

***Your Life in Christ Should
Not Be a Soap Opera
Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians***



1 Corinthians

- *A Little Bit of Background*



A Little Bit of Background

- First things first—where was Corinth and why did Paul write a letter (or four) to them?
 - Paul wrote multiple letters to fledgling Christian churches around the Greek-speaking world including a letter to the church in Corinth



A Little Bit of Background



Funky little teaching moment...

- This *not* one of the letters that Paul wrote while a prisoner in Rome, like Philippians later would be —on the contrary, it appears that Paul was sitting in Corinth when he wrote his letter to the Romans (In Romans 16:23, he writes that he's being hosted by Gaius, and that Erastus greets the church in Rome —and Gaius and Erastus are spoken of in Paul's letters as being in Corinth)



A Little Bit of Background



Funky little teaching moment...

- This *not* one of the letters that Paul wrote while a prisoner in Rome, like Philippians later would be —on the contrary, it appears that Paul was sitting in Corinth when he wrote his letter to the Romans —rather, 1 Corinthians 16:8 suggests that Paul was actually in Ephesus when he wrote this letter
 - And that gives us a little bit of context for when and why he was writing, because he wasn't in Ephesus for that long, so it had to have been right after he'd left them...



A Little Bit of Background



Crazy deep dive into background...

- To understand the letter, it helps to understand a bit of the geography and history of Corinth
 - “Corinthia” was the region that connects Greece (and all of Europe) to the famed Peloponnesian peninsula—home to little Olympia, site of the Olympic Games and to mighty Sparta, home of the toughest warriors on the planet
 - The Peloponnesian War of 431-404 BC was fought between the **Peloponnesian League**, led by Sparta and the **Delian League**, led by Athens

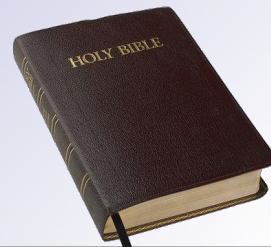
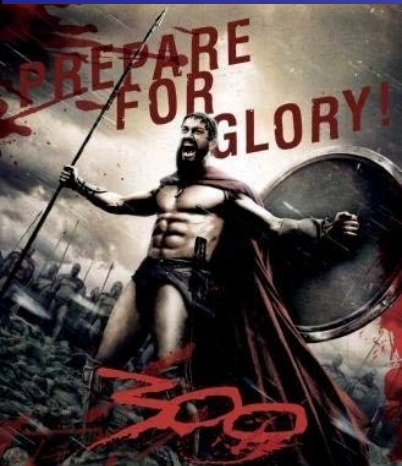


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 - Very long story very short, Athens lost—forever shifting the balance of power so that great Athens was reduced to a mere intellectual center, never again the major naval power that it once was (‘cuz back in the day, Xerxes’ Persian invasion of Greece had been held back by the Spartan footsoldiers at the Battle of Thermopylae and by the Athenian navy the simultaneous Battle of Artemesium)

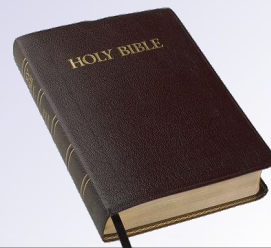
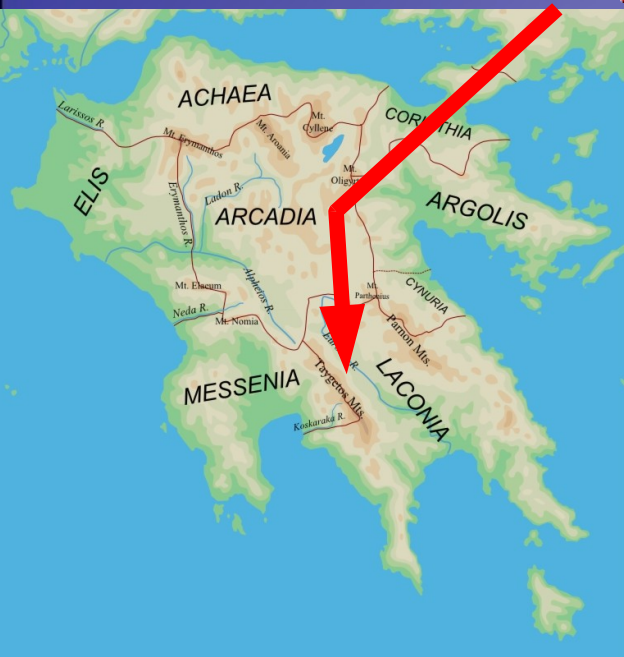


