

Archaeological Discoveries, Extant Texts, and their Implications  
on the Exposition of the πορνεία Passages  
of First Corinthians

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by  
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### *The Need for this Study*

A simple surface reading of the book of 1 Corinthians makes it manifestly clear that the church of Corinth was a far cry from a model 1<sup>st</sup> century church. The church of Corinth is infamous for its many problems, problems that demanded more of Paul's attention and time than most other early churches. He spent a great deal of time both physically present and in written form, seeking to address these problems. These issues included among others: divisions (1 Cor 1:10-17), lawsuits among believers (6:1-8), abuse of Christian Liberty (8:9-12), abuse of the Lord's Supper (11:20-22, 27-30), abuse of the spiritual gift of tongues (14:18-23), and disorder in the worship service (14:26-40). However, there is one subject matter that was so problematic, and for which the city was notoriously known. This was the issue of πορνεία "immorality" (1 Cor 5:1-12; 6:9-11; 6:12-20; 7:1-9; 10:6-8; 2 Cor 2:5-11; 12:20-21).

There is no question that sexual sin was a problem in Corinth during the Greek era. However, there is scholarly debate as to the temple of Aphrodite in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the use or absence of temple prostitutes, and whether the reputation of the Greek Corinth should be applied to the Roman era as well. This paper will attempt to address these concerns, as well as any implications its answer may have on the passages in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians dealing with the issue of πορνεία.

### *The Method of this Study*

To answer the above concerns, this paper will begin by studying the history and background of the city of Corinth. It will study the founding, development, and destruction of Corinth during the Greek era. It will then examine the Roman era. Extant writings, archaeological sites, and archaeological artifacts will be the primary evidence used to establish

the history and development of this city.<sup>1</sup> A thesis will be proposed concerning the operation, or lack thereof, regarding the temple of Aphrodite. A brief exposition will be done on select passages in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians dealing with the issue of πορνεία. Finally, the findings of this paper will be summarized in its conclusion.

### *Ancient Corinth in Light of Archaeology and Extant Writings*

The city of Corinth has a long and storied past, much of which was not uncovered until recently. Excavations of ancient Corinth did not become possible until 1858.<sup>2</sup> W. Dörpfel A Skias was the first to excavate in the seasons of 1886, 1892, and 1906. In 1896, the American School of Classical Studies was authorized by the Greek government to begin excavations. Since that time, to the present, excavations continue and new discoveries are consistently found.<sup>3</sup>

### The Greek Era

Archaeology discoveries provide evidence that Corinth was probably one of the first regions of Greece to be inhabited.<sup>4</sup> However, it was not until the eighth century that it became an important city for military and commercial reasons. It became a significant commercial city

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<sup>1</sup> Murphy-O'Connor gives a helpful list of extant writers and their writings which reference Corinth. He lists the following: Pausanias, Antipater of Sidon, Polystratus, Cicero, Crinagorus, Diodorus Siculus, Strabo, Livy, Propertius, Vitruvius, Philo, Petronius Abvier, Pliny the Elder, Vitruvius, Epicetus, Flavius Josephus, Martial, Pseudo-Julian, Dio Chrysostom, Plutarch, Juvenal, Pliny the Younger, Suetonius, Appian, Florus, Aelius Aristides, Lucian, Apuleius, Gellius, Alciphron, Dio Cassius, Philostratus, and Athenaeus. Unfortunately the earliest writer would only have lived around 100 BC. The most significant references for the purpose of this study are those of Strabo, Pausanias, and Athenaeus. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990), vii-x.

<sup>2</sup> A massive earthquake struck ancient Corinth in 1858. Those who survived relocated and rebuilt a new city, just a few miles to the northeast. It has only been since then that excavations became possible.

<sup>3</sup> Perseus Project Website, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/artifact?name=Corinth&object=Site&redirect=true>, (accessed, 3/22/2014).

<sup>4</sup> O'Connor claims archaeological discoveries provided evidence that the city was inhabited as early as the sixth millennium BC. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth*, 33.

because it was located on an isthmus, connecting the Peloponnese Peninsula to the rest of Greece. Due to its superb location, trade routes going north and south went through this city. Strabo indicates that the city of Corinth was “opulent” due to the required taxes levied on those who used these ports.<sup>5</sup> Corinth was also only 1.5 miles from Lechaem’s port and approximately seven miles from the Saronic Gulf. This resulted in it being heavily trafficked by trade going east and west as well.<sup>6</sup> The diolkos road was built to aid this trade route. Murphy-O’Connor dates this road to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>7</sup> This important road was in use all the way into the ninth century AD.<sup>8</sup> It was 3.7 miles long, and ran from the Saronic Gulf to the Gulf of Corinth. This road was used to avoid the dangers of sailing around the peninsula. Strabo speaks of this, “It was a desirable thing for the merchants coming from Asia, and from Italy, to discharge...at Corinth...For goods exported from Peloponnesus, or imported by land, a toll was paid to those who had the keys of the country.”<sup>9</sup> The ships at Corinth and Saronic would unload and haul their cargo on the Diolkos road onto another ship waiting for it at the corresponding port. During the sixth century BC, the Acrocorinth, standing 1,886 feet above the city proper, was also fortified.<sup>10</sup> It was at this time that the Greek city-state reached its zenith.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Strabo, *Geography* 8.6.20.

<sup>6</sup> D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 419.

<sup>7</sup> Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth*, 61.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 1135.

<sup>9</sup> Strabo, *Geography* 8.6.20.

<sup>10</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, “Corinth,” in *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 182-83.

<sup>11</sup> Allen C. Myers, “Corinth,” in *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 235-36.

During the Greek era of Corinth's ancient history, the city was also known for its growing cult worship. Archaeological remains attest to the many pagan temples being established in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. Locations of worship have been identified for: Demeter, Kore, Hera, Zeus, Poseidon, Apollo,<sup>12</sup> and possibly a local nymph, all before the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup> Four more worship centers were discovered and assigned to the 6<sup>th</sup> century: Asklepieion, a second site to Zeus, Dinsomoor, and Kokkinovrysi.<sup>14</sup> There are other indicators that worship in Corinth may have also surrounded Poseidon, Amphitrite, Pan, Isis, Sarapis, and Artemis Korithos.<sup>15</sup> Of course, the most important of all the pagan deities being worshipped in Corinth is that of Aphrodite. The temple of Aphrodite was located atop of the Acrocorinth.<sup>16</sup> This temple was possibly established as early as the 11<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> century BC, but certainly by the 8<sup>th</sup>.<sup>17</sup>

Regarding the immorality linked with the worship of Aphrodite, Strabo's statement has caused great debate,

The temple of Venus at Corinth was so rich, that it had more than a thousand women consecrated to the service of the goddess, courtesans, whom both men and women had dedicated as offerings to the goddess. The city was frequented and enriched by the multitudes who resorted thither on account of these women.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Pausanias' writings helped to identify the location where Apollo was worshipped. "As you go along another road from the market-place, which leads to Sicyon, you can see on the right of the road a temple and bronze image of Apollo. Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 2.3.6.

<sup>13</sup> Nancy Bookidis, "The Sanctuaries of Corinth," *Corinth, The Centenary: 1896-1996* (2003): 248.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 251-254.

<sup>16</sup> In the fifth century BC, Euripides already refers to the Acrocorinth as Aphrodite's "sacred hill and habitation." Strabo, *Geography* 8.6.21.

<sup>17</sup> Pottery shards have been discovered that might push back the dating to the early Geometric or even Protogeometric period. Bookidis, "The Sanctuaries of Corinth," 248.

<sup>18</sup> Strabo, *Geography* 8.6.20.

Some scholars have taken Strabo's statement at face value.<sup>19</sup> While others say this statement of Strabo's is erroneous,<sup>20</sup> hardly credible,<sup>21</sup> exaggerated,<sup>22</sup> and completely false.<sup>23</sup> O'Connor is often cited as proving Strabo wrong, using the argument that "There was never any temple of Aphrodite in Corinth capable of containing that number."<sup>24</sup> Lexham Bible Dictionary makes a surprising statement that Strabo was, "thoroughly disproven," but only references O'Connor's statement above as proof.<sup>25</sup> However, it seems that the assumption on the part of O'Connor is that these temple prostitutes lived and worked in the temple itself. Is it not possible, and in fact more probable, that they lived and applied their trade in the city, where people were more likely to come, rather than atop the Acrocorinth? For a traveler, or citizen of Corinth alike, to make the journey to the Acrocorinth would require a great deal of time, energy, and would result in exhaustion. A more likely scenario may be, prostitute-priests/priestesses lived and worked in the

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<sup>19</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 64. Broneer, "Corinth the Center of Paul's Missionary Work in Greece," *Biblical Archaeologist*, (December 1951), 87-88. David S. Dockery, "The Pauline Letters," in *Holman Concise Bible Commentary*, ed. David S. Dockery, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 552. John McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 315.

<sup>20</sup> Gordon D. Fee, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians," in *The New International Commentary of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 2-3.

<sup>21</sup> Victor Paul Furnish, "Corinth in Paul's Time: What Can Archaeology Tell Us?," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 14 no. 3 (May/June 1988):25.

<sup>22</sup> Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 420.

