

ΠΑΙΔΕΙΑ ☐ paideia  
COMMENTARIES ON  
THE NEW TESTAMENT

# First Corinthians

PHEME  
PERKINS



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PHEME PERKINS

**B**  
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# Contents



	List of Figures and Tables	vii
	Foreword	ix
	Preface	xi
	Abbreviations	xiii
	Introduction	3
	1 Corinthians 1:1–9	The Letter Opening 41
1	Corinthians 1:10–2:16	Against Divisions: God’s Wisdom 48
1	Corinthians 3:1–4:21	Against Divisions: Paul and Apollos as <i>Exempla</i> 65
1	Corinthians 5:1–6:20	Reports about Unholy Conduct among Believers 85
1	Corinthians 7:1–11:1	Questions in a Letter from Corinth 102
1	Corinthians 11:2–14:40	Problems in the Community Assembled for Worship 132
1	Corinthians 15:1–58	Reports That Some Deny the Resurrection 171
1	Corinthians 16:1–24	The Letter Closing 195
	Bibliography	207
	Index of Subjects	219
	Index of Modern Authors	223
	Index of Scripture and Ancient Sources	227

# Figures and Tables



## Figures

1. The Diolkos at Corinth 6
2. Erastus Inscription 7
3. Fountain of Peirene 9
4. The Acrocorinth 10
5. The Egyptian God Sarapis 13
6. The Rites of Isis 14
7. Animals for Sacrifice 16
8. Gallio Inscription 17
9. Map of Paul's Journey East from Corinth 19
10. Theater Ruins 67
11. Persons Assembled at an Altar for a Sacrifice 126
12. Roman Woman's Hairstyle 137
13. Woman with Head Covering 138
14. Map of the Mediterranean Region 199

## Tables

1. Paul's Rhetoric against Divisions at Corinth 25
2. Scripture Citations in 1 Corinthians 31
3. Thanksgiving Anticipates the Content of 1 Corinthians 42
4. Greeting Formulas in 1–2 Corinthians and Philippians 43
5. The Objects and Purposes of God's Call 56
6. Paul's Style of Preaching in Corinth 58
7. Mystery as God's Plan of Salvation 59
8. Scripture Citations Related to 1 Corinthians 2:9 60

Figures and Tables

9. The Corinthians and the Apostles Compared 79
10. Vice Lists in 1 Corinthians 5–6 96
11. Exodus Motifs in 1 Corinthians 10:1–5 123
12. Versions of Jesus’s Words over the Bread and Cup 144
13. Spiritual Gifts of Speech and Knowledge in 1 Corinthians 159
14. Scripture Citations in 1 Corinthians 14:21 161
15. Contrasting the Physical and Resurrected Body 187
16. Philo Parallels to 1 Corinthians 15:44b–47 189
17. End-Time Resurrection of the Christian Dead 190

# Foreword



*Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament* is a series that sets out to comment on the final form of the New Testament text in a way that pays due attention both to the cultural, literary, and theological settings in which the text took form and to the interests of the contemporary readers to whom the commentaries are addressed. This series is aimed squarely at students—including MA students in religious and theological studies programs, seminarians, and upper-division undergraduates—who have theological interests in the biblical text. Thus, the didactic aim of the series is to enable students to understand each book of the New Testament as a literary whole rooted in a particular ancient setting and related to its context within the New Testament.

The name “Paideia” (Greek for “education”) reflects (1) the instructional aim of the series—giving contemporary students a basic grounding in academic New Testament studies by guiding their engagement with New Testament texts; (2) the fact that the New Testament texts as literary unities are shaped by the educational categories and ideas (rhetorical, narratological, etc.) of their ancient writers and readers; and (3) the pedagogical aims of the texts themselves—their central aim being not simply to impart information but to form the theological convictions and moral habits of their readers.

Each commentary deals with the text in terms of larger rhetorical units; these are not verse-by-verse commentaries. This series thus stands within the stream of recent commentaries that attend to the final form of the text. Such reader-centered literary approaches are inherently more accessible to liberal arts students without extensive linguistic and historical-critical preparation than older exegetical approaches, but within the reader-centered world the sanest practitioners have paid careful attention to the extratext of the original readers, including not only these readers’ knowledge of the geography, history, and other contextual elements reflected in the text but also their ability to respond

correctly to the literary and rhetorical conventions used in the text. Paideia commentaries pay deliberate attention to this extratextual repertoire in order to highlight the ways in which the text is designed to persuade and move its readers. Each rhetorical unit is explored from three angles: (1) introductory matters; (2) tracing the train of thought or narrative or rhetorical flow of the argument; and (3) theological issues raised by the text that are of interest to the contemporary Christian. Thus, the primary focus remains on the text and not its historical context or its interpretation in the secondary literature.

Our authors represent a variety of confessional points of view: Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox. What they share, beyond being New Testament scholars of national and international repute, is a commitment to reading the biblical text as theological documents within their ancient contexts. Working within the broad parameters described here, each author brings his or her own considerable exegetical talents and deep theological commitments to the task of laying bare the interpretation of Scripture for the faith and practice of God's people everywhere.