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 - Very long story very short, Athens lost—forever shifting the balance of power so that great Athens was reduced to a mere intellectual center, never again the major naval power that it once was—and *that's* part of why Rome was able to sweep through the relatively weak individual Greek states and conquer all of them—including the whole Peloponnesian peninsula—in 146 BC



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Crazy deep dive into background...

- To understand the letter, it helps to understand a bit of the geography and history of Corinth
 - “Corinthia” was the region that connects Greece (and all of Europe) to the famed Peloponnesian peninsula
 - The first thing that Rome did was to secure the military installation atop the *Acrocorinth*—a huge, natural outcropping of rock that towered over Corinth (at its summit was a huge and glorious temple of Aphrodite, filled with prostitutes for the soldiers)
(NOTE: Plato's term for a prostitute was “a Corinthian girl”)

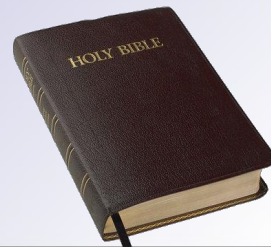


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 - Whole cargo ships could be towed along the stone road, so that days—if not weeks—of dangerous travel could be avoided
 - See, the habitable parts of the peninsula are all along the coast, since the interior is all rocks and mountains like the *Acrocorinth*—and the waters along the coastline are all famous for being beset by rough, irregular currents and treacherous weather



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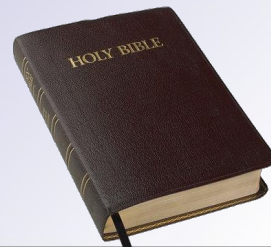


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- See, the habitable parts of the peninsula are all along the coast, since the interior is all rocks and mountains like the Acrocorinth—and the waters along the coastline are all famous for being beset by rough, irregular currents and treacherous weather (which is why it had been so hard for poor Odysseus to make his way back home to Ithaca after the siege of Troy)



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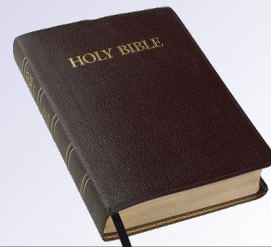
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Thus, whoever controlled Corinth controlled the easiest, safest, cheapest, and quickest shipping in all of the Greek waters

(which is why one of the catchphrases in the ancient world was to call someone “as fast as a Corinthian”)

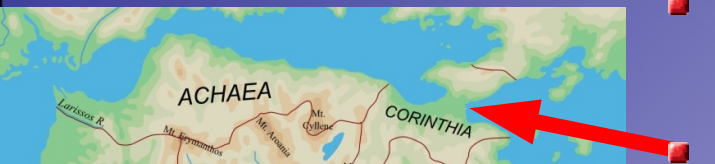


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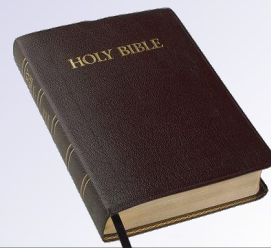
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- So, in 146 BC, Rome took over the region of Corinthia, burned the city of Corinth to the ground, slaughtered all of the men, enslaved all of the women and children, and sent everything of value back to Rome, leaving a garrison on the Acrocorinth to guard the Diolkos

