

# UNITY IN THE BODY

1 CORINTHIANS 1

# CORINTH



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# ANCIENT CORINTH



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Strabo claimed the city had 1,000 temple prostitutes at the temple of Aphrodite on the Acrocorinth.

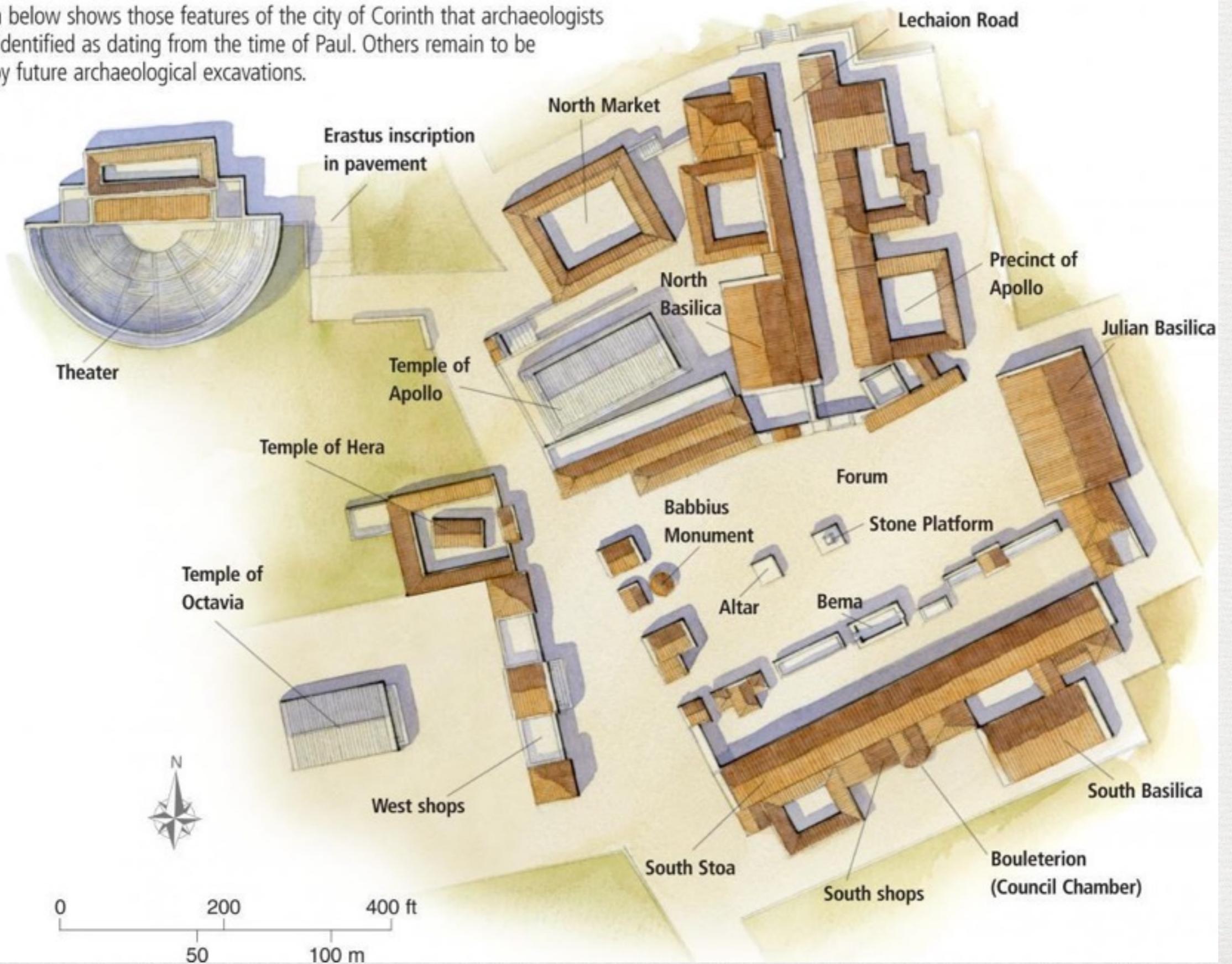


# ANCIENT CORINTH



## CORINTH IN THE TIME OF PAUL (C. A.D. 60)

The city plan below shows those features of the city of Corinth that archaeologists have so far identified as dating from the time of Paul. Others remain to be discovered by future archaeological excavations.