Mikeal C. Parsons  
Charles H. Talbert



# Preface



Lay readers often complain that they cannot understand what Paul is saying in the passage assigned for a given Sunday. A brief explanation before the service enables them to present his message intelligibly. The emphasis on laying out the biblical author's train of thought, which the editors of the Paideia series have set as the goal of these commentaries, should answer many such questions.

Working through all of 1 Corinthians under that mandate brings to light the subtlety of Paul's approach to highly charged issues in the life of the church. At the end of the day, some passages remain ambiguous. The reader must make choices about Paul's tone: harsh or conciliatory, humorous or sarcastic, siding with one group or another. One must also imagine how his words might have been received by the very diverse audience in first-century Corinth. I have explained the rationale for my choices on these issues as they emerge in the course of commenting on the letter. Different sets of assumptions produce very different images of the apostle's relationship to the church in Corinth.

Much of what I know about Paul and the Corinthians is thanks to conversations over the years with Fr. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, OP; Fr. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, SJ; and Fr. Raymond Collins. My debts to their written work are reflected in what follows. However, my biggest debt in reading Paul is owed to my first academic encounter with New Testament studies, when the late Krister Stendahl, former dean of Harvard Divinity School and Bishop of Stockholm, gave a nineteen-year-old a reading list. But more important for this project were three basic lessons Krister repeated over many years: the NT never quite means what you (or the pious) think it does, all the little details of language matter, and the Bible is the church's book. Its best interpretation nourishes and expands faith by pruning the tree.

August 8, 2011  
Feast of St. Dominic



# Abbreviations



## General

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AT	author's translation	OT	Old Testament
ca.	<i>circa</i> , approximately	trans.	translator/translated by
cf.	compare	vol(s).	volume(s)
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example	x	following a numeral indicates times, number of occurrences
i.e.	<i>id est</i> , that is		
NT	New Testament		

## Bible Texts and Versions

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LXX	Septuagint
NA <sup>27</sup>	<i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> . Edited by [E. and E. Nestle and] B. Aland et al. 27th rev. ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993.
NETS	<i>A New English Translation of the Septuagint</i> . Edited by A. Pietersma and B. G. Wright. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version

## Ancient Corpora

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OLD TESTAMENT		Deut.	Deuteronomy
Gen.	Genesis	Josh.	Joshua
Exod.	Exodus	Judg.	Judges
Lev.	Leviticus	Ruth	Ruth
Num.	Numbers	1–2 Sam.	1–2 Samuel





# First Corinthians



# Introduction



## Christianity in an Urban Setting

Much of Jesus's ministry took place in the small villages and towns of rural Galilee. The movement he founded established itself in cities (Furnish 1988). Peter and the other disciples had moved to Jerusalem before Paul's conversion from foe to apostle in about AD 34 (Gal. 1:13–17). By that time believers could be found in the Jewish communities of Damascus and Antioch in Syria. Several years later disturbances over a certain "Chrestus" in the synagogues of Rome led Emperor Claudius (41–54) to expel those responsible from the city. Some scholars associate the expulsion with the emperor's attempt to pacify the Jewish community during the first year of his reign. If so, the gospel had reached Rome by 41 (Murphy-O'Connor 1996). Most scholars credit a tradition found in later church historians that places the expulsion in 49 (Lampe 2003). The statement in Acts 18:2 that Claudius banned *all Jews* from Rome is hardly credible. Banishing persons held responsible for civic disturbances was routine practice.

Consequently Aquila and Prisca must have been preaching the gospel in Roman synagogues to have been exiled from the city. Like Paul, they were *skēnopoioi* ("tent

### Claudius Takes Action

*"He expelled from Rome Jews who were rioting repeatedly at the instigation of Chrestus." (Suetonius, Claudius 25.4 AT)*

*"... a certain Jew named Aquila of Pontus and his wife Priscilla, who had recently arrived from Italy on account of Claudius's order to expel all the Jews from Rome." (Acts 18:2 AT)*

### Inscriptions Honoring Female Artisans

*"I worked with my hands; I was a thrifty woman, I, Nicarete, who lie here."*

*"Sellia Epyre, dressmaker in gold in the Via Sacra, (wife of) Q. Futus Olympicus."*

*"In this tomb lies Aemnone, a bar-maid known [beyond the boundaries] of her own country, [on account of whom] many people used to frequent Tibur. [Now the supreme] god has taken [fragile life] from her, and a kindly light receives her spirit [in the aether]. I . . . nus, [put up this inscription] to my holy wife. [It is right that her name] remain forever."*

(Lefkowitz and Fant 2005, 219–20)

or awning makers"), and had transported their trade to Corinth (Acts 18:3). Some scholars assume that one should consider them to have been leatherworkers, making anything from tents to harnesses to sandal thongs, but there is no reason not to employ the traditional meaning of the Greek word. Inscriptions provide evidence for an association of tent makers (*collegium tabernaclariorum*) in Rome (Barrett 1998, 863). In addition to the routine use of tents or awnings for shade and shelter in theaters and arenas and by travelers, the biannual Isthmian Games, which took place outside Corinth, provided plenty of opportunity for such artisans.