<sup>23</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, "The Corinth Paul Saw," 152.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>25</sup> The Lexham Bible Dictionary also refers to Conzelmann's work in 1967, *Korinth und die Madchen* as proof but does not refer to a specific location in it that can be searched. It appears that the LBD accepted O'Connor's assessment of Conzelmann without investigating it themselves, since they simply repeated the same information cited by O'Connor. On the other hand, Kurke makes a persuasive rebuttal, "Nonetheless, I am not convinced by Conzelmann's major claim (that Corinthian temple prostitution is Strabo's invention), since it does not account for the fact that the Corinthian practice as Strabo describes it diverges in every detail from Herodotus' account of Babylonian temple prostitution (Hdt. 1.199) and from Strabo's own description of sacred prostitution in Armenia (Str. 11.532-33) and Egypt (Str. 17.816)." Leslie Kurke, "Pindar and the Prostitutes, or Reading Ancient 'Pornography,'" in *Arion* 4, no. 2 (Fall, 1996), 69.

city, a city devoted to the goddess of Love, Aphrodite. Strabo “doubles-down” by stating, “the city was frequented and enriched by the multitudes who resorted thither on account of these women. Masters of ships freely squandered all their money...”<sup>26</sup> In the same text, Strabo makes clear that the temple of Aphrodite on the summit of Acrocorinth had “upon it a small temple.”<sup>27</sup> Either Strabo was a very illogical person (recording contradictory information virtually side by side), or O’Connor and others have misunderstood him to be contending that the 1,000 prostitutes lived and worked in the temple atop Acrocorinth.<sup>28</sup> As Burnett states, “Their work is done in the city, for its citizens, but as slaves they are the property of the goddess.”<sup>29</sup> Further in *Geography*, Strabo writes,

...the multitude of harlots at Corinth, who are dedicated to Venus, and attracted by the festivities of the place, strangers resorted thither in great numbers. Merchants and soldiers were quite ruined (other translations “squandered all their money), so that hence the proverb originated, ‘every man cannot go to Corinth.’<sup>30</sup>

Strabo contends, (1) Corinth known for its worship of Aphrodite, (2) the usage of “harlots” who were dedicated to this goddess, and (3) many men would spend holidays there squandering their money. For this reason, Strabo also cites the ancient proverb that must have been famous, “not for every man is the journey to Corinth.” According to Strabo’s writings, sexual immorality was prominent and alluring in Corinth. It is also useful to note, Strabo speaks of another temple of

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<sup>26</sup> Strabo, *Geography* 8.6.20.

<sup>27</sup> Strabo, *Geography* 8.6.21.

<sup>28</sup> For a detailed response to O’Connor’s theory see McRay’s five point detailed argument in *Archaeology and the New Testament*, 315.

<sup>29</sup> Anne Pippin Burnett, “Servants of Peitho: Pindar fr. 122 S.” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 51 (2011): 60.

<sup>30</sup> Strabo, *Geography* 12.3.36

Aphrodite, the one in Eryx, was “full of female temple-slaves,” which were dedicated to the “fulfillment of vows not only by the people of Sicily but also by many people from abroad.”<sup>31</sup>

Other extant writings seem to confirm a similar description of the moral milieu of Corinth. A highly debated one is the notorious Pindar fragment 122.<sup>32</sup> This fragment reads,

Young women visited by many,  
servants of Peitho in rich Corinth,  
you who burn the tawny tears of pale frankincense,  
on many occasions fluttering in thought  
to the Ouranian mother of desires, Aphrodite?  
To you she has granted without the possibility of refusal,  
O children, to have the fruit of your soft bloom plucked in lovely beds.  
And with necessity, everything is beautiful...  
*(the last lines two lines are missing of this stanza)*

*(the first two lines are missing of this stanza)*  
But I wonder what the masters of the Isthmus will say of me,  
finding such a beginning of the honey-minded skolion,  
as a consort to common women.  
We teach the quality of gold with a pure touchstone ...  
*(one line is missing)*

O mistress of Cyprus, here to your grove  
Xenophon has led the hundred-limbed  
herd of grazing women,  
rejoicing in his vows accomplished.<sup>33</sup>

This poem appears to be announcing the giving of 100 prostitutes as an answer to Xenophon’s prayers, following his victories at the Isthmian games. This song would have been sung, possibly by Pindar himself, as Xenophon presented the 100 girls as an offering to Venus/Aphrodite at her

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<sup>31</sup> Strabo, *Geography*, 6.2.6.

<sup>32</sup> Pindar was a famous Greek poet who was born in the sixth century BC. A short biography of his life was discovered at Oxyrinus, Egypt in 1961 (P. Oxy.2438). Quintilian, the first century AD rhetorician said of him, “Of the nine lyric poets Pindar is by far the greatest, in virtue of his inspired magnificence, the beauty of his thoughts and figures, the rich exuberance of his language and matter, and his rolling flood of eloquence, characteristics which, as Horace rightly held, make him inimitable.” Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 10.1.61

<sup>33</sup> Leslie Kurke, “Pindar and the Prostitutes, or Reading Ancient ‘Pornography,’” *Arion* 4, no. 2 (Fall, 1996): 51-52.

“grove.” This is how the late Latin and Greek professor of John Hopkins University, Basil Gildersleeve understood it. Concerning this fragment he writes, “The wealth of the family is shown by Xenophon’s vow to consecrate a hundred ἑταῖραι as ἱερόδουλοι to Aphrodite.”<sup>34</sup><sup>35</sup> In this poem, Pindar recognizes these girls as “servants of Peitho.” Burnett explains that Peitho was “a minor goddess of seduction whose special concern was the amorous persuasion of the young and inexperienced.”<sup>36</sup> Pausanias informs his readers that at the Temple of Aphrodite in Athens, Peitho also was found.<sup>37</sup> The fragment reference above of Pindar’s is quoted from and commented upon, by Athenaeus around AD 200. Athenaeus in his *Deipnosophists* writes,

And even private individuals sometimes vow to Venus [Roman name for Aphrodite], that if they succeed in the objects for which they are offering their vows, they will bring her a stated number of courtesans. As this custom then, exists, with reference to this goddess, Xenophon the Corinthian, when going to Olympia, to the games, vowed that he, if he were victorious, would bring her some courtesans. And Pindar at first wrote a panegyric on him... But afterwards he composed a scolium on him, which was sung at the sacrificial feasts; in the exordium of which he turns at once to the courtesans who joined in the sacrifice to Venus, in the presence of Xenophon, while he was sacrificing to the goddess himself...<sup>38</sup>

Many contemporary scholars argue that Athenaeus misinterpreted Pindar’s poem, despite the fact that Athenaeus was over two thousand years closer to the events which transpired than contemporary scholars. Athenaeus contends that Xenophon made a vow. When Xenophon’s request came true, and “he attained what no mortal man had ever attained before” (see footnote

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<sup>34</sup> Basil L. Gildersleeve, *Pindar: The Olympian and Pythian Odes* (Medford, MA: Harper and Brothers, 1885), 227.

<sup>35</sup> This Xenophon is certainly the same man which Pindar’s 13<sup>th</sup> Olympian Ode is dedicated. In this Ode, Xenophon is honored for his two victories, “since he has been victorious in both the pentathlon and the foot race; he has attained what no mortal man has ever attained before.” Pindar, Olympian 13.30 <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0162%3Abook%3DO.%3Apoem%3D13>, (accessed, 3/23/2014).

<sup>36</sup> Burnett, “Servants of Peitho,” 52.

<sup>37</sup> Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 1.22.3

<sup>38</sup> Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists* 13.32-33.

35), Xenophon fulfilled his side of the vow and gave 100 women as ιερόδουλοι to Aphrodite. Given the evidence cited above, there is ample reason to take the statements of Strabo, Pindar, and Athenaeus at face value, and no persuasive reason for why they should not.

Other writings from ancient literature also help establish the moral milieu of Corinth during the Greek era of its history. When discussing the importance of education Plato (ca 428-347 BC) used the phrase Κορινθίαν κόρην literally translated “Corinthian girl,” when speaking of prostitutes. He states, “...if a man is to be in condition, would you allow him to have a Corinthian girl as his fair friend? Certainly not.”<sup>39</sup> The reputation of Corinth was one of significant moral depravation. In fact, it was so bad that Aristophanes (446-386 BC) coins a verb from the city name Corinth, κορινθιαζομαι, to mean fornication.<sup>40</sup> In the writings of Athenaeus a term κορινθιαστης was used. This noun is also from the same cognate as Corinth and means whoremonger.<sup>41</sup> Apparently this κορινθιαστης was the name of a play written by Philetaerus (4<sup>th</sup> century BC).<sup>42</sup> Poliochus (5<sup>th</sup> century BC) also wrote a play by this name which Athenaeus references.<sup>43</sup> Finally, there is intrigue surrounding the worship of Demeter which might also have involved sexual relations. Pausanias speaks of “the mysteries” of the worship of Demeter.<sup>44</sup>

From the ancient extant writings of Stabo, Plato, Athenaeus, Pindar, and Aristophanes, it is apparent that the Greek city-state of Corinth was infamous for its moral degradation, much of which focused on the worship of their patron deity, Aphrodite. Not only do the ancient writings

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<sup>39</sup> Plato, *The Republic* 3.404d

<sup>40</sup> Aristophanes, Fragment 354.

