

This document is a work in progress (July 2024-)

1 Corinthians – introduction and outlines

I gave this out as a one page of A4 introduction:

MESSY CHURCH: Christian community in a pagan culture between cross and resurrection **Paul's "First" Letter to the Corinthian Church – a less than one A4 page introduction**

From the Apostle Paul (9:1-3, 15-18; 12:28; 15:8-9) **and Sosthenes** – cf. Acts 18:17 - a scribe / secretary (amanuensis) cf. 16:21? Did he carry the letter to Corinth?

To the church in Corinth (map: <https://bibleatlas.org/corinth.htm>), which Paul founded on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-8) ? in the Autumn of AD 50. Paul stayed for 18 months, his second longest stay in any city. Maybe Paul's most "successful" church in terms of growth but as we'll see with issues! Paul probably wrote to them in AD 54 – 55 in response to their worrying letter (7:1). Paul has had a report from Chloe's household (1:11f) and had learnt about problems in the church. See also 16:17; 5:1. Sometimes he seems to be responding to their questions (7:1) / possibly quoting ?them (6:12; 10:23). The church members seem to be mostly gentiles = non-Jews (12:2). Maybe it is a church of around 100 people in a city of 50 000. Notice 1:2, they are called to be holy in Corinth – a great challenge, as it is for us in 21st Century Britain! How does their new identity in Christ apply to the values of their culture? Paul says, "Don't listen to your culture, rather listen to Word of Grace!" (Mody)

Corinth is in modern day Greece. The Greek city had been a Roman colony for over a century when Paul went there. It was the seat of the Roman governor of the province of Achaea and had a population larger than Athens. It is on an isthmus (narrow strip of land / land-bridge). "Situated on the main north-south route between northern and southern Greece, and with two good ports that linked it to Italy on the west and Asia Minor on the east, Corinth quickly became a center for commerce." (Fant & Reddish). The city was competitive, selfish, prosperous, growing, booming (rich & underclass), bustling, international, pluralistic, individualistic, self-sufficient, valuing rhetoric, status, honour, patronage, achievement, power, knowledge, wisdom, spirituality and autonomy / freedom. The Corinthians seem influenced by pagan philosophy e.g. sophistry, Stoicism (4:8-9). Like many other pagan cities, idolatry was everywhere and sex lives could be colourful. How can the church be holy in this unholy culture? Paul will tell them what they do with their bodies really matters. "Body" is used 47 x in 1 Cor. The church seems affected by pride and division.

Was there a previous letter of Paul to Corinth? (5:9)

1 Corinthians is a wide-ranging letter. It could be seen as "the longest pastoral document in the New Testament" (Winter). It speaks of grace, mission, love and hope. This letter can help us to apply the great truths of the gospel to the realities of daily life. How does the gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus teach us to live? The cross is especially prominent at the beginning of the letter and the resurrection at the end. In the middle, the gospel is applied to the mess of life. And it is quite messy at times! These are not perfect Christians with a

perfect church – though perhaps they think they have already arrived (4:8) and have a high opinion of themselves. The Corinthians need to learn what authentic Christian community under the cross looks like. “The terms “cross/crucify/crucifixion” are used more frequently in 1 Cor than in any other Pauline letter.” They are associated not merely with the execution of a criminal but with folly, weakness, and shame, and that is the grace of God. (Mody). Issues and themes include: True and false wisdom, factionalism, conflict, sexual immorality (incest, prostitution), marriage, greed and the godly use of our bodies, idolatry, gathered worship, spiritual gifts, giving, the resurrection. Paul calls his readers to a lifestyle of service shaped by the cross and governed by the new age of salvation. And he also gives instructions about the collection for the poor (16). *Flee* and *glory* are key words. They are to flee sexual immorality (6:18) and honour / glorify God with their bodies (6:20). They are to flee idolatry (10:14) and do everything for the glory of God (10:31). “Shape your lives not by what seems wise in this age, but in light of the truly glorious: Christ’s cross - because you know his resurrection age is coming!” (Ham)

Issues addressed in 2 Corinthians might also be relevant. In 2 Cor, Paul defends his apostleship in contrast to the so-called “super-Apostles”, who might seem so much more impressive. Paul speaks of God’s power made perfect in weakness.

