



**Bible-study: 2021/01/17 (St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, McMinnville) – 1 Corinthians 6:12-20**

[Ask for volunteer to read passage.]

This is the first in a sequence of four weeks on *1 Corinthians*, followed by another session on *2 Corinthians*. Now, *some* of us have looked at *some* of the content of these epistles previously, (early in 2019, in fact); but, as I'm sure you'll agree, I think it's worth reminding ourselves of what we said before about (i) authorship; (ii) date of composition; and, (iii) context – that is, the situation, “habitat” or “environment” of the (original) intended audience:

(i) A “dead-giveaway” as to the opinion of the Early Church on the question of who authored *1 Corinthians* is the book's position in the Canon. (After the gospels and *Acts*), the *Pauline* letters of the New Testament were arranged to reflect not just their length – longest to shortest – but also by the degree of confidence in their apostolic origin by the succeeding generation of Christians, moving from absolute certainty to doubtful. And these two criteria interact to place the sixteen chapters of *Romans* at the “head” of the list, which is ‘generally acknowledged as Paul's masterpiece’,<sup>1</sup> the slightly smaller *Hebrews* at the very end of the section, and much briefer correspondences than either of those in the middle. *Corinthians* holds second-place, a lofty position reflected in its salutation: ‘[Greetings from] *Paul*...[t]o the church of God that is in Corinth... Grace to you and peace...’ Accordingly, we find that from as early as A.D. 95(!), it was commonplace among the first pastors and theologians to quote from *Corinthians*, treating its teaching as derived from that incomparably authoritative figure, ‘with no doubts expressed about its authorship.’<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, a painstaking analysis of the (Greek) vocabulary employed in the various documents traditionally attributed to Paul by, for instance, the German scholar Theodor Nägeli, has shown that along with *Romans*, *Galatians* and *Philemon*, *1 Corinthians* ‘constitute[s] a homogenous literary monument.’<sup>3</sup> Leon Morris – in a more recent study – echoes this conclusion: ‘The style and language are those of the universally accepted Pauline writings. The letter [just] fits...’<sup>4</sup> And indeed, *1 Corinthians* is widely used as a ‘pillar’ of authenticity; a *plumbline* against which other compositions are measured.<sup>5</sup>

Paul, however, likely did not *write* the *actual* words on the page (himself): the standard practice of his day was to employ an amanuensis, trained in beautiful penmanship. (In *Romans*, Paul explicitly names this individual as,

<sup>1</sup> Wright, Tom (1997), *What Saint Paul Really Said*, Oxford: Lion Publishing, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Morris, Leon (2008), *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Volume 7)*, Downers Grove, I. L.: InterVarsity Press, 33. (My emphasis.)

<sup>3</sup> Gilbert, George H. (October 1906), ‘Some Recent Works on Paul and Paulinism’, *The American Journal of Theology*, Volume 10, No. 4, pp. 722-728, 723.

<sup>4</sup> Morris (2008), 33-34.

<sup>5</sup> See: Porter, Stanley E. (2016), *The Apostle Paul: His Life, Thought, and Letters*, Grand Rapids, M. I.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 245.

“Tertius”[16:22].) Rather, he would have dictated the epistle’s contents; and this he did whilst staying in Ephesus (in Turkey) during A.D. 55 or thereabouts.

(ii) Most scholars hold to the (above) conclusion about location because the Apostle indicates as much in his closing remarks: ‘I will visit you’, he tells his audience, ‘after passing through Macedonia... and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter... *But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost*, for a wide door for effective work [ministry] has opened to me [here]: [v.5]. The matter of when this occurred is more contentious, of course, but, as a “ballpark,” it appears to rest on a solid case: in *Acts*, Luke, the author, one of Paul’s closest friends, records that ‘Paul left Athens and went to Corinth’ – the city named in the letter’s title, ‘[w]here he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus,<sup>6</sup> who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. ...and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they worked together [as] tentmakers.’[18:2] – This couple – Aquila and Priscilla, we can infer, were *already* believers. That is, they had, *before meeting Paul*, accepted Jesus as the Messiah – probably during a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The success of Christianity in that place, however, emerging as it was largely – at this stage – *within* Judaism, which is to say, from a certain perspective, *at the cost of traditional* Judaism – like a wasp larva from an unwitting caterpillar, caused something of an uproar: The Roman writer Suetonius tells us that, in A.D. 49, ‘the Jews of Rome were indulging in constant riots at the instigation of [an enigmatic character he calls] “Chrestus.”’<sup>7</sup> That is, *Christ*. (The facts have been clearly “mangled” by capital gossip.) And so Caesar expelled the whole community. And this action provides one “bookend,” therefore, for the period in which *1 Corinthians* was sent.