<sup>41</sup> Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott. rev. by Sir Henry Stuart Jones. (Oxford. Clarendon Press. 1940).

<sup>42</sup> Athenaeus, *Deirnosophistae* 13.559.

<sup>43</sup> Athenaeus, *Deirnosophistae* 7.313c

<sup>44</sup> Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 2.14.1-3; 35:8

affirm this depiction, archaeological discoveries do as well. Some of these discoveries include: ancient coins, the temple of Aphrodite, the inscription at the amphitheater, and dining rooms in the temple of Demeter.

At Corinth, since 1915, 90,000+ silver, billon, and bronze coins have been discovered.<sup>45</sup> The temple of Aphrodite is prominent on ancient coins minted in Corinth during the Greek era from as early as 500BC. Just as the city of Ephesus was famous for its worship of Artemis/Diane, Corinth was branded for its devotion to Aphrodite. The prominence of the worship of Aphrodite is seen in the coinage printed at Corinth going all the way back to 510 BC (see appendix B). Not only was the impact of Aphrodite visible on the coinage, it is also highlighted by the location of the temple itself, on the Acrocorinth. The Acrocorinth would have been visible from miles around. The Acrocorinth would be the first thing that any traveler would see (including the Apostle Paul). The ancient city sat at its foot (see picture).

At the ancient theater a very significant discovery was made. The discovery was that of a stone with an inscription. The Roman theatre was probably rebuilt from the Greek one. As is often the case, much of the old building materials would have been repurposed to construct the new theater. One such piece was discovered with an inscription. The inscription was just one word, in large capital letters, KORFAN (see Appendix B). From the letters, it was clear that this was Attic Greek. This same word was found in Pindar's poem. The word is in the genitive case, showing possession. That one word is translated "belonging to the girls." This inscription dates back to the early years of the theatre's existence, probably the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>46</sup> During that period of time, ladies would not have been seen at a theater. Such behavior was not acceptable. In the

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<sup>45</sup> American School of Classical Studies at Athens website, <http://www3.ascsa.edu.gr/media/corinth/corinth.html>, (accessed, 3/24/3014).

words of McDonald, “These [girls] can scarcely have been any but the notorious temple prostitutes of Aphrodite, since respectable women did not attend the theater.”<sup>47</sup> Shear provides a likely conclusion,

The block is broken at one end, but by comparison with the dimensions of other Greek seats it is evident that the word was centered on the face of the stone with space at either side. It is therefore improbable that the word is part of a longer inscription. The girls of Corinth par excellence may have been the famous hierodoules of the temple of Aphrodite who are called by this name in Pindar's hymn to Xenophon, the Corinthian.<sup>48</sup>

This discovery confirms the description Pindar gives of “the girls” who are devoted to worship of Aphrodite as prostitute-priestesses.

Another inscription was found concerning one of “the girls” who is mentioned by name. Her name is Lais. Lais, the cartesian of Aphrodite, was taken captive at war time and brought to Corinth.<sup>49</sup> Athenaeus says she was, “superior in beauty to any woman who had ever been seen.”<sup>50</sup> “Pausanias identifies the location of her burial site, “As one goes up to Corinth are tombs...Before the city is a grove of cypresses called Craneum. Here are a precinct of Bellerophon, a temple of Aphrodite Melaenis and the grave of Lais, upon which is set a lioness holding a ram in her fore-paws.”<sup>51</sup> One more confirming piece of evidence that prostitutes were a part of the worship of this Greek goddess.

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<sup>46</sup> Theodore Leslie Shear, “Excavations in the Theatre District and Tombs of Corinth in 1929,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 33 no. 4 (Oct-Dec, 1929): 521.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>48</sup> Shear, “Excavations in the Theatre District and Tombs of Corinth in 1929,” 522.

<sup>49</sup> Plutarch, *Nicias* 15.4.

<sup>50</sup> Athenaeus, *Deirnosophists* 13.52.

<sup>51</sup> Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 2.2.4.

Further support of the immorality prominent in Corinth at this time, surrounds the ancient site of the temple of Demeter. At the temple of Demeter fifty dining rooms were uncovered. As previously mentioned, there is “mystery” surrounding what happened during the worship of Demeter. However, pottery may fill in the missing information. Many pieces of pottery have been discovered and are on display in various museums showing ancient dining couches (κλιναι) which are used for sexual purposes. Eating and intercourse were two pleasures often combined.<sup>52</sup>

The evidence above makes a strong case for temple slaves functioning as prostitutes leading in “worship” of Aphrodite. Ancient extant writings, excavation sites of this ancient city, and archaeological artifacts also all point to the moral depravity of the City-State of Corinth. The question remains, did this moral wickedness continue on through the Roman Era?

As many commentators contend, the history of Corinth is really the history of two cities, the Greek and the Roman. Corinth with all its wealth, trade, and strategic military location, became a leader amongst the Achaean League. The league was formed to protect and stand united against the attacks of the Roman Empire. Rome mandated that this league dissolve. Corinth refused and in 146 BC, Corinth was utterly destroyed by the Roman army led by Mummius. The majority of the men were killed and the women and children were sold as slaves.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament*, 317.

<sup>53</sup> Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 7.16.8.

## The Roman Era

For nearly one hundred years, this city was occupied by few citizens.<sup>54</sup> In 44 BC Julius Caesar formed a new Roman Colony by the same name, choosing to do so most certainly because of its ideal location to control and tax commerce, as well as maintain a military advantage. Many of the new settlers were recently freed slaves.<sup>55</sup> Corinth quickly returned to its wealthy status.<sup>56</sup> It became the most important commercial city of southern Greece. As a result of the wealth of Corinth, it repopulated rapidly. It became the third most populated city of the Roman Empire, only Rome and Alexandria were larger.<sup>57</sup> In 29 BC it became the seat of the Roman proconsul as well as the capital of the province of Achaia.<sup>58</sup> Guthrie and Carson warn the student of the New Testament not to read Old Corinth into the New.<sup>59</sup> O'Connor goes as far as to emphasize that both cities had their own, "distinctive institutions and theos."<sup>60</sup>

In older commentaries, it was common practice to attribute continuity between the Old and New Corinth. However, in recent days it is more popular (as indicated by Guthrie, Carson

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<sup>54</sup> Furnish acknowledges that great loss of life took place in Corinth, however he contends that ancient and modern writers are wrong to conclude it was completely devastated and abandoned. Unfortunately, Furnish includes no citations for his argument. Furnish, "Corinth in Paul's Time," 16.

<sup>55</sup> Appian, *Roman History* 8.20.136.

<sup>56</sup> Strabo even indicates that it was wealthier than the earlier Corinth due to the Isthmian games that it hosted every two years. Strabo, *Geography* 8.6.20. In addition to this, Corinth also became known for its bronze, which also brought a great profit to the city. Josephus the Historian for Rome writes about this bronze, "Of the gates nine were completely overlaid with gold and silver as were also the door-posts and lintels; but one, that outside the sanctuary, was of Corinthian bronze, and far exceeded in value those plated with silver and set in gold." Josephus Flavius, *Jewish War* 5:201-205.

<sup>57</sup> S.J. Hafemann, "Letters to the Corinthians," in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*. ed. Gerald E. Hawthorne (Inter Varsity Press, 1993), 172.

<sup>58</sup> Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 420.

<sup>59</sup> Carson, *An Introduction to the New Testament* 420; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th rev. ed., (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 432.

<sup>60</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 3.

and O'Connor's comments) to emphasize discontinuity. While it is a mistake to read the Greek Corinth into the Roman Corinth, it is equally a mistake to assume that the reputation of Old Corinth would perish with no lasting impact upon New Corinth, especially when the conditions of Old Corinth (port city, many travelers, large population) and the conditions of New Corinth were the same. Would not the conditions which primed the first, if present again in the second, logically result in a similar outcome? As Barnett states, "it would be surprising if new Corinth, as a recently founded, rapidly expanding and prosperous city, served by two seaports and with numerous short-term visitors, was not characterized by the sexual practices of the earlier era."<sup>61</sup> Add to this that (1) Rome tended to syncretize,<sup>62</sup> building upon rather than replacing, the previous culture of the Greco era,<sup>63</sup> and (2) many of the second settlement were just one step above slaves. They were likely to be less "civilized" and "refined" than the earlier era. In all likelihood, they would initiate a less moral cultural milieu rather than a more moral one.

There is no question that the paganism of the Greek city-state continued on into the Roman one. Pausanias, in his work *Description of Greece*, identifies many of those temples.<sup>64</sup> Fee counts at least 26 sacred places spoken of in Pausanias' writings.<sup>65</sup> In addition to the Greek deities worshipped the Roman settlers added additional temples to Aphrodite-Tyche, Herakles, Poseidon, Apollo, Hermes, and a temple for all the gods, as well as one to worship Octavia, the

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<sup>61</sup> Paul Barnett, "The Second Epistle to the Corinthians" in *The New International Commentary of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 4.