Workshops excavated along the north market area of Corinth are only eight to thirteen feet wide. Stone stairs and a ladder lead up to a loft,

where an unglazed window with wood shutters provided the only light except what came in through the doorway. As their lodger, Paul would have had to sleep among the shop tools on the ground floor (Murphy-O'Connor 1996, 263). Apostolic hardships such as relentless toil, sleepless nights, cold, hunger, and lack of sufficient clothing (2 Cor. 11:27) represent daily life for workers. Men and women, free persons and slaves often toiled side by side. Women are mentioned in trades associated with textiles and food shops or as lessees of inherited pottery shops, vineyards, or other agricultural facilities (Rowlandson 1998, 218–79). Though the educated elite considered the slave-like conditions of laborers demeaning, tombstone inscriptions refer to an artisan's trade with pride (Thomas 2005). Prisca would have worked alongside her husband and Paul making and repairing the tents and awnings out of coarsely woven cloth or leather.

This social setting is the urban equivalent to that of Jesus's original followers—a movement that took hold among those who worked at trades. Scholars use such slender hints about occupation, travel, and background to assess the economic and social position of the earliest Christians (Horrell 2006). Had they drawn from the most destitute rural or urban poor, Christians would not have had the means to carry their message between cities and to engage in the network of communication between churches that is so evident in the Pauline letters (M. Thompson 1998). One should not, however, imagine that these



first believers belonged to a comfortable middle class, assured of sufficient food, some leisure, and future well-being. At best some 3–4 percent of the total population comprised the wealthy elite classes, the imperial household, senatorial families, regional kings, members of the equestrian class, and provincial and municipal elite families. Some freedmen, wealthy merchants, and retired military commanders might have joined their ranks. An additional 7 percent—merchants, veterans, those able to employ others in larger workshops—could be considered comfortable, that is, able to provide their families with more than the basic needs for food and shelter. If the destitute comprised about 28 percent

of the population, that leaves the remaining 65 percent at or near subsistence level. Such folk comprised the overwhelming majority in Pauline churches. The few individuals who had sufficient wealth to be patrons of the apostle or the community as a whole belonged either to the 7 percent just below the elite or to a higher end of the “above subsistence” group (Friesen 2005).

Paul’s participation in the manual labor at local workshops created a bond of solidarity with believers in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:9). Like a loving father, the apostle had their interests at heart (Ascough 2003; Bartchy 2003). But such labor drew persistently harsh criticism from some Christians in Corinth (1 Cor. 4:10–12; 9:8–18; 2 Cor. 11:7; Marshall 1987). Apparently the apostle could have been supported by wealthier Christians in Corinth. There was no need for him to engage in such socially demeaning activities. Paul even agrees with the status judgments behind this criticism. His labors put him among the masses who are considered beneath notice by the 10–15 percent of the population considered elite or at least well off. Many of the problems he faces in Corinth involve the clash between such human criteria and God’s perspective revealed on the cross (Theissen 1982; Marcus 2006). He must persuade his audience that those who live in Christ no longer live by the routine standards of their culture.

Why is the situation much more divisive in Corinth than in the less prosperous churches of Macedonia (2 Cor. 8:1–6)? Paul’s sarcastic description of their pretensions (1 Cor. 4:6–13; Du Toit 1994) suggests that the Corinthians identify with the values of the civic elite even though few could claim membership in the upper classes by either birth or wealth (1:26–31). Scholars attribute this impulse to the economic and social dynamism of first-century AD Corinth.

### The Social Standing of Artisans

*“While we delight in the work, we despise the workman . . . for it does not of necessity follow that, if the work delights you with its graces, the one who wrought it is worthy of your esteem.” (Plutarch, Pericles 1.4–2.2, trans. LCL)*

*“Their trades, however, were petty, laborious, and barely able to provide them with just enough.” (Lucian, Fugitivi 12, trans. LCL)*



Figure 1. The Diolkos at Corinth. This track for hauling cargo across the isthmus from Cenchræe to Lechaion made it possible to transport wares from the Aegean Sea to the Adriatic without circumnavigating the Peloponnesus.

After lying in near ruin for almost a century, the city had been refounded by Julius Caesar in 44 BC. Veterans and other colonists from Rome settled there. Some new inhabitants may have been from Rome's Jewish population, descendants of those brought to Rome as slaves by Roman armies. Others may have arrived when Emperor Tiberius expelled Jews and Egyptians from Rome (Tacitus, *Annales* 2.45.4; Josephus, *Antiquitates judaicae* 18.65–84). Prisca and Aquila might have known Jewish immigrants in Corinth. With harbors on both the eastern (Cenchræe) and western (Lechaion) side of the isthmus, Corinth served as a transit point for goods being shipped across the Mediterranean. It was safer to haul a ship's cargo on the track between the two ports, the Diolkos, than risk a sea voyage around the Peloponnesus. By the first century AD the city was a major economic hub in the eastern Mediterranean, owing its considerable wealth to the goods and services it supplied to merchants and other visitors (Engels 1990). It served as the capital of the Roman province of Achaia.

