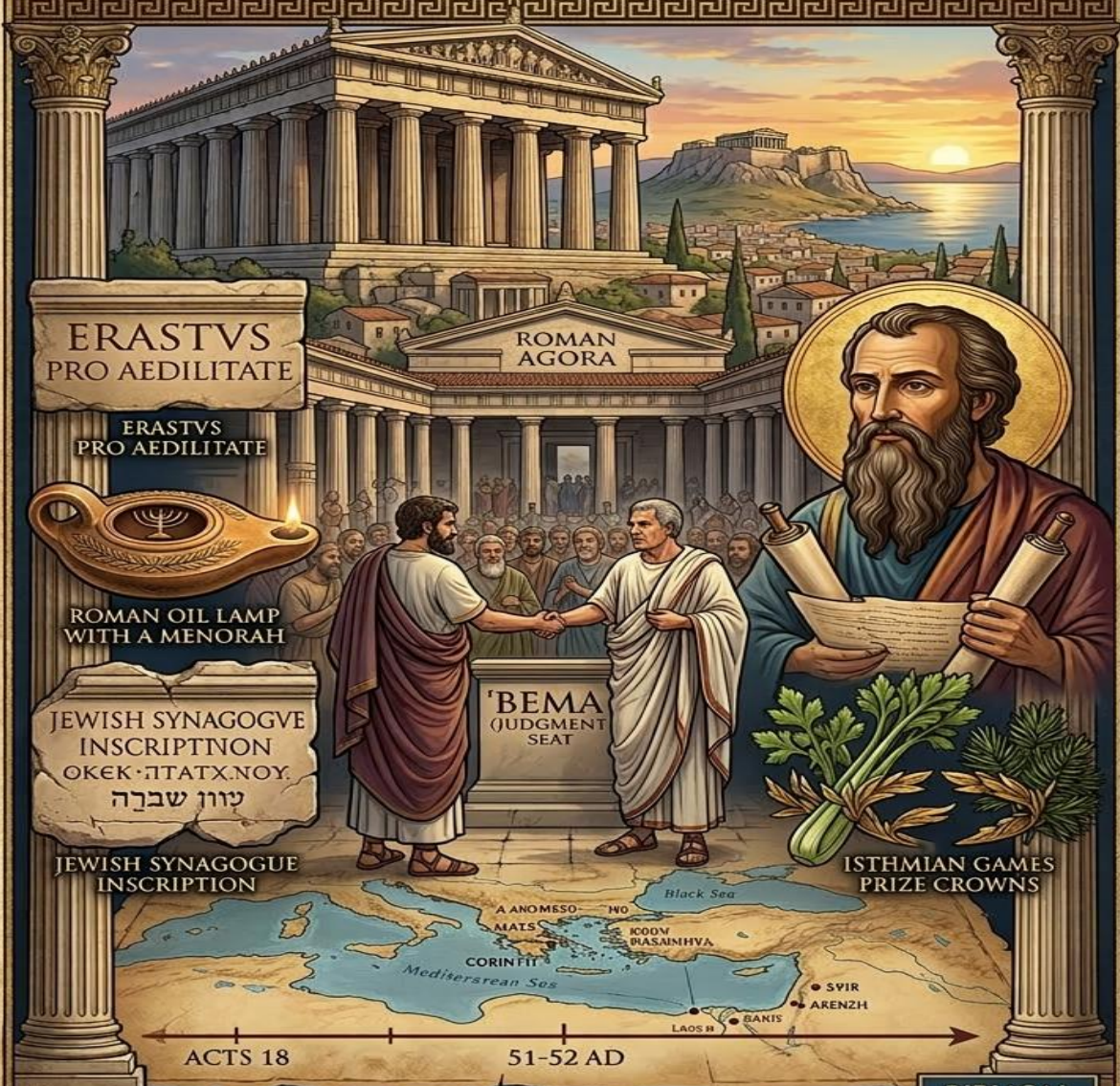


ERASTVS

HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE OF

CORINTH

DURING THE TIMES OF THE APOSTLE PAUL



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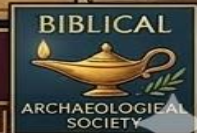
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ACTS 18

51-52 AD

BY FIVE MINUTES IN THE WORD



Here's the inquiry I used based on March 11, 2026 podcast for 2 Corinthians 13:7: Give historical evidence for this statement: The historical context of Corinth, with its diverse and often conflicting moral standards, highlights the challenge and necessity of adhering to Christian principles.

There is strong **historical and archaeological evidence** that the city of Corinth had extremely diverse cultures and moral practices during the first century. This background helps explain why the apostle Paul the Apostle repeatedly addressed ethical problems in **1–2 Corinthians**. Several historical sources support the statement that Corinth's moral environment was complex and often conflicted with Christian teaching.