Luke also mentions that Paul was in Greece – ‘Achaia’ – during the tenure of the proconsul, ‘Gallio’: [Acts 18:12]. And we know from archaeological evidence that this chap served for two years starting in A.D. 50. The Apostle then left (for Syria), says Luke, ‘[a]fter staying there’ – in Corinth – ‘for a considerable time’: [v.18]. And he only began work on the epistle ‘[after spending sometime...[going] from place to place through the region of Galatia and Phrygia’ – regions in what is modern-day southern Turkey – ‘strengthening all the disciples’: [v.23]. It is a continuation of *this* task – “strengthening all the disciples” – that we should see as the purpose behind sending *1 Corinthians*. *Specifically*, though, to respond to a “report” of ‘quarrels’ that had arisen among those that Paul had converted to the Faith during his stay there: [1 Cor. 1:11].

(iii) So, what kind of city was it? According to Donald Engles, Corinth was one of the most interesting places in the Roman world, ‘[a]fter [only] Rome itself, Athens, [and] Jerusalem...’<sup>8</sup> And in the 1<sup>st</sup> century it was well on its way to becoming one of the largest cities in the world – because it sat on a *narrow* isthmus – a “land-bridge,”<sup>9</sup> about 6km wide – joining the two “halves” of the

<sup>6</sup> Pontus was a port on Asia Minor’s – modern Turkey’s – Black Sea coast.

<sup>7</sup> See: Bruce, F. F. (March 1962), ‘Christianity Under Claudius’, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, Volume 44, pp. 309-326, 315-316.

<sup>8</sup> Engles, Donald (1990), *Roman Corinth: An Alternative Model for the Classical City*, Chicago, I. L.: University of Chicago Press, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Pettegrew, David K. (2016), ‘The Changing Rural Horizons of Corinth’s First Urban Christians’, in Harrison, James R. & Welborn, L. L. (Eds.), *The First Urban Churches 2: Roman Corinth (Writings from the Greco-Roman World Supplement Series: Number 8)*, Atlanta, G. A.: SBL Press, pp. 153-184, 155 & 156.

Greek heartland; one of the most crucial – *and busiest* – “crossroads” in the past:<sup>10</sup> [show on map].

She was founded on this strategic “spot” before such things were memorialized – in ‘prehistoric times’;<sup>11</sup> supposedly in the mythic past, claimed its proud citizens, by Bellerophon, the killer of the monster Chimera, and his winged-horse, Pegasus;<sup>12</sup> but be aware that Homer does *not* mention “Corinth” in original copies of the *Iliad*,<sup>13</sup> ‘the oldest poem...in the world’,<sup>14</sup> among the Mycenaean forces that went to war against Troy. Whatever the answer, this city-state became *exceedingly* powerful and prosperous over the centuries.

In 146 B.C., she was almost without rival, having ports – *and navies(!)* – on both the Aegean *and* Ionian seas, and trans-Isthmian fortifications – i.e. a wall, around 3 meters thick with eleven towers<sup>15</sup> – that created a lucrative taxable “choke-point” for ground-traffic to and from the Peloponnese: [show on map]. But the arrogant scheming and mounting riches of her ruling oligarchy attracted the attention of a “bigger fish” – the young Roman Republic (later, empire). And Corinth was brutally smashed: she was a marine power after all, and her few “troops” – mostly terrified slaves acting under duress<sup>16</sup> – were no match for professional legionaries. The cavalry that the local government hired fled,<sup>17</sup> and the ‘city was immediately evacuated... On entering it [Lucius] Mummius’ – the Roman general – ‘put the few males who remained to the sword; sold the women and children as slaves; and having carried away all its treasures, consigned it to the flames. ... [He] then employed himself in chastising and regulating the whole of Greece; and ten commissioners were sent from Rome to settle its future condition.’<sup>18</sup>

