by Peter: Mt. 16: 23

Beware the Tyranny of the Offended

8: 7 “Since their conscience is weak...”

- Our conscience must not be based on worldly wisdom, humanistic thinking, philosophical reasoning or man-made traditions.
- Our conscience must be based on the revealed will of God
 - 2 Cor. 1: 12
 - Old Testament fighting vs. New Testament love of enemies

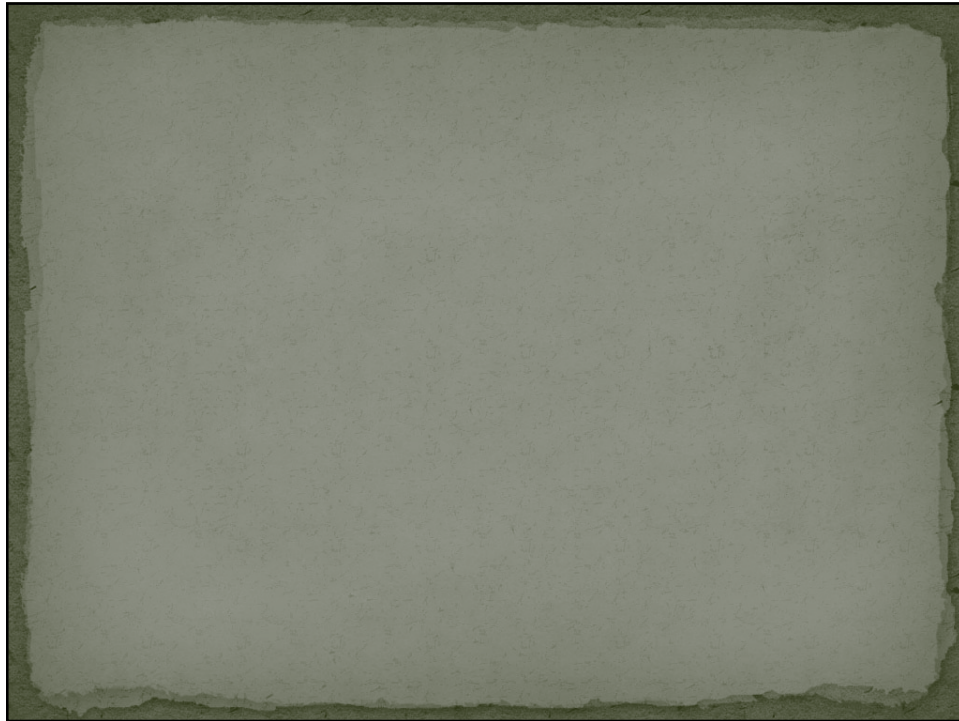
Beware the Tyranny of the Offended

Paul’s council about limiting our freedom for the benefit of the weaker brother will lead to peace, but it is only applicable to issues with no direct Biblical instruction .

- Holy days – Romans 14
- Eating meat in idol’s temples – 1 Corinthians 8

It would be wrong for us to comply with a weaker brother’s request if it is contrary to Bible teaching:

- Gal. 2:4-5
- 1 Cor. 1: 23



The Lord's Supper

1. The significance of sharing the One Loaf
2. What it means to eat in an unworthy manner
3. What it means to recognize the body of the Lord

The Lord's Supper

“Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation (sharing) in the blood of Christ?”

1 Corinthians 10: 15

The Lord's Supper

“ And though we are many, we all eat from one loaf, showing we are one body.”

1 Corinthians 10: 16 (NLT)

The Lord's Supper

“Your meetings do more harm than good...”

1 Corinthians 11: 17

The Lord's Supper

“For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.”

1 Corinthians 11: 29

Recognizing the Lord's body:

- 1 Cor. 10: 17
- 1 Cor. 12: 13, 27

The Lord's Supper

“A man ought to examine himself..”

1 Corinthians 11: 28

The Greatest of these is Love

- Our actions and behaviour toward one another must be motivated first and foremost by love.
 - “I always give thanks for you.” 1: 4
 - “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.” 8: 1
 - “If I have all knowledge... but have not love, I am nothing.” 13: 1-3
 - “Do everything in love.” 16: 14

“Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.”

2 Corinthians 13:11