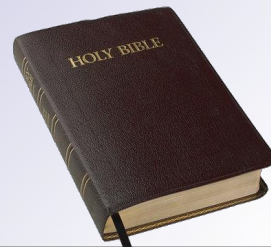
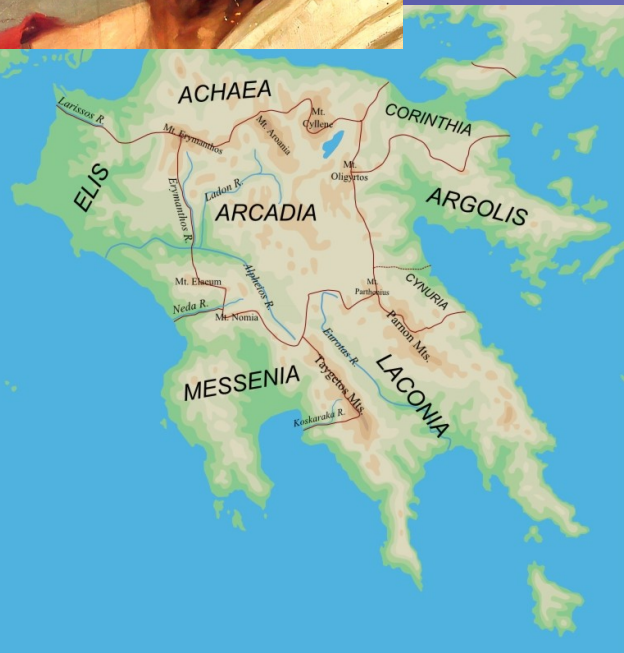


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 - So, in 146 BC, Rome took over the region
 - In 44 BC, Julius Caesar rebuilt the ruins as *Colonia Laus Iulia Corinthiensis* (the “colony of Corinth, in honor of Julius”)

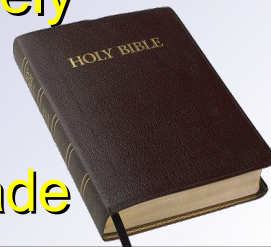
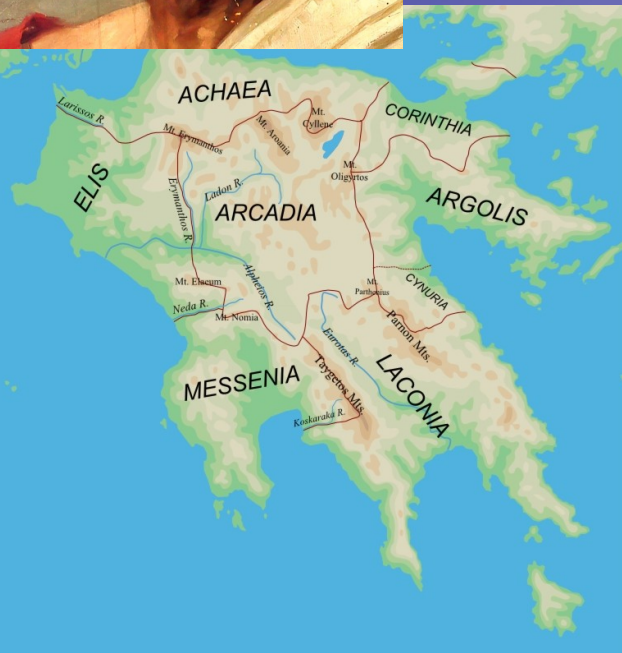


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 - So, in 146 BC, Rome took over the region
 - In 44 BC, Julius Caesar rebuilt the ruins as *Colonia Laus Iulia Corinthiensis*, actively repopulating the city with a huge and consciously diverse population of Romans, Greeks, Egyptians, Syrians, and Jews, to promote international trade