<sup>62</sup> Broneer states, "Many of the cults in the city were old and well established. They had continued to function during the century that Corinth lay in ruins, and when the colonists arrived in 44 B.C. they restored the worship of most of the ancient gods." Broneer, "Corinth: Center of St. Paul's Missionary Work in Greece," 83.

<sup>63</sup> This is evident in the archaeological remains of ancient Corinth. The ruins of the old temples were restored and reinstated along with other civil buildings.

<sup>64</sup> Pausanias is believed to have passed through Corinth around AD 165, although *Describing Greece* was not written prior to AD 180.

<sup>65</sup> Fee, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians," 3.

deified sister of Augustus.<sup>66</sup> In addition to these temples, in his article, “The City of Corinth and Its Domestic Religion,” Williams makes a strong case, based upon archaeological discoveries that shrines were also built upon the remains of destroyed homes, usually by family members, to honor the heroes and gods that were worshiped by those previously living in the destroyed homes.<sup>67</sup> The paganism of Old Corinth did not decrease, under the new administration, rather it increased. Regarding the temple for which Corinth was famous, the temple of Aphrodite/Venus, O’Connor acknowledges, “Like all the inhabitants, Paul would have been perpetually conscious of the craggy mass of Acrocorinth towering above the city.”<sup>68</sup> Strabo and Pausanias make it apparent that by the time of their writing a temple to Aphrodite was present on “Aphrodite’s Hill.”<sup>69</sup>

It is certainly true, “A good name is to be chosen rather than great wealth, good favor more than silver or gold.”<sup>70</sup> When one has a good reputation, it is incredibly valuable. It is equally true, when one has a bad reputation, it can have enduring and drastic consequences. The same applies for the reputation of a city. Corinth valued great riches, and not a good reputation. The result was a lasting and world-wide legacy throughout the ancient world for immorality, even to the point that derogatory words were formed from the name of the city itself. It is also true that a city’s bad reputation is extremely difficult to rehabilitate. This is especially difficult, when such a reputation attracts those of a disreputable sort. In light of the increased wealth,

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<sup>66</sup> Broneer, “Corinth,” 84-85.

<sup>67</sup> Charles Kaufman Williams II, “The City of Corinth and Its Domestic Religion,” *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens* 50 no. 4 (Oct-Dec, 1981):410.

<sup>68</sup> O’Connor, “The Corinth Saint Paul Saw,” 151-152.

<sup>69</sup> Strabo, *Geography* 8.6.21; Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 2.5.1.

<sup>70</sup> Proverbs 22:1; This quotation and all others, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the New English Translation.

increased population, and increased paganism, it is highly unlikely that New Corinth was able to liberate itself from the vices of Old Corinth. What Greco-Corinth was infamous for: immorality, prostitution, and licentiousness, the Roman-Corinth city was as well. Although, it is not possible to dogmatically state that the temple of Aphrodite in the Roman era involved temple prostitution, it is safe to say, prostitution was widely accessible. These prostitutes may or may not have been in an official capacity, as prostitute-priests/priestesses. However, it is safe to say, in a city devoted to the worship of Aphrodite, its patron deity, and in a city where the visual reminder of that worship (Acrocorinth) is literally visible from every piece of real-estate, those who participated in prostitution (both the prostitutes as well as their solicitors) would have likely seen themselves as involved in the worship of this goddess of love.

Prior to applying the implications of these archaeological discoveries and extant writings to Paul's first epistle to the Corinthian church, it is first beneficial to set the historical context of Paul's writing. This will be accomplished by developing a brief survey of the interactions Paul had with the Corinthian believers.

#### *Paul's Interactions with the Church at Corinth*

Paul first visited the city of Corinth on his second missionary journey. This visit is one of the most well established dates of Paul's journeys. In fact, it is from this date, that many of the other events are calculated. Luke records for us the journeys of Paul. He informs Theophilus (Acts 1:1), that during Paul's second missionary, at the time when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews brought Paul before Gallio for judgment. Gallio refused to make a decision based upon Jewish laws, and subsequently released Paul (Acts 18:12-17). An archaeological discovery at Delphi helps to solidify a narrow time-frame in which this event would have taken

place. At Delphi a stone was discovered, which at one time was likely to have been a part of the exterior wall of the Temple to Apollo (see appendix C). This stone had an inscription on it.

Τιβερ[ιος Κλαυδης Κ]αισ[αρ Σεβαστ]ος Γ[επμανικς,  
αρχιερευς μεγαιστος, δημαρχικης εξουσιας το ιβ, αυτοκρατωρ το  
κ[a digamma follows the kappa]...  
Λουκς Γ' ουνιος Γαλλιων ο φ[ιλος] μου κα[ι ανθυ]πατος [thV AjaiaV]<sup>71</sup>

This discovered inscription was a copy of a message from Claudius, naming Lucius Junius Gallio as the proconsul of Achaia. This inscription states that this event was during Claudius's 12<sup>th</sup> year of his "tribunical power" and after his 26<sup>th</sup> year emperor. Clearly, the reign of Gallio must have started before August 52, when Claudius would have made his twenty-seventh proclamation.<sup>72</sup> Carson explains, Proconsuls normally began their tour of duty on July 1, which means that Gallio probably ascended to the proconsulship on July 1, 51. However, it is possible that the rescript belongs to the very end of the seven-month period, in which case Gallio may have taken up his duties on July 1, 52.<sup>73</sup> A reign of a proconsul usually lasted only a year. It is likely that Gallio's did not even last that long due to a fever that Seneca, the younger brother of Gallio writes about, "I remembered master Gallio's words, when he began to develop a fever in Achaia and took ship at once, insisting that the disease was not of the body but of the place."<sup>74</sup> The combination of the archaeological evidence along with the writings of Luke and Seneca, makes an AD 50-51 dating very strong.

Paul stayed in Corinth for one and a half years, during which time he established a church there. After Paul's visit to Corinth he wrote a letter that he refers to as his "former letter" (1 Cor

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<sup>71</sup> Taken from McRay's, *Archaeology and the New Testament*, 226-227.

<sup>72</sup> Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 587.

<sup>73</sup> Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 447-48.

<sup>74</sup> Seneca, *Moral Epistles* 104.1.

5:9). Apparently it was not inspired, and therefore not preserved by God. We do not have any manuscripts of this letter. It is possible that Paul was misunderstood in this first letter regarding with whom they should and should not fellowship (1 Corinthians 5:10). At a later date, members of Chloe's household reported back to Paul that there were disputes taking place in the church family (1 Cor 1:11). As a result, Paul saw the need to send a second letter. The epistle called first Corinthians was that letter. Paul writes in his first inspired letter (second referenced letter) that he was planning to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost (1 Cor 16:8). After Pentecost he planned to go to Macedonia and after Macedonia return to Corinth to spend an extended period of time with them (1 Cor 16:5-7). It is believed that this first preserved letter, 1 Corinthians, was written in the Spring of AD 55 or 56<sup>75</sup>. Apparently this epistle did not resolve all the problems requiring a "painful visit." This visit is not recorded in Luke's account of Paul's journeys. It may be that this "painful visit" was to deal with "a certain man" (2 Corinthians 2:5-11; 7:12). A third letter was written, referenced as his "severe letter," also not inspired, and not preserved for the church (1 Corinthians 2:4). Paul left Ephesus and went to Macedonia, Titus' arrival and report encouraged him regarding the church of Corinth (2 Corinthians 7:7). The majority of people in the Corinthian church were receptive to Paul's apostolic teaching, but there was still a minority who were opposing Paul. Paul writes his fourth letter (2 Corinthians), to address this problem, defending his apostolic authority. Paul probably wrote Second Corinthians around AD 56-57 from Macedonia. At the writing of that epistle, Paul anticipated another trip to Corinth (2 Cor 13:1; Acts 20).

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<sup>75</sup> For a clear and concise argument see Harold Mare's discussion, "1 Corinthians" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 179-180.

### *Implications on the Exposition of 1 Corinthians*

The Roman city of Corinth, established in 44 BC, was growing quickly, it was becoming extremely wealthy, it had a previously established reputation for immorality, and it was a city on two ports with a multitude of visitors each year. These conditions established “a perfect storm” scenario which resulted in New Corinth becoming as immoral as Old Corinth. This is also the picture one gets when he reads Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians. Not only is the city of Corinth immoral, but that sexual licentiousness infiltrated the church.

Prior to delving into the texts, it is valuable to first comment on 1 Corinthians 3:1-3. In these verses Paul identifies the spiritual condition of the recipients of his letter, the members of the Church of Corinth. Paul writes,

So, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but instead as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready. In fact, you are still not ready, for you are still influenced by the flesh.

Here and elsewhere, Paul identifies the church of Corinth as believers. He uses the intimate term of ἀδελφοί “brothers” which indicates that he does not question their eternal status. He recognizes them as members of the family of God. Paul goes on to explain that when he first arrived in Corinth he was not able to treat them as πνευματικοῖς “spiritual people” but rather σαρκίνοις “fleshly people.” They were simply νηπίοις ἐν Χριστῷ, “immature in Christ.” Paul develops the imagery of their previous immaturity, by speaking of them as infants. Their spiritual maturity was so limited, just as babies require milk in their first stages of growth, that they too required γάλα “milk” and not βρῶμα “meat.” However, Paul further elaborates that they have not progressed in their faith. They are still σαρκικοί “fleshly people” and still immature. They were not progressing beyond the stage of infancy. The congregation is composed of immature believers living in a decadent society. The result is unfortunately predictable.