1. A Cosmopolitan Roman Trade City

After being destroyed in 146 BC, Corinth was rebuilt in 44 BC by Julius Caesar as a Roman colony. By the first century it had become one of the most important commercial centers in the eastern Mediterranean.

- Located between two harbors—**Lechaeum** and **Cenchreae**—Corinth connected trade between the Aegean and Adriatic seas.
- Merchants, sailors, soldiers, freedmen, Jews, Greeks, and Romans all lived there.

The Greek geographer Strabo described Corinth as a **wealthy and bustling commercial hub**, attracting people from many regions and cultures. This mixture created competing religious and moral systems.

2. Reputation for Sexual Immorality

Ancient writers often associated Corinth with sexual immorality.

The historian Strabo wrote about the temple of Aphrodite on the Acrocorinth, claiming it once had many temple servants connected with sexual practices.

Another indication of Corinth's reputation appears in Greek language itself:

- The verb “**korinthiazesthai**” (to act like a Corinthian) meant to live in **sexual immorality or debauchery**.

Because of this cultural reputation, many scholars see why Paul addresses sexual issues in **1 Corinthians 5–7**.

3. Religious Pluralism and Idolatry

Archaeology shows that Corinth had many temples and cults, including worship of:

- Aphrodite
- Apollo
- Poseidon
- Asclepius
- The Roman imperial cult honoring the emperor

Excavations by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens have uncovered temples, shrines, and inscriptions confirming the city’s diverse religious life.

This helps explain why Paul addresses:

- **Food sacrificed to idols** (1 Cor. 8–10)
 - **Pagan temple participation**
 - **Confusion about worship and spiritual gifts**
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4. Social Stratification and Status Competition

Roman Corinth had strong divisions between rich and poor.

Evidence from inscriptions and Roman social history shows a society of:

- wealthy elites and patrons

- freed slaves seeking status
- laborers and sailors

This background helps explain issues Paul addresses such as:

- divisions in the church (1 Cor. 1–3)
- class problems at the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17–22)
- boasting in leaders and status

Roman society highly valued **rhetoric, honor, and public prestige**, which also explains why some Corinthians preferred more impressive speakers than Paul.

5. Jewish and Greek Philosophical Influence

Corinth had both a Jewish synagogue and Greek philosophical influence.

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus mentions Jewish communities throughout Roman cities like Corinth. Meanwhile Greek philosophical traditions such as Stoicism and Sophism influenced public life.

This cultural mixture explains why Paul had to confront:

- **Greek ideas about wisdom** (1 Cor. 1–2)
 - **Denial of bodily resurrection** (1 Cor. 15)
 - **philosophical skepticism about authority**
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Conclusion:

Historical sources, linguistic evidence, archaeology, and ancient writers all confirm that Corinth was a **cosmopolitan, morally diverse, and religiously pluralistic city**. In such an environment, early Christians faced constant pressure from surrounding cultural values. This context highlights why Paul repeatedly urged believers to remain faithful to **distinct Christian ethics and spiritual unity**.

If you'd like, I can also show you **how specific moral problems in Corinth directly correspond to issues Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians**. It makes the letters much clearer historically.

Understanding the historical setting of Corinth makes many passages in **1 and 2 Corinthians** much clearer. The issues the apostle Paul the Apostle addresses directly reflect the cultural pressures and moral environment of the city.

Below are several **historical problems in Corinth** and how they correspond to specific passages in Paul's letters.

1. Sexual Immorality in the Culture

Corinth had a widespread reputation for sexual looseness. Ancient writers like Strabo described the city's association with the temple of Aphrodite, and the phrase "*to Corinthianize*" became slang for immoral living.

Paul's Response

Paul addresses sexual ethics repeatedly:

- **1 Corinthians 5** – A man living with his father's wife
- **1 Corinthians 6:12–20** – Warning against prostitution
- **1 Corinthians 7** – Teaching on marriage and sexual purity

Paul reminds believers that their bodies belong to Christ and are temples of the Holy Spirit.

2. Idol Worship and Pagan Temples

Corinth was filled with temples to gods like:

- Apollo
- Poseidon

- Asclepius

Many social gatherings and meals occurred in temple settings, and meat sold in markets was often connected to sacrifices.

Paul's Response

Paul deals with this issue directly:

- **1 Corinthians 8** – Food offered to idols
- **1 Corinthians 10:14–22** – Avoid participation in pagan worship
- **1 Corinthians 10:23–33** – Balancing freedom with love for others

Paul emphasizes loyalty to Christ and warns believers not to mix Christian worship with pagan practices.

3. Social Status and Class Divisions

Roman Corinth valued honor, wealth, and status. Society was sharply divided between elites, freedmen, and laborers.

Paul's Response

This mindset caused divisions inside the church.

- **1 Corinthians 1:10–13** – Divisions around leaders
- **1 Corinthians 3** – Spiritual immaturity and boasting
- **1 Corinthians 11:17–22** – The rich humiliating the poor at the Lord's Supper

Paul teaches that the church must operate as **one body in Christ**, not according to worldly status.