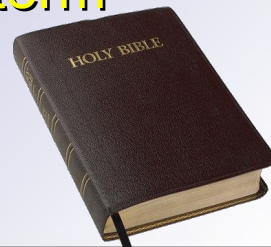


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 - The first thing that Rome did...
 - So the Corinth of Paul's day was less than 100 years old—a new city of the newly rich that wanted to establish itself as a center for modern trade and trendsetting culture in the Roman Empire...
 - As one historian summarized the city,
“The ideal of the Corinthian was the reckless development of the individual. The merchant who made his gain by all and every means, the man of pleasure surrendering himself to every lust, the athlete steeled to every bodily exercise and proud in his physical strength, are the true Corinthian types—in a word, the man who recognized no superior and no law but his own desire.”
(NOTE: Thus, Aristophanes coined the term “to Corinthianize” to describe indulging in any perverse, sensual vice)



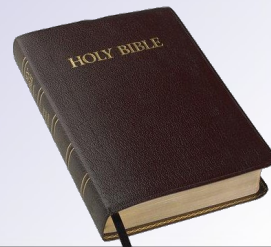
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- First things first—where was Corinth and why did Paul write a letter (or four) to them?
 - Paul wrote multiple letters to fledgling Christian churches around the Greek-speaking world including a letter to the church in Corinth
 - Paul felt called to travel from Asia to Europe
 - From Macedonian cities like Philippi and Thessalonica, he made his way south into Athens (all of which should be ringing bells for any of you who were around for our series on Philippians or our VBS set in Athens)



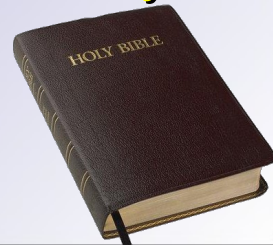
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 - **In Acts 17, Paul ran into trouble with the local Epicurean and Stoic philosophers living in Athens so he moved on to nearby Corinth**
 - Read Acts 18:1-3
 - Paul had been a professional tent-maker, so he naturally gravitated to other Jewish tent-makers
 - The Emperor Claudius had been expelling Jews from Rome over the past decade (ironically, because he was sick of all of the trouble they caused about the rising number of Christians in the world)



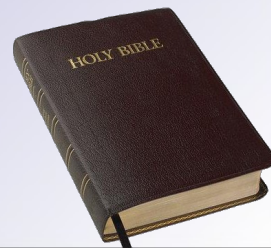
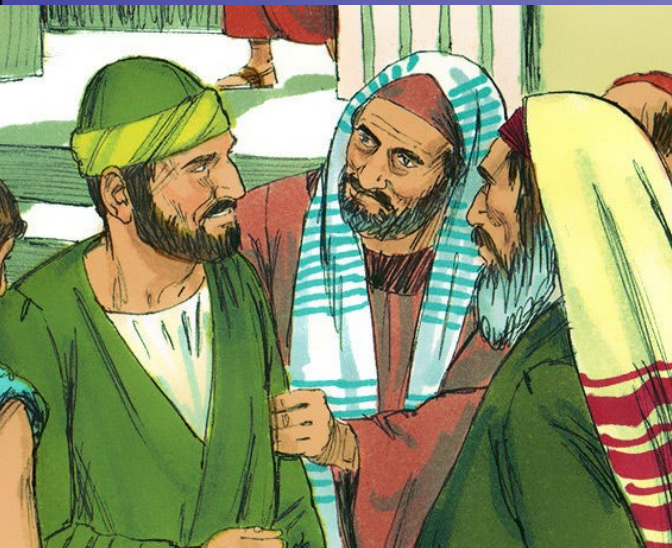
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 - Paul had been a professional tent-maker, so he naturally gravitated to other Jewish tent-makers
 - The Emperor Claudius had been expelling Jews from Rome over the past decade, so odds are that Aquila and Priscilla were Jewish Christians who had only lived in Corinth for a short time—brand new citizens of the new city of New Corinth, filled with new converts to Christianity, newly rich traders, and exotic markets



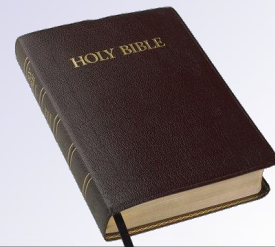
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 - Read Acts 18:1-3
 - Read Acts 18:4-5
 - **What did Paul's ministry look like in Corinth? And why would he do it that way?**