## 1 Corinthians 5:1-2

It is actually reported that sexual immorality exists among you, the kind of immorality that is not permitted even among the Gentiles, so that someone is cohabiting with his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you have been deeply sorrowful instead and removed the one who did this from among you?

The first time Paul addresses an issue relating to immorality is in chapter five. Paul learned, probably from Chloe's household (1:11) that *πορνεία* "immorality," existed among members in their assembly. Mare rightly contends that this word conveys, "the idea of extramarital sexual relations of any kind."<sup>76</sup> Out of the seventeen times that Paul uses this word, eleven are found in 1 Corinthians. Sexual immorality was permitted and acceptable behavior in the pagan culture of Corinth. But Paul explains that the kind of *πορνεία* that has commenced is a sort that is not even permitted by *ἔθνεσιν* "the nations." This egregious act, *γυναῖκα τινα του του πατρὸς ἔχειν*, someone "has" the wife of his father. The verb in the infinitive form *ἔχειν*, is often used to indicate marital relationships. These relationships are certainly sexual by nature, and Paul's qualifying of this act as *πορνεία* reaffirms this understanding. A member of the church is participating in an incestuous relationship with his mother, or more likely, his step-mother. It is not clear if this instance of *ἔχειν* indicates marriage or possibly cohabitation, either of which were certainly off limits. Keener gives a helpful understanding of the nature of the *πορνεία* not even permitted by *ἔθνεσιν*.

The marriage of full brothers and sisters was considered immoral throughout the Roman Empire except in Egypt; parent-child incest was universally abhorred throughout the Roman world. From the revulsion against the idea exhibited in the Greek Oedipus stories to slanders leveled against emperors, it was one of those few crimes that all cultures agreed were terrible. Its Roman legal punishment was banishment to an island. Relations with stepmothers were treated like relations with mothers—as incestuous.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Mare, "1 Corinthians," 217.

<sup>77</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 1 Co 5:1.

The Roman's did indeed have a law against this, "Moreover, I cannot marry my former mother-in-law or daughter-in-law, or my step-daughter or step-mother."<sup>78</sup> Cicero describes an act of this kind, and the great disapproval surrounding it.

The mother-in-law marries the son-in-law, no one looking favourably on the deed, no one approving it, all foreboding a dismal end to it. Oh, the incredible wickedness of the woman, and, with the exception of this one single instance, unheard of since the world began! Oh, the unbridled and unrestrained lust! Oh, the extraordinary audacity of her conduct! To think that she did not fear (even if she disregarded the anger of the gods and the scorn of men) that nuptial night and those bridal torches! that she did not dread the threshold of that chamber! nor the bed of her daughter! nor those very walls, the witnesses of the former wedding! She broke down and overthrew everything in her passion and her madness; lust got the better of shame, audacity subdued fear, mad passion conquered reason. Her son was indignant at this common disgrace of his family, of his blood, and of his name. His misery was increased by the daily complaints and incessant weeping of his sister; still he resolved that he ought to do nothing more himself with reference to his grievous injuries and the terrible wickedness of his mother, beyond ceasing to consider her as his mother; lest, if he did continue to behave to her as if she were his mother, he might be thought not only to see, but in his heart to approve of, those things which he could not behold without the greatest anguish of mind.<sup>79</sup>

Certainly the Jewish community in Corinth would also have prohibit this behavior (Lev. 18:8; Deut. 22:22). The Old Testament and rabbinical writings speak of the "father's wife," as a reference to the stepmother (Gen. 35:22; 49:4; 2 Sam. 16:22; 20:3; 1 Chron. 5:1).<sup>80</sup>

The first obvious problem regarding the church of Corinth in this text was the incestuous relationship. The second wrong behavior involved the apathy and inaction on the part of the church to this deed. Paul says, "And you are proud! Shouldn't you have been deeply sorrowful instead and removed the one who did this from among you?" The church was *πεφυστωμένοι*

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<sup>78</sup> Gaius, *Institutis*, 1.63  
<http://faculty.cua.edu/pennington/law508/roman%20law/GaiusInstitutesEnglish.htm>, (accessed, 3/30/2014).

<sup>79</sup> Cicero, *Orations* 6.15-16.

<sup>80</sup> Robert B. Hughes and J. Carl Laney, *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 550.

“being proud” or “being puffed up.” They ought to have shown signs of great grief for this immoral behavior, and this sinning brother, but instead they chose not to act, and by not acting illustrated their great pride. It is probable, in light of the instruction given in 6:12-13, that they had adopted the attitude that “everything is permissible.” They had disregarded Paul’s teaching in his previous letter, not to associate with immoral people (5:9), and instead accepted a lifestyle characterized by license, which demonstrated their arrogance and pride. The same verb is translated “puffed up” (4:6), and “arrogant” (4:18) by the New English Translation. They lived in a very immoral environment, and not much time has transpired since they too participated in this immoral lifestyle (6:11).

#### 1 Corinthians 5:9-12

I wrote you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. In no way did I mean the immoral people of this world, or the greedy and swindlers and idolaters, since you would then have to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who calls himself a Christian who is sexually immoral, or greedy, or an idolater, or verbally abusive, or a drunkard, or a swindler. Do not even eat with such a person. For what do I have to do with judging those outside? Are you not to judge those inside? But God will judge those outside. *Remove the evil person from among you.*

It becomes quickly apparent that this is not the first time Paul has addressed the issue of immorality. The aorist is utilized by Paul. He indicates that ἔγραψα “he wrote” concerning μὴ συναναμίγνυσθαι “not fellowshiping with” πόρνοις “immoral people.” It is correct to understand this as a true aorist and not as an epistolary aorist for at least two reasons found in the literary context. A prepositional phrase ἐν τῇ ἐπιστολῇ includes the definite article τῇ to indicate “the epistle.” Paul has a specific letter in mind. If he were speaking of the present letter he would likely have used a form of the relative pronoun οὗτος rather than the article.<sup>81</sup> Paul also uses a

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<sup>81</sup> The apostle John used such a construction in his first epistle. He used ταυτα (1:4; 2:1; 2:26; 5:13) which is often translated “these things” or “this” to speak of what he previously wrote in the same letter.

νυν “now” in verse eleven to indicate both a transition and a comparison. Having completed his discussion about what he did write, he now moves on to give instructions to follow in this epistle that he is currently writing. Now he does utilize an epistolary aorist which is accurately reflected in the NET translation as, “I am writing.”

Paul clarifies however that his command is not, nor was, to stop fellowshiping with πόρνοις who are τοῦ κόσμου “of the world.” Paul proceeds to argue that if this is what was required, it would necessitate departing the world. After Paul clarifies what he did NOT mean, he explains what he DID mean. This is clear in his statement, οὐ πάντως τοῖς πόρνοις τοῦ κόσμου. Paul’s apostolic instructions were not to συναναμίγνυσθαι ones who call themselves ἀδελφὸς and participates in πόρνος. As Fee dully notes, “Paul is not advocating that only the sinless can be members of the Christian community; rather, he is concerned about those who persist in the very activities from which they have been freed through the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb (v. 7).”<sup>82</sup> Paul does not single out just this sin, but adds to immorality, a list of other abhorrent behaviors that should not be mentioned amongst believers.

Paul continues to elaborate. Believers cannot hold unbelievers to a standard of morality when they do not believe in the God who is the source of those standards. However, a professing believer in Christ must observe these moral standards. Paul uses the verb κρίνειν “to judge” three times, indicating a play on words. Paul asks, who am I to κρίνει τοὺς ἔξω “judge the outsiders”? Aren’t you supposed to κρίνετε those within? God will κρίνεῖ those outside.<sup>83</sup> Paul’s Jewish mindset is evident in the words selected. He speaks of those “outside” and those “inside.”

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<sup>82</sup> Fee, “The First Epistle to the Corinthians,” 224.

<sup>83</sup> Paul did not demand the punishment of the woman involved in this incestuous relationship, probably indicating that the woman was not a believer. If she were a believer, she too would be judged by the same standard. According to Paul’s teaching, God will be her judge, not the church.

The literal meaning is reflected in the NET translation above. An appropriate interpretation of the text is represented by most other translations by supplementing for clarification the word “church” or in the case of the NCSB, “community” (NIV, NLT, ESV, NASB), although neither are in the original text. It is apparent that Paul is speaking of those who are professing to be believers as “inside” and unbelievers as “outside.” This is also evident when the apostle previously speaks of *τις ἀδελφὸς ὀνομαζόμενος* “one who calls himself a brother” (5:11).

Paul repeats clearly, what was previously misunderstood in his former letter, or possibly ignored entirely, the responsibility of the church is to judge “insiders” but since they did not, Paul does. He commands them to *ἐξάρατε* “expel” the sinning brother. Here Paul uses language familiar to Jewish believers. It is a clear elusion to passages from Deuteronomy that require the Jewish community to judge and punish those who participate in certain heinous sins (17:7; 19:19; 22:21, 24; 24:7). In the Old Testament these offenses were punishable by death. Paul is not demanding physical death, separation from the body, but rather separation from the church, with the desire that they would repent and be restored.