A city that was rebuilding and expanding had room for ambitious merchants and artisans to push forward into that 7 percent of comfortable means. Since



John McRay

Figure 2. Erastus Inscription. A paved limestone area east of the theater at Corinth included this inscription: “Erastus paved this at his own expense in return for the aedileship.”

Corinth did not have a long-established group of aristocratic families as its “first citizens,” some recent arrivals might even aspire to join the ranks of the “municipal elite” with the help of newly acquired wealth and marriage into a prominent family. History preserves a tantalizing bit of evidence that one such individual could have belonged to the church. Paul sends greetings to those in Rome from a certain Erastus, a steward or financial officer (*oikonomos*) of Corinth (Rom. 16:23). East of the theater, an area of paved limestone included an inscription identifying its donor, Erastus, as an aedile. The aediles were responsible for supervising the city’s markets and other commercial functions. If this Erastus is the same man, he has moved up to a higher civil office. Several factors favor the identification. Erastus is not a common name. Since no formal patronymic is given, the person in question was probably a wealthy freedman. Some scholars wonder how a Christian could serve in a public office that required participation in civic religious activities (Bookidis 2005; Turcan 2000). But some believers had few scruples in that regard (1 Cor. 10). Therefore it is quite likely that the Erastus of Rom. 16:23 became an aedile in Corinth (Jewett 2007, 980–83).

The workshop setting provides more than clues about the socioeconomic demography of Pauline churches. Evangelization probably occurred in that context as well (Hock 1980). Jewish synagogues provided instruction in the law and ancestral traditions. Roman inscriptions refer to individuals as “teacher of the law” (*nomodidaskalos*), “teacher and student of the law” (*didaskalos kai nomomathētēs*), and “student of wise men” (*mathētēs sophōn*). Philo notes that the “ancestral philosophy” (*patrios philosophia*) was taught in Rome’s synagogues (*Legatio ad Gaium* 156; Lampe 2003, 78). Pious gentiles associated with local synagogues, which provided Christians with the first non-Jewish believers. But measures taken against Jews in Rome under Claudius either severely restricted or terminated Christian recruiting in the synagogues (Lampe 2003, 14–15, 69–70). Acts 18:4–8 imagines a similar forced separation between Christian sympathizers and other Jews at Corinth. Although Paul shifted his preaching to the nearby home of a gentile god-fearer, Titus Justus, tensions with the local synagogue persisted. After some eighteen months

### Dream Visions of Asclepius

*“Arata, a Spartan, suffering from dropsy. On her behalf her mother slept in the sanctuary while she stayed in Sparta. It seemed to her that the god cut off her daughter’s head and hung her body with the neck downwards. After a considerable amount of water had flowed out, he released the body and put the head back on her neck. After she saw this dream she returned to Sparta and found that her daughter had recovered and seen the same dream.”*

*“An anonymous woman from Troezen, for children. She fell asleep and saw a dream. The god seemed to say that she would bear children and asked her whether she wanted a boy or a girl. She said that she wanted a boy and after that within a year a son was born to her.”*

(Lefkowitz and Fant 2005, 286–87)

during which Paul established the nucleus of the Corinthian church, the apostle was charged before a disinterested Roman proconsul and left the city (18:9–17), taking Prisca and Aquila along and leaving them in Ephesus (18:18–19).

The story as Luke tells it has been shaped by the assumptions of a more elite audience. Christian preaching does not pose any threat of civic discord. A dispute over teaching causes Paul to shift to the household of a private individual, often the context for itinerant philosophers in the Roman world. The Roman proconsul refuses to intervene in an argument about Jewish matters. In short, the social stigma of a fractious movement among the city’s artisan class has been omitted from the story. Though Acts has not forgotten Paul’s trade, the workshop plays no role in spreading the gospel. In addition, its version of the story enhances the significance of moving from synagogue to private home with a dream vision. This divine oracle strengthens the apostle and demonstrates that his ministry is unfolding according to God’s plan (18:9–10). Both residents and visitors would have been familiar with dream oracles at the sanctuary of the healing god, Asclepius. The complex was located outside the city four hundred yards north of the theater, near the spring of Lerna (Fotopoulos 2006). Mass-produced, terra-cotta body parts were dedicated by those who had been successfully cured. Local artisans must have supplied these items as well as other services required by visitors to the sanctuary.

### Urban Pleasures

Corinth, which overlooked the entire isthmus from its acropolis, dominated land traffic between central Greece and the Peloponnesus, just as its two ports





Figure 3. Fountain of Peirene. This fountain provided a gathering spot for lounging and talking.

linked by the Diolkos controlled east-west sea trade. Two natural features enhanced the pleasure a traveler might feel upon arriving in Corinth: its fertile agricultural plain and its abundant water. Natural springs, Roman baths, and public fountains made good use of the water supply. The Fountain of Peirene, a gathering spot since classical times (Euripides, *Medea* 68–69), was rebuilt in the Roman period to provide a square, arched courtyard for lounging and talking. In the early second century, the wealthy family of a Corinthian orator, Antonius Sospes, paid for the impressive white marble veneer (Pausanias, *Graeciae descriptio* 2.3.3; Mee and Spawforth 2001, 154–55). The waters of the fountain were thought to flow from a spring on the acropolis, which always had clear, potable water (Strabo, *Geographica* 8.6). Legend had it that Belerophon captured Pegasus as the winged horse drank from the spring.