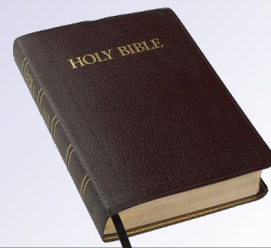
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 - Read Acts 18:1-3
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 - Read Acts 18:6-7
 - **How and why did Paul's ministry change? Why did he appear to move into the home of YAHWEH-loving *Gentile* Titus Justus?**



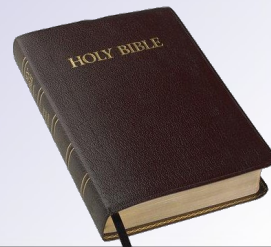
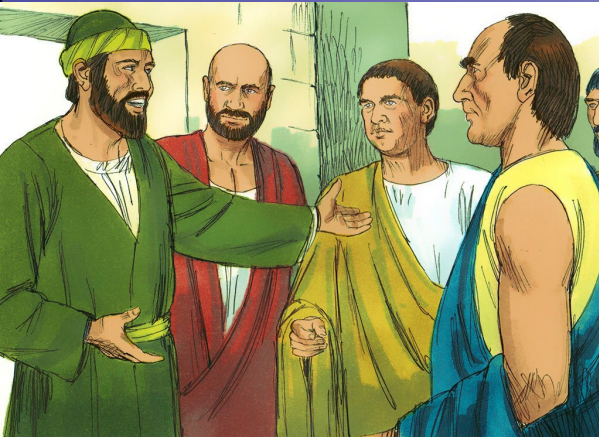
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 - Read Acts 18:1-3
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 - **Read Acts 18:6-7**
- How and why did Paul's ministry change?
- **And yet, what happened in Acts 18:8?**
 - **Why are any of those details important?**



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 - **We're told in Acts 18:11 that Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, establishing a church there**
 - **How intimately involved with the church in Corinth do you think Paul would've been after 18 months?**
 - **Why do you think that Priscilla and Aquila sailed with him when he left to travel east to Ephesus in Asia in Acts 18:18?**

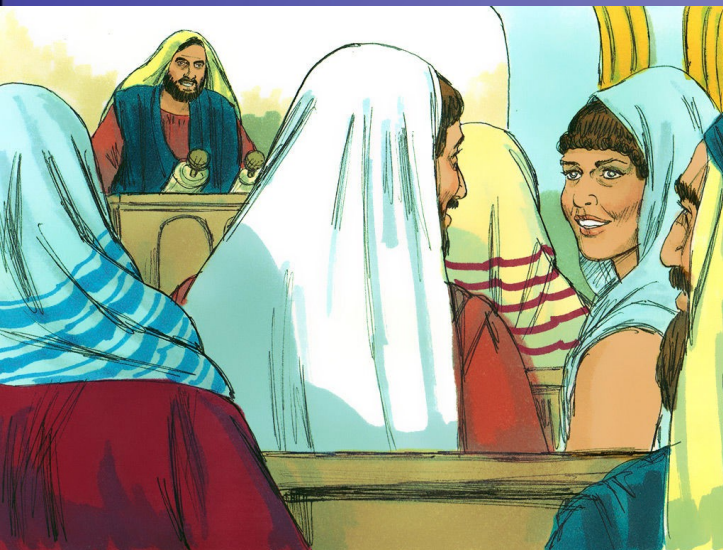


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Funky little teaching moment...

- Read 1 Corinthians 16:19
 - What does this detail tell you about what Priscilla and Aquila did in Ephesus?
 - What happened in Acts 18:24-26?
 - What does *this* episode tell you about Priscilla and Aquila?
 - What happened to Apollos in Acts 18:27-28?
 - And where is Achaia?
 - So boisterous Apollos had to go through Corinth to get to Achaia (see Acts 19:1)



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Funky little teaching moment...