NIV Proclamation Bible summary sentence: “All believers in Christ are God’s holy temple and should live in keeping with that holy status by being unified, shunning pagan vices and glorifying God under the lordship of Christ.” (Rosner)

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And I have been producing an A5 handout / outline for each sermon:

1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-9 (page 1145)

CALLED TO LIVE IN CORINTH AND IN CHRIST

Background:

marclloyd.blogspot.com/2024/05/1-corinthians-one-page-a4-introduction.html

Introduction: The Word of God to 1st Century Corinth & 21st Century Sussex

Ancient letters: FROM... TO... GREETINGS / thanksgiving

(1) God’s call to Paul (v1) – an apostle

(2) God’s call to the church in Corinth (v2) – holy

- Be holy in Corinth and in Christ (v2)
- Be thankful in Christ's rich grace (vv3-6)
- Be confident in Christ's keeping power (vv7-9)

... and now for some of your issues! (v10ff)...

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1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-17 (page 1144)

AN APPEAL AGAINST DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH

CALLED INTO PARTNERSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD (v9)

Issues of unity and division in churches

(1) Agree in Christ, united in mind and judgement – rather than schism or quarrels (vv10-11)

(2) Remember your baptism into the undivided Christ who was crucified for you – rather than human leaders or cliques (vv12-16)

(3) Look to the power of the preached good news of the cross – rather than supposedly “wise words”, eloquence, learning (v17- more on this next time!)

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1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5 (page 1144)

THE CHRIST-CRUCIFIED REVOLUTION:

Not words of wisdom (1v17) but the word of the cross (1v18)

Divisions and rivalries (1:10-17)

- The apparent weakness and foolishness of the cross to those who are perishing, but its power and wisdom to those who are being saved (1vv18-25) [1st person plural: we]

God's revolutionary cross-shaped wise and powerful purposes proved by:

- (1) The recipients of the gospel who were mostly unimpressive (1vv26-31) [2nd person plural: you]
- (2) The preacher / preaching of the gospel which were mostly unimpressive (2vv1-5) [1st person singular: I]

➤ Who / what will you boast / glory / rejoice / put your faith in? (1v31; 2v5)

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1 Corinthians 2v6-end (page 1145)

TRUE SPIRITUAL WISDOM FROM GOD

“Nones”

Spirituality / Wisdom / Power / Rule

In response to divisions and rivalries in the church (1:10-17; 3:1-4)

Bold claims (e.g. v6, v16b)

The message of true wisdom (the good news of the cross) Paul, the apostles and all faithful Christians proclaim is...

... not the wisdom of this age (v6)

... nor of the rulers of this age (v6)

... secret / was hidden (v7)

... foreordained for our glory (v7)

... not understood by the rulers of this age (v8)

... inconceivable to human beings, but revealed by God's free gift of the Spirit in Christ (vv9-16)

So...

- Receive this wisdom (the work of the Spirit needed! - vv10-15)
- Live according to this wisdom (without boasting, rivalry and division etc. and...)

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1 Corinthians 3 (page 1145)

A GROWN-UP CHRIST-CENTRED VISION OF CHURCH, CHURCH LEADERS AND ALL THINGS

1:10-12 – response to divisions and rivalries

The apparently weak and foolish word of the cross is real wisdom and power for Christians ("the mature") – 2:6

- Don't walk like merely human unspiritual, fleshly, babies (vv1-3)
- See Christian ministers not as rival party leaders but as co-workers with God (vv4-9a)
- See yourselves as God's field, God's building, God's Temple (vv9b-17)

➤ See yourself as a “fool” in need of God’s wisdom (vv18-20)

➤ See all things as yours, and yourself as Christ’s (vv21-23)

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1 Corinthians 4 (page 1146)

STEWARDS OF THE GRACE OF THE CROSS

Servants entrusted with the gospel are ultimately accountable to God (vv1-5)

Don’t arrogantly forget grace (vv6-8)

Humbly receive the cross (vv9-end)

➤ What difference might it make to how we think and live if we begin to grasp these points: Stewards – Grace – Cross?