# IMAGINE

Imagine a church wracked with divisions and factions. There are preaching cults where church members favor one particular preacher over another. Imagine a church filled with sexual immorality. Some of the members are visiting prostitutes. One church member is having an affair with his stepmother. Imagine a church where believers don't work out their problems. Instead, they sue each other in secular courts. Imagine a church where debates rage on topics like Christian liberty, men's and women's roles, prophecies, and speaking in tongues. Imagine a church where the Lord's Supper is abused and a significant number do not even believe in the bodily resurrection of Christ.

**A BELIEVER'S IDENTITY  
MUST BE  
ROOTED IN CHRIST**

# DIVISIONS

- Paul wants to show the Corinthian church that their identity is in the family of God.
- The divisions rampant in their local church are not genuine characteristics of God's people.
- These divisions are finding security and identity in the cultural environment and what it affords, rather than in Christ and what He gives.

# DIVISIONS

- Paul urges a shift in focus for them
- He wants them to see that Christ, through His Cross, has given them the only eternal point of boasting.
- He wants them to forego the impulse to find value in personal, political or professional gain.

# HISTORY

- Paul had a history with Corinth.
- He first visited the city on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1–18), preached boldly, and established a church with the help of Aquila and Priscilla (two fellow believers).
- After spending about a year and a half in Corinth, Paul, along with Aquila and Priscilla, set sail to Ephesus to minister there.

# HISTORY

- While in Ephesus, Paul learned of issues in the Corinthian church concerning sexual immorality and wrote a letter to address the problem (mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9).
- After hearing from additional church members (1 Corinthians 16:17) concerning questions on issues that are further dividing the church, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians.

# THEME

- The church at Corinth reflects too much of the world and not enough of Christ.
- This letter will speak directly to several issues and questions that pertained to the Corinthian church, including: the pursuit of holiness, unity within the church, issues concerning marriage, liberty and responsibility, spiritual gifts, money and the doctrine of the Resurrection.

**THE CHURCH BELONGS  
TO GOD AND SHOULD  
BE MARKED BY UNITY**

**1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-17**

# PAUL, THE APOSTLE (1)

- Paul identifies himself as an apostle.
- Paul did not earn his office by demonstrating great skill in oration or obtain the title through cunning political maneuvering.
- The role of apostle was given by God.
- His humble pursuit of God's will would be an example to the Corinthians.

# CHURCH OWNED BY GOD (2)

- Paul identifies the Corinthians as a church owned by God.
- The immoral and divisive behavior of the church demonstrated a self-centeredness and lack of Christian identity.
- Paul gives them a definition.
- They are “sanctified” (meaning “set apart”) by God for His possession.

# CHURCH OWNED BY GOD (2)

- They have been set apart from the evils of the world for God's use.
- Not only are they sanctified but they have Jesus as their Lord.
- These facts demand a pursuit of holiness, allegiance to God's will and Word, and a unity with all other believers.

# THANKSGIVING FOR GOD'S GRACE (4-9)

- It seems odd that he would give thanks for a church that is struggling so greatly (people who appear to overestimate, self-inflate and choose division).
- Paul praises God for His faithfulness and grace toward the church.
- Despite the massive failings of the Corinthian church, Paul identifies several reasons to give thanks:

# THANKSGIVING FOR GOD'S GRACE (4-9)

- The Corinthian believers who are recipients of God's grace, are a part of the Church (v. 4).
- Because of their belonging to Christ, God has given them spiritual gifts (v. 5).
- The presence of spiritual gifts confirms the truth of the Gospel that was shared (v. 6).
- The Corinthians are justified in Christ (vv. 7–9).

# LACK OF UNITY IN THE CHURCH (10-13)

- Verse 10 is the first indication in the letter that something is wrong.
- Paul had set the table in the previous sentences and now he lays an issue bare: There is a lack of unity in the church.
- In identifying the presence of divisions and separate factions, Paul reminds them that all identity and encouragement are grounded in Christ.