The archaeological artifacts and ancient ruins discovered in Corinth (both from the Greek era and the Roman era), as well as the extant writings, paint a picture of a society plagued by immorality. So much immorality existed in the world and more specifically in Corinth that Paul contends, to avoid fellowshiping with immoral people of the world would mean departure from the world.

#### 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

“All things are lawful for me”—but not everything is beneficial. “All things are lawful for me”—but I will not be controlled by anything. “Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both.” The body is not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. Now God indeed raised the Lord and he will raise us by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of

Christ? Should I take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that anyone who is united with a prostitute is one body with her? For it is said, “*The two will become one flesh.*” But the one united with the Lord is one spirit with him. Flee sexual immorality! “Every sin a person commits is outside of the body”—but the immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God with your body.

In chapter five Paul treats almost exclusively the subject of sexual immorality. He addresses it in general and the brother involved in an incestuous relationship specifically. It is interesting to note, that the topic of sexual immorality is interrupted by an excursus about lawsuits, and Christians bringing issues before secular judges rather than spiritually minded church members.<sup>84</sup> Verses 12-20 Paul returns to the subject of immorality, but a specific kind of immorality, sexual relations with prostitutes. In typical Pauline style, the apostle starts with belief/doctrine, prior to developing behavior/duty. He is cognizant that right belief is foundational to right behavior. Paul begins this topic with a surprising attention grabbing statement, Πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν “all things are lawful for me.” A closer inspection of the text makes evident that Paul employs a teaching method of using an imaginary opponent with imaginary objections. Paul provides arguments of an imaginary opponent, probably reflecting common concepts of the day, and then proceeds to give a rebuttal. The arguments of the imaginary person are: (1) all things are lawful (repeated twice in verse 12), and (2) food is for the stomach and stomach for the food.” It is also important to note a reoccurrence of two key words:

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<sup>84</sup> Peter Richardson makes an interesting argument that “all of chapters 5 and 6, including 6:1-11, has to do with sexual questions.” He contends, (1) the structure argues for the connection of chapters 5 and 6; (2) the occurrences of key vocabulary are used in chapters 5,6, and 7; (3) and the argument of 6:1-11 is about “the impropriety of sins of adultery and infidelity being judged by anything other than Christian standards.” While Richardson makes an interesting case, it is not certain, and therefore for the purposes of this paper it will not be developed further. See further, “Judgment in Sexual Matters: In 1 Corinthians 6:1-11” in *Novum Testamentum* 25 no. 1 (1983): 37-58.

πορνεία “sexual immorality,” and σῶμα “body.”<sup>85</sup> A form of πορνεία occurs a total of five times and σῶμα eight times.

Paul’s first statement, Πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν “all things are lawful” was a familiar saying to the Corinthians. While there is some debate as to its source, some say it was Pauline.<sup>86</sup> But such a statement seems neither Pauline nor consistent with other biblical writers. It is more likely to have had some philosophical source (Cynics, Stoics, or Gnostics) and for that reason was familiar to all Corinthians.<sup>87</sup> The editors of the NET translation state, “If it is a Corinthian slogan, then it is a slogan used by the Corinthians to justify their immoral behavior. With it they are claiming that anything done in the body or through the body had no moral relevance.” Whether the arguments made by the Corinthian church was the twisting of Paul’s original statement or a pagan philosophical theory, Paul argues against the logical result of this statement. Paul begins by agreeing in part to their philosophical position. A verbal form of Greek verb ἔξεστις is found only in the Gospels, Acts, and the Corinthian epistles.<sup>88</sup> Sometimes this verb is used to speak of what was lawful according to the Roman law (Acts 16:21; 22:25). It is not likely that Paul is speaking in this manner, since all things are not lawful by the Roman law, including incest. Most often this word is used to reference what was or was not allowed according to the Jewish Law (Matt 12:2,4,10,12; 14:4; 19:3; 22:17; 27:6; Mark 2:24, 26; 3:4; 6:18; 10:2; 12:14; Luke 6:2,4,9; 14:3; 20:22; John 5:10; 18:31). Paul could have been saying, all things are now lawful since Christ has abolished the Old Testament law, by fulfilling it in its entirety (Matt

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<sup>85</sup> Fee, “The First Epistle to the Corinthians,” 1250.

<sup>86</sup> Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, “First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians: The International Critical Commentary, in *The International Critical Commentary*, eds. S. R. Driver, A. Plummer, and C. A. Briggs (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1978), 120.

<sup>87</sup> Fee, “The First Epistle to the Corinthians,” 251; *The NET Bible* (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), 1 Co 6:12.

<sup>88</sup> It is used 29 times, 26 are in the indicative mood and 3 times it is used as a participle.

5:17). Finally, sometimes this verb simply meant what was permissible, not relating to a particular set of laws (Matt 20:15, Acts 2:29; 21:37; 2 Cor 12:4). Given that Paul’s audience was composed primarily of Gentiles although some Jews were also there, it makes best sense to understand this to mean “permissible” as is reflected in the interpretive translations of the NIV, NLT, HCSB, ISB. This same usage is found by Paul in 2 Corinthians which also argues for this understanding.

Paul responds to the popular saying, by stating ἀλλ’ οὐ πάντα συμφέρει “but all things are not beneficial.” He does not argue with their first contention, but responds by saying the issue is not so much what is ἔξεστις “permissible” but rather what is συμφέρει “beneficial.” Paul repeats this Corinthian phrase again. Such an argument was probably used by pagan philosophers excusing their sexual relationships with prostitutes, as a lawful and legitimate way to control their bodies.<sup>89</sup> Paul rebuts this wrong idea with the phrase ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐγὼ ἐξουσιασθήσομαι ὑπὸ τινός “but I will not be mastered by it.” Although, the philosophers were saying prostitution allowed them to control their bodies, Paul was saying the opposite. If I will participate in prostitution it means ἐξουσιασθήσομαι “I will be mastered” by my body, and not my body mastered by me. Paul uses a word game, to make his point. The word ἐξουσια means authority. Paul is saying, if I solicit a prostitute, I profess by my actions to have ἐξουσια “authority” over it, when in fact ἐξουσιασθήσεται “I will be mastered by it.” This is clear in his next argument. This is further elaborated in Paul’s third rebuttal.

Paul quotes the ancient philosophy, τὰ βρώματα τῆ κοιλία καὶ ἡ κοιλία τοῖς βρώμασι “food is for the stomach and the stomach for food.” Scholars debate, and translations reflect, whether the third quote ends at this point (NIV, NLT, ESV, HCSB) or continues on to include

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<sup>89</sup> Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 1 Co 6:12.

the next phrase (NET). It seems best to follow the former translations, since Paul quotes a pithy statement, and then follows that pithy statement with one of his own. Furthermore, if the source is indeed a pagan philosophy, it is unlikely that it would have spoken of god, or at least a singular god.<sup>90</sup>

Paul gives seven strong arguments for why to abstain from sexual relations with prostitutes: (1) the body is for the Lord, (2) the body is eternal, (3) believers are members of Christ, and (4) prostitution unifies a believer to a prostitute, (5) sexual sin is against one's own body, (6) believers are the temple of the Holy Spirit, (7) believers are owned by God who bought them.

Some in the Corinthian church appear to be arguing that just as the stomach is for food, so to the body is also made for sexual relations. Paul systematically negates this understanding. He explains that their σῶμα “body” is not for πορνεία, but their σῶμα is τῷ κυρίῳ “belonging to the Lord.” God created the body and it was created for service unto the Lord. Mare states, “...he [Paul] denies the argument of a parallel between eating and digesting food as a natural process and practicing sexual immorality as a natural process.”<sup>91</sup> It is important at this point to note, that the Corinthian believers were correlating eating with sexual relations. This could be the result of the “mystery” cult worship of Demeter, which is depicted on pottery discovered involving dining couches.

Paul instructs the Corinthian believers, that the stomach and food are not important for eternity but the body is. He proceeds to reason, God raised τὸν Κυρίον “the Lord” from the dead, and he will raise ἡμᾶς “us” to life as well according to his δυνάμεως “power.” The referent of

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<sup>90</sup> For the alternative view see Fee, “First Corinthians,” 253–57.

<sup>91</sup> Mare, “1 Corinthians,” 224.

ἡμᾶς is certainly believers. Paul's argument, believers will be raised unto life, just as Christ was raised from the dead. Therefore the body is eternal, and since it is eternal, it is important how a believer uses it in this present life.

Paul proceeds to teach more regarding the body. The apostle teaches that the believer's σῶμα is μέλη "a member" of Christ. In some unfathomable way, believers are united with Christ. It logically follows, if we are members of Christ, what we do unites Christ to that action and/or person. Paul then asks, should you take a μέλη of Christ and make it a μέλη of πόρνης "a prostitute"? The answer is obvious, μὴ γένοιτο "may it never be so." Pauline teaching is: to participate in prostitution is to unify a member of Christ with a prostitute. It is apparent in Paul's mind, that having sexual relations is not merely a physical act. To aid his argument, Paul quotes from Gen 2:24, "the two become one flesh."

