St Helen's Bishopsgate

Bible Matters
1 Corinthians, Kev Murdoch
Tuesday 6 October 2026

To discuss…
- What comes to mind when you think of 1 Corinthians?
- Any parts of 1 Corinthians you particularly remember being blessed by?

Welcome to Corinth Church…
- The former Greek city was destroyed in 146BC
- A new city was created as a Roman colony in 44BC, using freed slaves
- A high-traffic hub on major trade routes (see map)
- A melting point of massive wealth, competing ideas and sexual freedom



The backstory…
- 50 AD: Paul plants the church and spends 18 months teaching there (Acts 18:11).
- Paul leaves; Apollos arrives (Acts 18:18–19:1)
- Letters and gossip ('Chloe's people') fly back and forth (1 Corinthians 1:11, 7:1).
- 54 AD: Paul writes *this* letter from Ephesus ahead of his next visit

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The problem…
~~1 Corinthians~~ iCorinthians iChurch



'a highly egocentric, individualistic and competitive society…any sense of relationship or mutual obligation rests purely on a fiscal basis…'
T L Carter, *Big Men in Corinth*

We can track this problem all the way through the letter…

My leader! (1:12)
My wisdom! (3:18)
My boasting! (5:6)
My freedom, my body! (6:12)
My knowledge that puffs me up! (8:1–2)
My freedom! (10:23)
My gifts! (12)
My envy! (3:3)
My pride, cos I'm better than you! (4:6)
My insistence on being proved right! (6:1)
My relationship status! (7)
My rights! (9)
My turn! (to eat) (11:21)
My turn! (to speak) (14)

- Where Paul urges Corinth Church to follow his example, he is urging the opposite of iChurch behaviour (eg 4:9–13, 9:1–27, 10:31–11:1, whole of chapter 13)

- The self-promotion in Corinth Church makes sense given what they were before (1:26, 6:11). Church as a forum for people who didn't have status and power in the wider culture?
- It's not surprising Paul calls them children several times! (3:1, 13:11, 14:20, maybe 16:13)

To discuss…
How might we/our culture/London church culture be a bit like Corinth Church?

The prescription…

…is to remind them of the gospel.
'*…we preach Christ crucified…*' (1:23)
'*Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you…*' (15:1)

In chapters 1–4 the focus is God's foolish/weak-looking/Spirit-discerned gospel wisdom, seen in the cross of Christ and the cross-shaped ministry of the apostles. Notice how the cross shapes the apostolic ministry Paul wants the Corinthians to follow:
(see 4:8–16, 7:7, 9:1–23, 10:32, 13:1–13, 15:30 on cross-shaped ministry)
(and see 5:7, 6:11, 6:20, 7:23, 8:11, 10:16-17, 11:23–27 on the cross shaping the Corinthians' identity and behaviour now)

In chapter 15 the focus of Paul's reminder of the gospel is the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ which is the firstfruits of the future bodily resurrection of all his people. Notice how the future shapes the argument at various points through the letter:
(see 1:7, 2:6, 3:13, 4:5, 5:5, 6:2, 6:9, 6:14, 77:31, 9:25, 13:8)

The other big recurring truth (in a sense, the idea that holds the cross and resurrection stuff together) is the idea is the body.
By becoming Christians they've been joined together into God's holy temple.
(see 1:2, 1:9, 3:16–17, 6:11, 6:15, 6:19–20, 10:17, 12:12–31, 14:4–6, 14:17, 14:26, 15)
Hence the recurring instructions to glorify God (6:20, 10:31) and build up the body (10:32–33, 14:1–40)

Chapters 1–4	Wake up!	The cross: God's wisdom looks cross-shaped - you're thinking like the world
Chapters 5–14*	Give up!	The body: Give up the 'me' life to build up Jesus' body, like Paul did
Chapters 15–16	Look up!	The resurrection: Raised bodies in the future - your labour now is not in vain

*Chapters 5–14 can be divided further around the issues raised:
Chapters 5–7: Relationships; Chapters 8–10: Food sacrificed to idols; Chapters 11–14: Church gatherings

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Purpose of 1 Corinthians
To flip Christians from being all in 'me' people to being all in 'body of Christ' people.
(Or something like that!)

Instead of iChurch, they should be _____

To discuss…
- Questions? Comments? Details in 1 Corinthians we've not talked about (or not talked about enough)? There's a lot of 1 Corinthians wisdom in the room!
- Making it personal…any challenges for us as people in set-aside ministry, as we consider Paul's (Jesus-imitating) example? (Looking particularly at Paul's ministry model, described in 4:8–13, 9:1–27, 10:31–11:1 and 13:1–13)