Corinth ‘was left largely uninhabited’ for about 102 years, until Julius Caesar founded a colony for his veterans among its ruins<sup>19</sup> – in what had become ‘a wilderness of rubbish and hovels’.<sup>20</sup> The method and process of the city’s renaissance was carefully planned and executed: The city was laid out as ‘a level, trapezium-shaped place’,<sup>21</sup> tight and compact according to a grid, much like an American city; but with ‘a vast surrounding territory’<sup>22</sup> – including, once more, “satellite” harbors on either side of the Isthmus: [map]. Intensive

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<sup>10</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome (September 1984), ‘The Corinth That Saint Paul Saw’, *The Biblical Archaeologist*, Volume 47, No. 3, pp. 147-159, 148.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Engles (1990), 99.

<sup>13</sup> 4.

<sup>14</sup> Powell, Barry B. (2014), ‘Introduction’, in Homer, *The Iliad*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3.

<sup>15</sup> See: Pettegrew, David K. (2016), *The Isthmus of Corinth: Crossroads of the Mediterranean World*, Ann Arbor, M. I.: University of Michigan Press, 71-72.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Achaean War (146)’, in Phang, Sara E.; Spence, Iain; Kelly, Douglas & Londey, Peter (Eds.), *Conflict in Ancient Greece and Rome: The Definitive Political, Social, and Military Encyclopedia – Volume 1: A – R, Greek Section*, Santa Barbara, C. A.: ABC-CLIO, p.62.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Smith, William (1889), *A Smaller History of Greece: From the Earliest Times to the Roman Conquest*, New York, N. Y.: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 221.

<sup>19</sup> Romano, David Gilman (March 2006), ‘Roman Surveyors in Corinth’, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Volume 150, No. 1, pp. 62-85, 66.

<sup>20</sup> Watson, R. G. (1872), *A Handbook for Travellers in Greece*, Fourth Edition, London: John Murray, 123. This description was actually about Corinth’s situation in the nineteenth century under the Ottomans, but it was too delicious to exclude.

<sup>21</sup> Murphy-O'Connor (1984), 149.

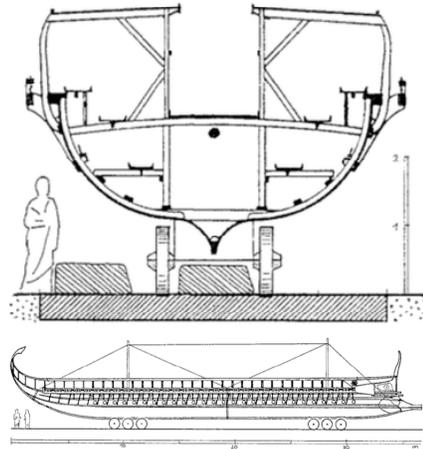
<sup>22</sup> Pettegrew (2016), 154.

cultivation of grapevines in this space – despite high aridity, offset by canals and spring-water<sup>23</sup> – led to Corinth becoming the chief regional exporter of raisins – a major foodstuff in the period, and it is actually from the city’s name that we get our English word, “currant.”<sup>24</sup>

But it wasn’t wrinkly dried-fruit that made Corinth the ‘boomtown’ that Paul knew.<sup>25</sup> It was the “diolkos,” a specially designed, paved “road” that ‘had deep parallel grooves spaced 1.5m apart [like inverted train] rails’,<sup>26</sup> which allowed, ‘[w]ith well-devised appliances and mechanisms’, for ‘a ship, cargo and all’, to ‘be lifted on to [a wheeled] cradle, [and] transported across the...isthmus, and relaunched within a day; whereas, in [the] most favorable weather, the journey round [the Grecian peninsula took] several days’ sailing, and with contrary winds might be a matter of weeks.’<sup>27</sup>

This *ingenious* shortcut from the Far / Middle East to Atlantic markets ‘generated’ ‘immense’ profits.<sup>28</sup> And Corinth became notorious as a town to make ‘...a quick buck’;<sup>29</sup> a city ‘where numerous foreigners, [but] above all sailors, went [to make their fortune]’;<sup>30</sup> a city overwhelmed by ‘...*massive* commercial and service facilities... [noisy] quays and [endless, cavernous] warehouses’ ‘packed with goods coming from as far [away] as India, China, and even Indonesia: spices, silks, precious stones, exotic woods, marble blocks of every color in the rainbow... amphoras of wines, olive oils...copper and tin ingots...’<sup>31</sup> *Doesn’t it sound great?!*