Today nothing remains of the temple to the goddess Aphrodite, which stood near the spring on the Acropolis. Sailors passing through the city's ports allegedly flocked there for less noble pleasures, including its many prostitutes. There is no evidence of temple prostitutes in Roman times. The women frequented by some of Paul's addressees (1 Cor. 6:12–20) plied their trade elsewhere in the city, such as in public baths and bars. Selling both female and male prostitutes was a regular part of the commercial slave trade in any ancient city.

Corinth was prone to earthquakes because its gulf lies between fault lines. A temple to the god Poseidon stood in Isthmia from the sixth century BC into Roman times. Herodes Atticus, a second-century AD Athenian orator, endowed

**Graffiti from Pompeii about a Well-Known Prostitute**

*“In Nuceria, near Porta Romana, in the district of Venus, ask for Novellia Primigenia.”*

*“Health to Primigenia of Nuceria. For just one hour I would like to be the stone of this ring, to give to you who moisten it with your mouth, the kisses I have impressed on it.”*

(Lefkowitz and Fant 2005, 213)

the Roman temple with a colossal ivory and gold sculpture of Poseidon and Amphitrite in a four-horse chariot to replace the earlier marble sculpture of the same theme. The biannual Isthmian Games, whose victors received a celery wreath, began in the sixth century BC. After the Romans destroyed the classical city, the games were moved to neighboring Sikyon (146 BC), whose inhabitants also continued to farm the Corinthian plain. Emperor Nero returned the games to the traditional site for his own performances in the musical, heraldic, and acting competitions as well as chariot racing (AD 66; Champlin 2003,

54–58). Paul’s audience would have associated his athletic metaphors with the local contests. The “perishable crown” (1 Cor. 9:25) of these athletes was not our Olympic gold, but celery or pine.

The city possessed facilities for various other entertainments. Its ancient theater was rebuilt for stage performances in the first century AD. Reconstruc-



Baker Photo Archive

Figure 4. The Acrocorinth. The Acropolis in Corinth overlooked the entire isthmus, positioning Corinth to control northwest land traffic up and down the isthmus as well as cross-isthmus traffic on the Diolkos.

tions to accommodate such Roman spectacles as wild beast hunts and aquatic shows did not occur until the third century AD. Erastus may have supervised public theater expenses as part of his aedileship (Engels 1990, 18). A smaller, covered building nearby, the Odeion, provided musical and poetic recitations until it was converted to an arena in the third century. Thus some of the characteristically Roman entertainments associated with the arena may not have been a routine part of civic life in first-century Corinth as in the second and third centuries (Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 10.28–35; L. White 2005). Many exegetes doubt that Paul’s remark about “fighting with beasts in Ephesus” (1 Cor. 15:32) refers to an encounter in the arena.

Competitions in singing and tragic acting kept the poetry and myth of the classical world alive in the eyes and ears of Roman audiences. Roman theater developed popular comic forms of mime in which such lowly born characters as slaves, idiots, the useless philosopher, adulterers, disobedient sons, and assorted rogues take advantage of their betters. Such performances were not confined to the theater or homes of the wealthy elite. Traveling mime troops might set up a temporary wooden stage in the marketplace (Welborn 2005, 7–9). Paul might have manipulated some of the familiar characters and plots of the comic stage in confronting Corinthian pride with a fool’s persona. Is he the anxious parent annoyed with the delinquent son whose lack of progress is abetted by the slave pedagogue in 1 Cor. 4:14–21, perhaps (Welborn 2005, 86–87)?

Rhetorical competition not only served to advance the public career of those who could afford such training but also provided entertainment. Paul’s Corinthian audience appears to have been enamored of such verbal virtuosity (“wisdom of words”; 1 Cor. 1:20–21; 2:1–5; Betz 2004). A young man who had been away studying with a famous orator in Athens, Alexandria, or Antioch would be expected to put on a display for his fellow citizens upon returning to his hometown. Afraid of failure, some pupils of the famous fourth-century rhetorician Libanius even delayed their return home (Criore 2007, 84–91). Of course, the teacher had as much to gain or lose with the young man’s performance in the theatrical display piece. A star would bring others from that town’s elite to his school. A failure meant dishonor for even the most famous teacher. For those who had endured such rites of passage, Paul’s

### Aphrodite’s Prostitutes

*“The sanctuary of Aphrodite was so wealthy that it possessed as temple-slaves more than a thousand prostitutes who were dedicated to the goddess both by men and by women. And so, by reason of them, the city was thronged and enriched; for the sailors spent their money easily, and on that account the proverb says, ‘Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth.’”* (Strabo, *Geographica* 8.6.21, trans. Mee and Spawforth 2001, 158–59)

### Nero's Acting Parts

*"Among his performances were Canace in Childbirth, Orestes the Matricide, Oedipus Blinded, and Distraught Hercules. There is a story that a young recruit on guard recognized him in the rags and fetters demanded by the part of Hercules and dashed forward to his assistance." (Suetonius, Nero 21 AT)*

remark that he came preaching "in weakness, fear, and much trembling" (2:3) would have suggested a first performance that crashed under pressure. Paul's weaknesses as a public orator continued to be a bone of contention with some in Corinth (2 Cor. 10:1–2). Of course, as the previous demographic discussion indicates, neither Paul nor his audience belonged to the elite for whom such training was an option. They gained their knowledge of its requirements as audiences for such public displays of oratory.