4. Greek Love of Rhetoric and Philosophical Wisdom

Greek culture valued impressive public speakers and philosophers. Professional orators called Sophists often gained fame through eloquence and persuasion.

Paul's Response

Some Corinthians judged Paul as unimpressive compared to other speakers.

- **1 Corinthians 1–2** – The message of the cross versus human wisdom
- **2 Corinthians 10–12** – Defense against “super-apostles”

Paul emphasizes that the gospel's power does not depend on human eloquence but on God's Spirit.

5. Confusion About Spiritual Gifts

In a city full of mystical religions and ecstatic practices, spiritual experiences were highly valued.

Paul's Response

This influenced how the Corinthians treated spiritual gifts.

- **1 Corinthians 12** – Many gifts, one Spirit
- **1 Corinthians 13** – Love as the greatest virtue
- **1 Corinthians 14** – Order in worship

Paul teaches that spiritual gifts are meant for **building up the church**, not personal status.

6. Greek Beliefs About the Body and Resurrection

Many Greeks believed the body was inferior or unimportant. Some denied a future bodily resurrection.

Paul's Response

This explains the long teaching in:

- **1 Corinthians 15** – Defense of the resurrection of the dead

Paul argues that Christ's resurrection guarantees the future resurrection of believers.

Why This Historical Context Matters

The moral diversity and cultural pressures of Corinth explain why Paul constantly calls the church to **holiness, unity, and faithfulness to Christ**.

The Corinthians were trying to live as Christians inside a culture that valued:

- sexual freedom
- idol worship
- social status
- intellectual pride
- spiritual sensationalism

Paul's letters show how believers can remain faithful to Christ even while living in a morally complex society.

If you'd like, I can also show you **5 fascinating archaeological discoveries in Corinth that confirm details in Paul's letters** (including one inscription that actually mentions a person from Acts).

Archaeology from Corinth has uncovered several discoveries that strongly confirm the **historical background of Paul's ministry** and the environment described in **1–2 Corinthians and Acts**. These findings help us understand the world in which Paul the Apostle preached.

1. The Gallio Inscription (Confirms the Timeline of Paul's Ministry)

One of the most important discoveries related to the New Testament is the **Gallio Inscription**, found at Delphi.

It mentions the Roman proconsul
Lucius Junius Gallio Annaeanus.

In **Acts 18:12–17**, Paul is brought before Gallio while he is governing the Roman province of Achaia.

The inscription dates Gallio’s rule to **around AD 51–52**, which helps scholars accurately place Paul’s **18-month stay in Corinth** (Acts 18:11).

This is one of the strongest pieces of archaeological evidence confirming the New Testament timeline.

2. The Erastus Inscription (A Person Mentioned by Paul)

Archaeologists discovered a stone pavement inscription in Corinth that reads:

“Erastus, in return for his aedileship, laid the pavement at his own expense.”

This likely refers to the same person Paul mentions in **Romans 16:23**:

“Erastus, the city treasurer, greets you.”

The inscription connects the New Testament with a **real city official in Corinth**, showing that Christians existed even among civic leaders.

3. The Bema (Judgment Seat)

Bema of Corinth

Archaeologists uncovered the **stone platform in the marketplace** where Roman officials heard legal cases.

This matches the scene in **Acts 18**, where Paul was brought before Gallio.

The **Bema** still stands in the ruins of Corinth today, providing a physical location connected to Paul’s trial.

Interestingly, Paul later uses the same term **“judgment seat” (bēma)** in his letters when speaking about God’s judgment (2 Corinthians 5:10).

4. Temples to Greek Gods

Excavations have uncovered remains of temples including:

- Apollo (Temple of Apollo still standing)
- Asclepius
- Aphrodite

These discoveries confirm that Corinth was full of **pagan religious practices**, which explains why Paul spends so much time addressing:

- idolatry
- food sacrificed to idols
- loyalty to Christ alone.

5. The Acrocorinth Fortress and Temple Area

Acrocorinth

This massive hill overlooking the city contained a temple historically associated with Aphrodite.

Ancient writers like Strabo described the site and the city's reputation for moral excess.

From the top of Acrocorinth you can see the entire city, the ports, and the trade routes that made Corinth wealthy and culturally diverse.

Why These Discoveries Matter

These archaeological findings confirm several key elements of the New Testament story:

1. **Real Roman officials** mentioned in Acts existed (Gallio).

2. **Actual Corinthian citizens** named in Paul's letters are historically attested (Erastus).
3. **The legal setting** of Paul's trial is physically preserved (the Bema).
4. **The pagan religious environment** Paul confronted is archaeologically verified.

Together they show that the letters to the Corinthians were written in a **real historical setting with real people and real cultural pressures.**

All notes are from ChatGPT