The population of Corinth, therefore, was a significantly transitory one. Which is exactly why, very probably, the Apostle ‘to the Gentiles’ [Rom. 11:13] went there: ‘The situation of Corinth... offered Paul the possibility of influencing people from *many* different [and dispersed] areas...[and] assured him of superb communications [with the wider “scene”].’<sup>32</sup> And ‘this hotch-potch of races [on-the-move]’<sup>33</sup> – of “nomads” physically – *and spiritually* – adrift<sup>34</sup> – was reflected in the church he helped to establish: it was ‘a predominantly Gentile



<sup>23</sup> Engles (1990), 10.

<sup>24</sup> Morris (2008), 22.

<sup>25</sup> Murphy-O'Connor (1984), 147.

<sup>26</sup> Pettegrew, David K. (2014), ‘The Diolkos and the Emporion: How a Land Bridge Framed the Commercial Economy of Roman Corinth’, in Friesen, Steven J.; James, Sarah A. & Schowalter, Daniel N. (Eds.), *Corinth in Contrast: Studies in Inequality*, Leiden, The Netherlands; Boston, M. A.: Brill, pp. 126-142, 127.

<sup>27</sup> Davies, Gerald Stanley (1877), *St. Paul in Greece*, London: S. P. C. K., 165-166.

<sup>28</sup> Murphy-O'Connor (1984), 147.

<sup>29</sup> Twomey, Jay (2017), *2 Corinthians: An Introduction and Study Guide: Crisis and Conflict*, London: Bloomsbury T. & T. Clark (Bloomsbury Publishing), 44.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>31</sup> Engles (1990), 12. (My emphasis.)

<sup>32</sup> Murphy-O'Connor (1984), 148. (My emphasis.)

<sup>33</sup> Morris (2008), 18.

<sup>34</sup> Spiritually “adrift”? My saying so is influenced by the lectures of Eric Dodds: *Pagan and Greek in an Age of Anxiety* (1963) by Cambridge University Press. But is, if according to his thesis alone, strictly speaking, anachronistic.

community'.<sup>35</sup> This is clear from 'the high percentage' of Latin names that appear in the epistle verses Hebraic ones,<sup>36</sup> 'the majority of whom were almost certainly at the lower end of the socioeconomic ladder... [And whilst] they were the Christian church in Corinth, an inordinate amount of Corinth was yet in them, emerging in a number of attitudes and behaviors that required radical surgery without killing the patient.'<sup>37</sup> – A "surgery" of the Holy Spirit on 'those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, [and] called to be [His] saints': [1 Cor. 1:2].

And one "tumor" that needed special attention, judging from our passage this morning, was 'fornication' (πορνεία) [vs.13 & 18]: literally, sex outside of marriage [see Mt. 5:32] – which Paul clearly regards as a serious offense given his appeal to 'shun' it (Φεύγετε) [v.15]: literally 'to flee' it, in line with the consistent testimony on the matter in the Hebrew Scriptures; including, he specifies, with prostitutes: [v.15].

That this appears to have demanded a direct *if embarrassing* intervention may have stemmed from the fact that Corinth was home to an enormous – *the* most enormous – temple for the worship of the goddess of love, Aphrodite *Kallipygos* ("of the beautiful buttocks").<sup>38</sup> (She had, like the rest of the classical Pantheon, different guises – emphases/nicknames – in different locales, and here she was known – and depicted in sculpture – as having a particularly pleasing "derrière.") And pilgrims flocked to her shrine to experience "Olympian" ecstasies with the aid of its one thousand prostitute-priestesses. Thanks to this "activity," Corinth became 'a by-word for licentiousness';<sup>39</sup> frequently portrayed in the *primary* literature – that is, in the contemporaneous literature – as a sort of Hellenic Sodom or Gomorrah. (Or Las Vegas?)