### Religious Activities in the City

Corinth's religious monuments, temple buildings, altars, precincts, statuary, and sacred places—the Asclepeion, temple to Aphrodite, temple of Poseidon in Isthmia, and a sacred spring—were as important to the ancient city as its other public buildings. First-century visitors to the forum in Corinth would have found other sites from the classical period that had been restored or rebuilt by the Roman-period settlers as well as new temples that reflected their Roman heritage. One temple was dedicated to Apollo, another to the oracle of Apollo at Claros in Asia Minor. Next to the latter one could find a temple dedicated to Venus as the ancestress of Julius Caesar and his descendants. A sanctuary

### Congratulating a Successful Student

*"To Julianus.*

*It is because I predicted this that I urged you to return to your fatherland. You were an excellent orator but a coward. . . . I think yours is a city of good men who honor you like a god. Many other cities are not aware of the virtue of their citizens or . . . resent it; this one, however, recognized your talents, rejoiced, celebrated, and adorned you with honors in the theater. . . . The joy that these events brought you is the same as the joy the things written in your letter brought me. But besides the facts themselves, the length of the letter and its charm was showing that I am the father of a good child. Your letter is a greater gift to me than if you had sold most of your land and sent me the money." (Libanius, F1130; trans. Criboire 2007, 287–88)*

dedicated to Demeter and Kore was located on the Acrocorinth (Pausanias, *Graeciae descriptio* 2.4.7). Activity at the site dedicated to the oldest of the Greek mysteries picked up in the mid-first century AD. A much larger temple was dedicated to either Augustus's sister Octavia or Jupiter Capitolinus (Mee and Spawforth 2001, 150–54). In addition to appearing in temples, statues of gods and goddesses such as Apollo, Athena, and Aphrodite could be found in public areas.

Excavators found a broken inscription in Greek, “synagogue of the Hebrews,” from a much later period (fourth century AD). With earthquakes, looting, and the common practice of reusing marble for other purposes, finding a late inscription along the Lechaion road does not help locate the first-century AD synagogue. Other bits of marble decoration, seven-branched candlesticks, palm branches, and citron belong to the fifth century AD.

The Egyptian goddess Isis, popular with sailors, had a temple complex in Cenchreae.

Her temple at Pompeii dates from the second century AD, and that on the Campus Martius from 43 BC, despite imperial suspicions of foreign cults. A famous fresco from Herculaneum depicts priests of Isis performing religious ceremonies. Her cult at Corinth was immortalized in the *Golden Ass*, a novel by the second-century AD orator Apuleius. The novel's hero has been turned into an ass thanks to a misadventure with a love potion. After a series of treacherous adventures, this “human” ass prays to the “Queen of Heaven,” whichever form the goddess takes. Isis appears in his dream, claiming to be the divine power behind the universe and all the goddesses. She instructs him to seek the procession of Isis worshipers the next day. The celebrations mark the beginning of the season when it is safe for ships to put to sea. There, instructed by the goddess in a dream, the main priest gives the ass his rose garland to eat and so restores Lucius to his human form. Further initiations into the mysteries of Isis follow. The goddess promises initiates who have descended to Hades and returned a blessed afterlife and freedom from fate in this life (Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11).

Her male priests are represented with shaved heads and are clad in white linen. A final sign of Lucius's complete devotion in the novel was a willingness to resume his rhetorical practice in Rome's law courts with a shaved head (*Metamorphoses* 11.30). Priestesses wore long hair and a fringed mantle tied



Figure 5. The Egyptian God Sarapis. This life-size marble head, found in the South Stoa at Corinth, dates to the first century AD.





Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

Figure 6. The Rites of Isis. A wall painting at Herculaneum depicts priests of Isis performing religious ceremonies.

in a characteristic knot, often carrying the characteristic sistrum rattle and the situla vessel holding a libation of milk or water. Participation in mysteries or other rituals might require such preliminaries as washing in a river, sacred stream, or sanctuary pool and abstaining from sexual relations for a short period. Paul’s advice to married couples includes the latter element (1 Cor. 7:5; Oster 1992; Wimbush 1987).

Though initiation into the mystery cults was secret and, according to Apuleius, expensive even for someone at the lower end of the elite scale, the elaborate public processions staged by devotees could be witnessed by outsiders. Various artistic representations from classical to Roman times depict the processions in which an animal was conducted to the altar of sacrifice. They might include women carrying holy things on their heads, a man or boy leading the animal, instrument players, persons carrying wreaths or lustral branches, and a jug containing the wine for the libation (Connelly 2007, 168–70).