Paul commands his readers φεύγετε τὴν πορνείαν "flee from immorality." Paul, speaking with apostolic authority, uses a second person, plural imperative to command the Corinthian church to run away from immorality. He then argues that sexual sin is against the σῶμα. Paul articulates that sexual sin is especially devastating because it is the only sin against one's own body. This verse has brought great confusion and debate, Fee provides a good solution,

In fornicating with a prostitute a man removes his body (which is the temple of the Spirit, purchased by God and destined for resurrection) from union with Christ and makes it a member of her body, thereby putting it under her "mastery" (v. 12b; cf. 7:4). Every other sin is apart from (i.e., not "in") the body in this singular sense.<sup>92</sup>

One cannot say dogmatically whether this is the best understanding of Paul, but it resolves what appears otherwise to be a contradiction to what we have been informed from experience (other sins do effect in a tangible way the physical body).

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<sup>92</sup> Fee, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians," 262.

Paul makes another argument for not participating in prostitution; the body of the believer is a temple of the Holy Spirit. This is related to being a μέλη of Christ, as well as our σῶμα being eternal, but goes beyond both these doctrines to instruct that the body must be treated rightly. Paul poses a question, Do you not know that your σῶμα is ναὸς “a temple.” The analogy of a temple would certainly have been effective in a society where one could hardly look in any direction without seeing a temple. Paul articulates that the believer’s physical body is a spiritual temple of ἁγίου πνεύματός. “Holy Spirit”, who dwells within believers. For this reason, prostitution should not be an option.

Paul concludes his discourse against prostitution by arguing that we are not our own, we were ἠγοράσθητε “purchased.” This verb comes from the root word ἀγορά which means market. It has the idea of making a purchase or buying something, which in the Greek commercial setting took place in the marketplace. It indicates possession on the part of the one doing the purchasing. Although, no specific purchaser is mention in this phrase, God is clearly in mind. Because God purchased believers, their bodies are not their own, and they are to honor God with it. Joining the body with a prostitute is contrary to honoring God with their bodies.

Archaeological discoveries, extant writings, and ancient artifacts do not change one’s interpretation of this passage, but it does provide greater clarity to the issue of immorality in general, and prostitution specifically plaguing the church in Corinth. These findings confirm the description Paul gives. The prostitution, for which the temple of Aphrodite was famous, was still a pressing problem during Paul’s Corinth. The study of Demeter, and the introduction of food into the immoral practices at the temple, may also help one think more clearly regarding the early churches arguments in verse 13. Prostitution was a constant temptation, and although it was an acceptable behavior by the Roman laws, Paul instructs that it is not acceptable for believers.

## 1 Corinthians 7:1-5

Now with regard to the issues you wrote about: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” But because of immoralities, each man should have relations with his own wife and each woman with her own husband. A husband should give to his wife her sexual rights, and likewise a wife to her husband. It is not the wife who has the rights to her own body, but the husband. In the same way, it is not the husband who has the rights to his own body, but the wife.

The sexual immorality pervading Corinth is also evident in Paul’s writings concerning marriage. Paul mentions a letter that they wrote. The second person plural aorist form of γράφω was used by Paul to indicate that there were a plurality of members who wrote Paul in the past. It appears that they had some questions regarding marriage and so Paul addresses those. He begins by saying καλὸν ἀνθρώπῳ γυναικὸς μὴ ἄπτεσθαι, “It is not good for man to touch a woman.” A misinterpretation is reflected in the NIV’s translation of “to marry.” It is best to understand ἄπτεσθαι to be a euphemism for sexual relations. The construction found in verse one, the infinitive form of ἄπτεσθαι + γυναικός is only found here in all of the New Testament. However, it is found nine other times in Greek literature (including the Septuagint), all of which have the idea of sexual relations.<sup>93</sup> Fee investigates seven in detail and concludes, “In all of these occurrences it is a euphemism for sexual intercourse, and in not one of them is there the slightest hint that the idiom extends to something very close to “take a wife” or ‘marry.’”<sup>94</sup> Paul is not teaching abstinence from sexual relations between husband and wife, as some early sects were promoting. Paul was not disallowing marriage either, as becomes even more evident in later portions of this chapter. What Paul did promote was abstinence before marriage. In a society

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<sup>93</sup> *The NET Bible First Edition Notes*, 1 Co 7:1.

<sup>94</sup> Gordon D. Fee, “1 Corinthians 7:1 in the NIV” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23 no. 4 (December, 1980), 307-308.

plagued by immorality, Paul feels the necessity to repeat something they should already know, they should not have sexual relations before marriage.

There is some controversy in verse two. What does Paul mean by *διὰ δὲ τὰς πορνείας ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα ἐξετω...* The traditional view is reflected in a translation similar to, “but on account of immorality each one should have their own wife...”<sup>95</sup> Others would translate similar to the NET, “But because of immoralities, each man should have relations with his own wife...”<sup>96</sup> Is Paul arguing for marriage because of the temptation surrounding Corinth and its pagan practices or was Paul arguing for regular sexual relations between husband and wives to avoid temptation? Strong arguments can be made for both positions, but it seems that recent research supports the latter view. Keener’s statement represents this position, “‘Let each have’ reflects a Greek idiom for ‘Let them have sexual relations.’ Jewish people saw married sexual intimacy as the best deterrent to sexual immorality, and Paul here agrees (see also Prov 5:19–20).”<sup>97</sup> Whether you lean towards the traditional interpretation of Robertson, Plummer, Mead, and the NIV editors, or the more recent view of Fee, Keener, and the NET Bible editors, one thing is certain, immorality was so prevalent in the city, that it became a major issue for the church, and one which required the apostle to repeatedly address.

Depending on one’s interpretation of verse two, determines whether one takes verse three as further elaboration, or a shift of emphasis. Paul writes, *τῇ γυναικὶ ὁ ἀνὴρ τὴν ὀφειλὴν*

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<sup>95</sup> This is the position of Mare, “1 Corinthians,” 228; as well as Robertson and Plummer, “First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, 132-133. Robertson and Plummer state, “But the apostle is not discussing the characteristics of the ideal married life; he is answering questions put to him by Christians who had to live in such a city as Corinth. In a society so full of temptations, he advises marriage, not as the lesser of two evils, but as a necessary safeguard against evil.”

<sup>96</sup> For a developed argument of this particular view, see further Fee, “The First Epistle to the Corinthians,” 278-279.

<sup>97</sup> Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 1 Co 7:2.

ἀποδιδότω, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἡ γυνὴ τῷ ἀνδρί. Here Paul commands the man in a marriage to give his wife ὀφειλῆν. This word is only used two other times in the New Testament, once to speak of a financial debt (Mt 18:32), and again in Romans to speak of obligations of paying taxes (Rom 13:7).<sup>98</sup> Paul's point to the Corinthians, husbands have an obligation of "what is owed" to their wives. Paul follows this command with a couple connectives ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ, "and also in like manner" the woman to the man. Although, ὀφειλῆν is not repeated in the Greek text, it is clearly implied. The clear teaching of Paul is that there are specific marital obligations regarding the marriage bed.

Paul further elaborates, a woman οὐκ ἐξουσιάζει "does not have authority" over her σῶματος but the man does. Paul then uses the same connective construction as in the previous verse, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ "and also in like manner" the man οὐκ ἐξουσιάζει over his σῶματος but the woman does. Paul continues his homily on marital responsibilities by using an imperative preceded by a negation, μὴ ἀποστερεῖτε "do not deprive" each other. Although there is no objective in the sentence, the implied object is from the previous sentences, not to deprive each other of their ὀφειλῆν "marital obligations." The present imperative employed here indicates that some individuals were already depriving their partners. It could be translated, "Stop depriving one another."<sup>99</sup> It is also significant to note, that ἀποστερεῖτε is used in 6:7-8 for the man who defrauded someone else. Fee speaks of this verb, "It is a pejorative word for taking away what rightfully belongs to another (cf. Jas. 5:4)."<sup>100</sup> Paul seems to be arguing that depriving one's partner, is defrauding them of what is rightfully theirs. Paul establishes only one reason for a

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<sup>98</sup> Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 564.

<sup>99</sup> Mare, "1 Corinthians," 228.

<sup>100</sup> Fee, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians," 281.

temporary cessation of sexual relations, and that reason is σχολάσητε “to devote oneself” to προσευχῆ “prayer.” Paul qualifies this with a couple requirements. It should involve συμφώνου “mutual agreement” and it should be only for καιρόν “a season.” Paul explains why he gives these qualifications introducing it with ἵνα “in order that.” Satan μὴ πειράζη ὑμᾶς “may not tempt you.” Paul utilizes the subjunctive to show that the ceasing of sexual relations between husband and wife provides Satan the opportunity to tempt the married partners and thereby having ἀκρασίαν “potential power” over them. Once again, the immoral context of Corinth requires special instructions for husbands and wives in light of the near and easy access to and participation in πορνεία.

### *Conclusion*

The ancient city of Corinth is one of the most excavated cities of Greece. There is a plethora of information at the disposal of any interested party. Many of those archaeological discoveries help the biblical scholar better understand the historical context in which Paul wrote his epistles to the Corinthians. In addition to the archaeological discoveries, there are many texts which described the history and events of this infamous city. These too are of great value to the student of the Scriptures. This paper concerned itself with the archaeological remains (the temple to Aphrodite, the Temple of Demeter), archaeological artifacts (coins, vases, and inscriptions), and extant writings (Appian, Aristophanes, Athenaeus, Flavius, Josephus, Pausanias, Pindar, Plato, Quintilian, Seneca, Strabo) which touched on the subject of the immoral setting of Corinth.