That Paul nowhere "points the finger" at the temple (itself shouldn't surprise us. Yes, its presence – and influence on local *mōrēs* – was a likely contributory factor in this particular scenario, but Paul knew its cult was merely a convenient outlet of expression of the *real* problem, which lay in the "hearts" of his audience – a term used three times in *1 Corinthians* [2:9, 4:5 & 14:25, and extensively elsewhere]: not literally – 'The organ that we now call the heart is referred to 853 times in the Old Testament and 148 times in the New Testament, but *never* in the context of the function that we now recognize it to have: pumping blood throughout the body. Instead...the closest English words we use in the various modern biblical translations for the Hebrew understanding of...the "heart," [is] "inmost being," "soul" or "mind."<sup>40</sup> And Paul is everywhere consistent in 'charging' the "inmost being" of man 'with...radical corruption.'<sup>41</sup> A 'charg[e]' reformed theologians call by the short-hand, "Total Depravity." And it is a vital "building block" of orthodox religion. Calvinist A. W. Pink said: 'It is on the basis of this dark background that the whole Bible proceeds.'<sup>42</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Fee, Gordon D. (2014), *The First Epistle to the Corinthians, Revised Edition*, Grand Rapids, M. I.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 4.

<sup>36</sup> Longman, Tremper, III and Garland, David E. (2008), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Revised Edition – Volume 11: Romans – Galatians*, Grand Rapids, M. I.: Zondervan, 253.

<sup>37</sup> Fee (2014), 4.

<sup>38</sup> Morris (2008), 18, n.3.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>40</sup> Janssen, Luke Jeffrey (2019), *Soul-Searching: The Evolution of Judeo-Christian Thinking on the Soul and the Afterlife*, Eugene, O. R.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 41.

<sup>41</sup> Hughes, R. Kent (1991), *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven*, Wheaton, I. L.: Crossway, 71.

<sup>42</sup> *Doctrine of Total Depravity* (2015), Lulu, 1-2.

“Total Depravity” does not mean man is as depraved as he could be... Dr. Addison Leitch used to illustrate this by saying that if the color of sin were blue, every aspect of us would be some shade of [it].<sup>43</sup> Does that make sense? More helpful, maybe, is how Cranmer, the founder of our own tradition – “Anglicanism”/ Episcopalianism – describes this doctrine in the “39 Articles”: ‘man...is of his own nature *inclined to evil*, so that the flesh lusteth *always*’. And ain’t that the truth? Give me an inch and I’ll take a mile.

And, exacerbating this problem, was that the Gospel Paul had preached to the Corinthian Christians was, *fundamentally*, one of freedom: ‘All things are lawful for me’<sup>[v.12]</sup> he quotes himself as having said to them. And this is true! In regard to Torah, that is; *the Law*. Jesus’ perfect obedience had ‘*fulfilled*’ it: <sup>[Rom. 13:8]</sup>. And so salvation is to be found not by failing to imitate Him in doing similar, which would be impossible for you or I, but by ‘hiding’ ourselves in what *He* achieved <sup>[Ps. 32:7, 119:114; Is. 25:5]</sup> → ‘put on Christ’, Paul taught: <sup>[Rom. 13:14]</sup>. And, repeatedly, this message – of eternal life by *His* righteousness (not mine), wiping my “slate” clean on the Cross – has led to “antinomianism.” ← A confusion wherein some Christians mistakenly think, Jesus having triumphed as He did, that nothing is forbidden and everything permissible for those professing faith in Him. This mistake is understandable; one we must guard ourselves against: speaking about Paul’s exhortation to holiness in *Romans* (chapter) six, the scholar Jaen Hyun Lee observes that ‘with regard to sin and death...their kingly dominion over believers is ended, because believers are now under [a] new realm of grace. Yet [a] negative imperative clause [in Paul’s writing] may suggest that it is still possible [in the Apostle’s thinking] for believers to interact with sin...’<sup>44</sup> The ‘may’ in this quotation is quite unnecessary; *ridiculous*: *of course* we continue to ‘interact’ with sin, and ‘Paul certainly believes moral and spiritual apostasy by a Christian is possible.’<sup>45</sup> Don’t you agree?

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<sup>43</sup> *Supra*.

<sup>44</sup> *Paul’s Gospel in Romans: A Discourse Analysis of Rom 1:16-8:39* (2010), Leiden, The Netherlands; Boston, M. A.: Brill, 314.

<sup>45</sup> Witherington, Ben, III<sup>rd</sup> (2004), *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, Leiden, The Netherlands; Boston, M. A.: Brill, 160