What happened to the cow, ox, or sheep being led off to a sacrificial altar? Much of the animal remained to be consumed by those participating or was sold in the market. Both options raised questions for Corinthian believers. Apparently “sacrificial meat” was so designated when sold in the market. Perhaps the “blemish free” and “no stress reaction” required for such animals made their meat desirable. Could believers buy such meat or consume it if it



### Satirical Account of Isis Devotees

*"In winter she'll break the ice, enter the river, be immersed three times in the morning Tiber . . . then she'll crawl, naked and trembling across the whole field of the proud king [Campus Martius]. If white lo so orders, she'll go to the ends of Egypt and bring back the required water . . . so that she can sprinkle it in the shrine of Isis which stands next to the ancient sheep pens. For she believes, she is instructed by the voice of the mistress <i.e., Isis> herself—being no doubt just the sort of person, in soul and mind, to whom gods would speak in the night! That is why the one who deserves the special, highest honors is Anubis, since he runs about jeering amongst the linen-clad, bald crew of people lamenting <the death of Osiris>. And it's he <Anubis> who begs forgiveness for a wife, whenever she fails to abstain from sex on the forbidden sacred days and incurs the great penalty for wrong-doing between the sheets, and whenever the silver snake is seen to move his head. His tears and practised mutterings do the trick: Osiris does not refuse forgiveness for her guilt—bribed, of course, by a fat goose and a fine sacrificial cake." (Juvenal, *Satirae* 6.522–41, trans. Beard, North, and Price 1998, 2:302)*

was served at a private dinner? What about the banquets associated with the sacrifice at a temple itself? Some Christians had no problem with eating such meat or attending the banquets (1 Cor. 8; 10; P. W. Gooch 1987; Phua 2005). For Jewish believers, the issue would never arise, since the meat in question was not kosher. In fact, most people rarely had meat in their diet. Sacrificial meat distributed on a special civic or private occasion might be the only form meat-eating ever took (Theissen 1982). The religious diversity of Roman Corinth becomes even more complex when social and economic differences enter the picture.

First Corinthians 8:10 and 10:19–22 assume that the sacrificial banquet occurred within the temple complex of the god or goddess to whom the animal had been sacrificed. Literary references to such meals are common, though visual depictions are infrequent. Terse invitations to banquets have been discovered. Archeologists have been hard put to find the “temple dining rooms” referred to in 1 Corinthians (Fotopoulos 2006). Sometimes storage rooms have been taken as such. The Asclepeion complex does include a building with dining rooms at a level lower than that of the temple courtyard itself. Blackened stones suggest that cooking occurred in the center of the rooms. The colonnaded courtyard outside the rooms provided shade and a place for guests to stroll. With that setup it would be easy for others not invited to the feast to observe who was present, as 1 Cor. 8:10 suggests. This setting was much less public than the processions and sacrifices that took place in the city center or at one of the harbors. Some scholars imagine that the Asclepeion functioned



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Figure 7. Animals for Sacrifice. This procession with animals being led to sacrifice appears on a small frieze from the inner altar of the Ara Pacis.

as more of a “local country club” for the wealthy elite than a public facility (Fant and Reddish 2003, 60–61). If so, those to whom Paul’s words are directed comprise a tiny minority of the church as a whole.

### Gallio as Proconsul

Paul’s letters lack indications of a date, such as references to Roman rulers or to the civic calendar. Even piecing together a relative chronology based on the travel plans of Paul and his associates mentioned in the letters leaves so many gaps that scholars come up with very different solutions to dating. The account of Paul’s initial visit to Corinth in Acts 18 provides some historical clues. Luke assumes that Paul arrived in Corinth from an unsuccessful mission in Athens (also mentioned in 1 Thess. 3:1), shortly after Prisca and Aquila were exiled from Rome by Claudius (Acts 18:2). Despite the efforts of some scholars to push that edict back to 41, the generally accepted date of 49 stands (Fitzmyer 2008, 37–39). Therefore Paul’s mission in Corinth began in about 50.

Paul had been evangelizing for some time before Jews opposed to his message dragged him before the Roman proconsul, Lucius Junius Gallio Annaeus (Acts 18:12–13). Luke depicts Gallio as disinterested. It is more likely that he followed the policy of Claudius and simply banished troublemakers from the city. Roman proconsuls were dispatched to govern a province for a year. Knowing when Gallio served would provide a date for Paul’s expulsion from the city. Fragments of an inscription at Delphi open up the possibility of assigning dates to Gallio’s term of office. The inscription records an edict in a letter from Emperor Claudius to the city’s leaders. As governor of the region, Gallio had informed Claudius that Delphi was losing population among the local elite, who were needed to manage the affairs of a city.