This study has been confirmatory, illustrative, and insightful. It has been confirmative in that the archaeological discoveries and extant texts confirm the immoral setting which demanded Paul’s rebuke in First Corinthians. These discoveries and texts support rather than negate the

historicity of this Pauline epistle. The archaeological discoveries confirm what is evident in the epistles. The church was faced with the inevitable challenge of going against the accepted norms of society. Unfortunately, at many points they failed.

This study was illustrative. It helps the student of the Corinthian Epistles get a better glimpse and understanding of the immoral society and cultural milieu to which the Corinthian epistles were written. It is difficult to imagine a church where a member of its congregation was committing prolonged sexual immorality with his step-mother (5:1). It is equally difficult to imagine a church, aware of these events transpiring, and yet doing nothing to prevent them (5:2). It is hard to picture believers rationalizing their sin by saying everything is permissible (6:12). It is stunning to think that it was common for believers to be actively participating in prostitution (6:16). And it is difficult to conceive of a church where married members were intentionally defrauding each other of their marital obligations (7:5). While all of this is unconscionable, it becomes more understandable when one better understands that these Christians were “mere infants” (3:1) living in a morally depraved society. This is the illustrative nature of the archaeological discoveries, artifacts, and extant writings. They portray a hedonistic setting with few rivals in ancient history which could compete at its level of degeneracy. The church of Corinth, rather than making a profound impact on the society, they were profoundly impacted by the society in which they lived. Rather than being a beacon of light in a very dark habitat, they were all but an extinguished candle with minimal impact.

Not only was this study confirmatory, and illustrative, it was also insightful. Several aspects of the archaeological discoveries and extant writings are helpful to the πορνεία passages. In general, understanding the history of the city of Corinth as “read” through archaeological discoveries and extant writings, gives the student of these passages a helpful understanding of

the historical context. Since meaning of the text is sourced in what the original author intended to communicate to the original recipients, understanding better the historical context is always a worthy pursuit.

In particular, there are also helpful aspects from this study which have a bearing on the specific passages studied. It has not been definitively proven that there were temple prostitutes during the 1<sup>st</sup> century Corinth, although a strong case has been made for it, and worthy of review here. Those closest to the era: Strabo, Pausanias, Pindar, Athenaeus, and even Plato, gave statements that supports the traditional view, that the worship of Aphrodite involved prostitution during the Greco Corinth era. In addition to these texts, an inscription discovered at the theatre, “belonging to the girls” and the grave of Lais, one of “the girls,” establishes a lot of hard evidence for which, those who oppose this position, must give better explanations. Concerning the Roman Corinth, it has been argued that the same conditions or “better” conditions were in place for the perfect storm, and a resurgence of immorality for which the city was known. The “perfect storm” includes: greater wealth, a larger population, a port city, many travelers, the isthmian games, a settlement of recently released slaves, and probably most importantly, a reputation that is not easily debunked and which attracts those seeking a decadent lifestyle. For these reasons, it is logical to conclude that the cultural milieu of the Roman Corinth was as bad or worse to the earlier Greek era.

Prostitution was certainly rampant, and those involved in prostitution, probably saw it as a means to worship their patron goddess of love, Aphrodite. This is all important, and background to the study of 1 Corinthians 6, where believers were joining their bodies with prostitutes. It was allowed by the Roman law, and was even possibly elevated by philosophers as a means to “control their bodies.” Discoveries pertaining to Demeter and the mystery worship

involving food could also play a part in why the argument concerning food is inserted when rationalizing prostitution 6:12-13. This theory deserves further investigation. It was this immoral cultural milieu that caused Paul to command believers to positively give their spouse what is “owed” them and negatively, stop depriving one another of their marital privileges. The study of archaeological remains and extant writings relating to the immoral setting of Corinth is a worthwhile pursuit as it provides confirmation, illustration, and helpful insights to the texts of Scripture.

Appendix A  
Pindar’s Fragment 122

Πολύξεναι νεάνιδες, ἀμφίπολοι  
Πειθοῦς ἐν ἀφνειῷ Κορινθῶ,  
αἴ τε τᾶς χλωροῦς λιβάνου ξανθὰ δάκρυα  
θυμιᾶτε, πολλάκι ματέρῳ ἐρώτων  
οὐρανίαν πτάμεναι

νοήματι πρὸς Ἀφροδίταν,  
ὑμῖν ἄνευθ’ ἐπαγορεύει ἐπορευεῖν,  
ὦ παῖδες, ἐρωταίνας <ἐν> εὐναῖς  
μαλθακῆς ὄρας ἀπὸ κκαρπὸν δροπέσθαι.  
σὺν δ’ ἀνάγκῃ πᾶν κκαλόν

...

...

...

...

ἀλλὰ θαυμάζω, τί με λέξοντι Ἴσθμοῦ  
δεσπότης τοιάνδε μελίφρονος ἀρχὴν  
εὐρόμενον σκκολίου  
ξυνάορον ξυναῖς γυναιξίν.  
διδάξαμεν χρυσὸν κκαθαροῦ βασάνῳ

...

ὦ Κύπρου δέσποινα, τεὸν δεῦτ’ ἐς ἄλλος  
φορβάδων κκαροῦ ἀγέλαν ἐκκατόγγυι-  
ον Ξενοφῶν τελείαις  
ἐπάγαγ’ εὐχολαῖς ἰανθείς.

Appendix B  
Ancient Corinthian Coins



510-480 BC



405-345 BC



400-350 BC



400-338 BC



350-306 BC

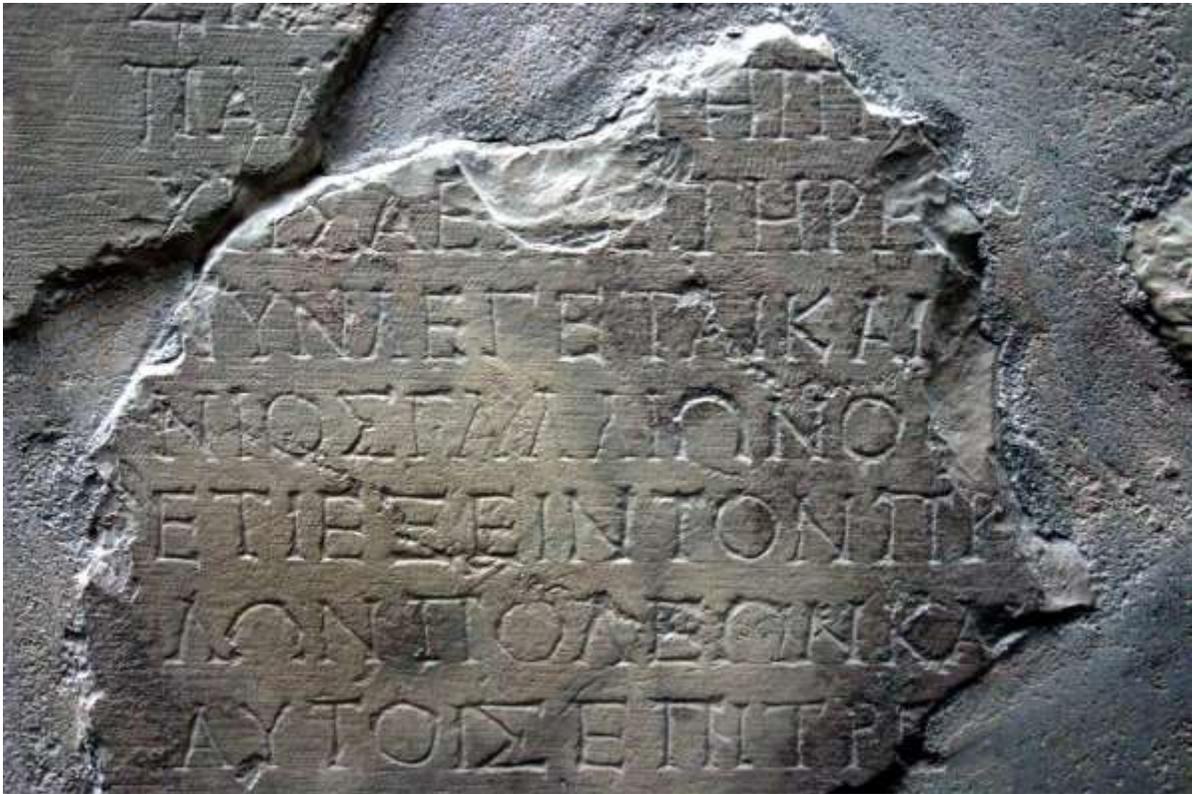


330 BC

Appendix C  
Ancient Inscriptions



<sup>101</sup> KOPFAN “belonging to the girls,” inscription discovered at Corinth



Delphi Inscription Announcing Gallio as Proconsul of Achaia

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<sup>101</sup> Image taken from Shear of the KOPFAN “belonging to the girls,” 521.

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