# LACK OF UNITY IN THE CHURCH (10-13)

- He exhorts them that the Christian's place in the family of God is not self-made or self maintained.
- Secondly, it is the result of an outside action done solely by God Himself on the Christian's behalf.
- That goes against everything happening in Corinth.
- During this time period, various philosophers competed for a following of their particular brand of philosophy.

# LACK OF UNITY IN THE CHURCH (10-13)

- These Christians in Corinth were divided in whom they were following.
- They were divided in their cultural views and in various competing camps.
- Paul says this isn't the way of the Christian faith.
- Christians are to be first and foremost followers of Christ.

# RELIANCE ON GOD'S WISDOM (14-17)

- Paul was called to preach the Gospel.
- Here is where Paul distances himself from what the Corinthians would have expected from an orator who is defending a particular viewpoint (like a preacher).
- In the time period in which the letter was written, professional orators would have been common in cities such as Corinth.

# RELIANCE ON GOD'S WISDOM (14-17)

- Paul could not persuade people to his school of thought by impressing them with a speech.
- However, he came with the power of the Gospel, a power that was genuine and changed lives.
- Eloquent words of men may sway a mind, but only the power of the Holy Spirit wins the heart.

# RELIANCE ON GOD'S WISDOM (14-17)

- Paul tells them this self-boasting and is valuing their own wisdom over God's.
- These Christians were chasing the world's wisdom over their Creator's. They were trusting in the ways of Corinth, not the ways of the Cross.
- Verse 17 strikes a clear distinction between God's wisdom and that of the culture. This is something we will discover as we read through this book.

**THE WISDOM OF GOD IS  
IN CONFLICT WITH THE  
WISDOM OF MAN**

**1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-31**

# CROSS IS FOLLY TO THE PERISHING (18-21)

- Imagine attempting to apply the wisdom of the city of Corinth to the church of Corinth.
- The congregation would be full of members who are self-serving, arrogant and very concerned with their self-preservation.
- These traits are in stark contrast to the wisdom of God (Christ on the Cross demonstrated humility, a willingness to put self last, submission to God's will, and an openness to sacrifice everything).

# PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED (22-25)

- Paul says the way of God is foolish to the way of popular culture. The Gospel doesn't make sense to the world.
- But Paul says what is foolish to the surrounding culture is power and life for the Christian.
- What is weak in the world is strong for those in Christ.

# PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED (22-25)

- Where are those who are educated and well-spoken, Paul asks. Where are those who are wise?
- Similar to Isaiah 19:12 - mocking Egyptian wise men.
- There are none who are wise by the world's standards within the community of faith.
- Paul is poking the nerve of Corinthian culture, and shows that the Cross of Christ doesn't make sense when interpreted through the lens of culture.

# PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED (22-25)

- For these Corinthians, power was the ultimate cultural value.
- At the Cross, all power was given up. Christ went to the Cross willingly and sacrificially.
- This was a scandal in the mind of a Corinthian.
- This made it a stumbling block. And this is why the Cross today is still a stumbling block to so many.

# FOOLISHNESS IN THE WORLD (26-31)

- People in this culture didn't see the Cross in a positive light.
- It was weak. It wasn't wise at all and didn't make any sense to the Corinthian mind.
- On the surface, it was a defeat.
- But Paul knows that the reality of the Cross turns the entire culture upside down.

# FOOLISHNESS IN THE WORLD (26-31)

- The Cross offers a better way and a better community.
- The Cross calls Christians to lay down self-effort and trust Christ's effort on their behalf. The Cross shows Christians that nothing they bring will be of any account.
- The Christian's worth, value, inheritance and achievements are all located in Calvary.

# FOOLISHNESS IN THE WORLD (26-31)

- This is why Paul says in verse 31 to boast in the Lord.
- God in Christ is offering a different cultural storyline.
- The Cross of Christ deconstructs the Corinthian's value system and worldview.
- This is God's gracious gift, a gift that no one can claim on their own effort.

# FOOLISHNESS IN THE WORLD (26-31)

- In Christ, one's own importance and achievements mean nothing.
- All is wiped away and broken down at the foot of the Cross.
- Throughout this letter to the Corinthians, Paul consistently brings it back to this truth: All that matters in this life and the next has been graciously given, not earned, in Christ.