- Read 1 Corinthians 16:19
- Three or four years later, what did Paul ask of the church in Rome in Romans 16:3?
 - What do the details in Romans 16-4-5 tell you about what Priscilla and Aquila did in Rome?
 - So what does that suggest about what kinds of people Priscilla and Aquila were, and what kind of role they had probably played in the church in Corinth?

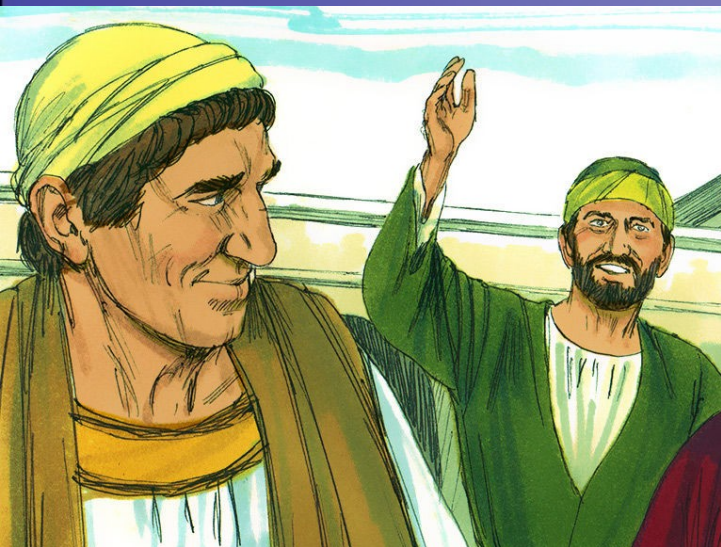


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- Read 1 Corinthians 16:19
- Three or four years later, what did Paul ask of the church in Rome in Romans 16:3?
- A man from Macedonia named Gaius was with Paul as he traveled in Ephesus in Acts 19
 - What do the details in 1 Corinthians 1:14 tell you about Gaius?
 - What does the detail years later in Romans 16:23—again, written in Corinth—tell you about Gaius?



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Funky little teaching moment...

- Read 1 Corinthians 16:19
- Three or four years later, what did Paul ask of the church in Rome in Romans 16:3?
- A man from Macedonia named Gaius was with Paul as he traveled in Ephesus in Acts 19
- **But there was another interesting detail there in Romans 16:23—who is this Erastus guy?**
 - **In Acts 19:22, while Paul stayed in Ephesus, he sent Timothy and Erastus to help the church in Corinth**
 - Timothy would later be installed by Paul as the pastor of the church in Ephesus
 - We know from 1 Corinthians 5:9 that Paul had already written them a letter since he'd left them ("0 Corinthians"?) and from 1 Corinthians 7:1 that the church in Corinth had already written back to him with a series of follow-up questions in response
 - So just how messed up must Corinth have been for Paul to have had all of this correspondence and *still* felt the need to send Timothy there, when he was grooming him for Ephesus?





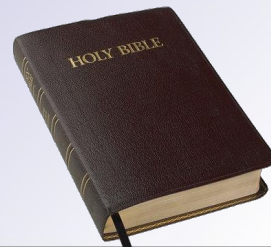
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- As for Erastus, by the time the letter to the Romans was written a few years later, he had become Corinth's director of public works!
 - In fact, in 1929, an inscription was found at the entrance of a first-century Roman road in Corinth, saying,
"Erastus—in return for his aedileship—paved this at his own expense"
(NOTE: An "aedile" was an elected Roman official in charge of public buildings and festivals)



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 - So—putting all of that together—what kind of church body and cultural context do you expect to see, once we start looking at Corinth in this letter?
 - A messed-up church surrounded by new wealth, new converts, and new immigrants (including church members involved in all of those things), in a Roman city at the crux of cultural and religious crossroads, with a temple of lusty Aphrodite towering overhead
 - How does that sound a lot like where we are right now?