The formulaic language of imperial edicts makes the reconstruction of this badly broken text almost certain. How long it took Claudius to respond and

### Claudius's Edict

*"Tiber[ius Claudius Caes]ar A[ugust]us G[ermanicus, invested with tribunician po]wer [for the 12th time, acclaimed imperator for t]he 26th time, F[ather of the Fa]ther[land . . . sends greetings to . . .]. For a l[ong time I have been not onl]y [well disposed toward t]he ci[ty] of Delph[i, but also solicitous for its pros]perity, and I have always sup[port]ed th[e cul[t of Pythian] Apoll[o. But] now [since] it is said to be desti[tu]te of [citi]zens, as [L. Jun]ius Gallio, my fri[end] an[d procon]sul, [recently reported to me, and being desirous that Delphi] should continue to retain [inta]ct its for[mer rank, I] or[der you (plural) to in]vite [well-born people also from ot]her cities [to Delphi as new inhabitants and to] all[ow] them [and their children to have all the] privi[leges of Del]phi as being citi[zens on equal and like (basis)]." (trans. Fitzmyer 2008, 41)*

whether Gallio was still proconsul when this edict arrived in Delphi, we do not know. Claudius's twelfth regnal year began in January 52. A proconsul would head from Rome for his province as soon as the spring sailing season permitted travel, likely in April. After a year's service, he would have to return no later than September/October to avoid dangerous travel. How far into the year 52 was this edict composed? The acclamation "emperor" did not occur at any specific interval. It was often associated with an event that could be construed as a victory. Other inscriptions help scholars date the acclamations during the reign of Claudius. The twenty-sixth acclamation mentioned here must have occurred before August 52.

Those clues narrow down the possibilities for Gallio's term as proconsul. He arrived either in June 51 to serve until fall 52 or in June 52 and reported

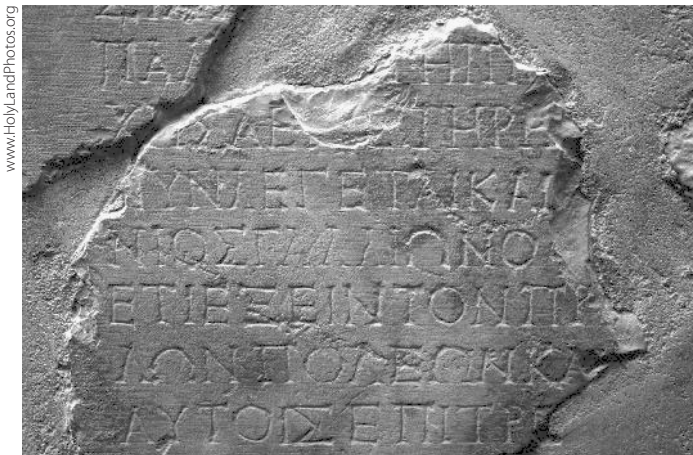


Figure 8. Gallio Inscription. This fragmentary Greek inscription from the temple of Apollo at Delphi mentions Gallio in connection with datable historical circumstances, enabling us to date his proconsulship to AD 52.

about Delphi shortly thereafter. Gallio did not complete his term as governor of Achaia. His younger brother was Seneca, the famous Stoic philosopher and tutor to a young Nero. Seneca notes that his brother cut his term short and hurried home to Italy after catching a fever that he attributed to the unhealthy climate (*Epistulae morales* 104.2). Therefore Gallio actually served only a few months as proconsul. Assuming that Claudius sent the edict concerning Delphi while Gallio was still in office narrows the date for Paul's appearance before Gallio to summer or early fall 52 (Fitzmyer 2008, 40–42). Paul may have left Corinth for Asia Minor from its eastern port at about the same time that Gallio decided to sail back to Rome from the western one. Gallio was suffect consul at Rome in 55 or 56. Shortly after Paul was martyred there under Nero (64?), suspicions that Seneca had been involved in a failed plot to assassinate Nero led both brothers to commit suicide (65).

## Dating 1 Corinthians

After Paul's departure from Corinth, Ephesus becomes the center of his activities (Acts 18:23). Paul makes his final journey through Asia Minor and Macedonia back to Corinth in about 57–58. The travel plans in Rom. 15:14–33 indicate that Paul considers his mission in Asia Minor and Greece accomplished. After taking the collection from his gentile converts to believers in Jerusalem (spring 58?), he intends to visit Rome en route to a new effort in Spain. Assigning plausible dates to the letters, visits by Paul or his associates, and other communications that went back and forth between Paul and Corinth in those years is a complicated puzzle. The accuracy of Luke's information about Paul's journeys continues to be disputed, since it fits awkwardly with clues in Paul's own letters. At least two letters that Paul sent to Corinth were not preserved. One written prior to our 1 Corinthians had been misunderstood by the recipients (5:9). The other, a "letter of tears," was fired off after a brief, disastrous visit to Corinth during which Paul was humiliated by a member of the community (2 Cor. 2:1; 12:14, 21; 13:1–2). In addition, our canonical 2 Corinthians may have been the composite of several shorter letters Paul sent to Corinth.

Paul tells us that he is writing 1 Corinthians from Ephesus, where he intends to stay until Pentecost (1 Cor. 16:8). Perhaps the phrase "Christ our Passover has been sacrificed" (5:7) also points to the time at which Paul writes. If one allows for the travel back to Judea and Antioch mentioned in Acts 18, along with the earlier exchange of letters and a visit by Timothy overland through Macedonia, then early spring 55 or 56 is a plausible date for the composition of 1 Corinthians. Scholars who discount Acts or push the appearance before Gallio back a year opt for an earlier date (ca. 54; Murphy-O'Connor 1996, 184). In any event, Paul would have spent much of the spring and summer of the year in question preoccupied with problems in Corinth.