

# 1 CORINTHIANS

living for **God** in a world that isn't



DATE	BIBLE	DATE	BIBLE
29 Apr-5 May	<a href="#">1 Cor 1:1-9</a>	10-16 June	<a href="#">1 Cor 3:1-9</a>
6-12 May	<a href="#">1 Cor 1:10-17</a>	17-23 June	<a href="#">Choose your own</a>
13-19 May	<a href="#">1 Cor 1:18-25</a>	24-30 June	<a href="#">1 Cor 4:1-7</a>
20-26 May	<a href="#">Pulse Check</a>	1-7 July	<a href="#">1 Cor 4:8-17</a>
27 May-2 June	<a href="#">1 Cor 1:26-2:5</a>	8-14 July	Small Groups on Break
3-9 June	<a href="#">1 Cor 2:6-16</a>	15-21 July	Small Groups on Break

# 1 CORINTHIANS

The Church of God in Corinth had a problem – they were too much like Corinth and not enough like God. That’s the same challenge we face living for God in Wollongong! So our series in 1 Corinthians will help us live for God in a world that isn’t. We’re unpacking this letter over several years, starting with chapters 1-4 which show us what true wisdom looks like.

## ABOUT CORINTH

Paul planted the church in Corinth on his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary trip, around 50 AD – you can read about it in Acts 18:1-11. It’s actually his second letter to the church (see 1 Cor 5:9) but we don’t have a record of that earlier letter.



Corinth was a major city in the Roman Empire, as it was located in the Centre of the Empire and allowed sharing of trade, philosophy and religion between the Greek speaking East and Latin speaking West.

## ABOUT 1 CORINTHIANS

The church in Corinth is famous for being a mess - if you lived in Corinth you'd probably go to the church in the city next door instead!

But despite their huge problems, Paul never once tells them they're not Christians or are unloved by God. In fact Paul constantly reminds them they're "those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people" (1:2), who have "Grace and peace...from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3), who have been "called...into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1:9); and Paul is confident God "will also keep you firm to the end, so you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:8).

So if they're the church of God, where have all the problems come from?! Here's some insights from *Roy Ciampa* and *Brian Rosner* in their commentary on 1 Corinthians...

The main problem for the Corinthian Christians is actually signalled in the opening verses of Paul's letter. He writes in 1 Corinthians 1:2 to "the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified, called to be holy." That the church in Corinth is God's church is repeated three times. Yet the Corinthians were still behaving as if they belonged to their city!

Lyle D. Vander Broek offers a pithy summary: "Each of the community problems Paul needed to address grew out of the Corinthians' inability to let the gospel message fully reshape their gentile, Greco-Roman lives, whether because they misunderstood that message or because they rejected it outright. They were Hellenists through and through, and this eschatological, cross-centered, body-affirming Jewish sect called Christianity demanded that they enter another theological and ethical world. It is no surprise that these residents of Corinth would seek rhetorical wisdom, be unconcerned with immorality and the preservation of the body, be infatuated with asceticism and spiritual empowerment, and preserve the distinctions between rich and poor. The Corinthians were simply trying to be Christians with a minimal amount of social and theological disturbance."

Paul was prompted to write 1 Corinthians in response to disturbing news from the church. This included both oral reports, from Chloe's people (1:11) and Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (16:17), and a letter from the church that Paul mentions in 7:1 consisting of a series of questions posed by the congregation.

As far as we can reconstruct the situation, after Paul left Corinth, Apollos, and possibly Peter, visited, and this caused unintended problems as well as bringing various benefits. The congregation was now divided based on loyalty to their favourite Christian leader (1:12). Further, Paul learned that they were in considerable disarray, with some members engaging each other in civil litigation (6:1–11), cases of sexual immorality (5:1–13; 6:12–20), marriage problems (7:1–40), and questions concerning food offered to idols (chs. 8–10) and spiritual gifts (chs. 12–14).

In short, the Corinthians were “worldly,” “acting like mere human beings” (1 Cor. 3:3). In this sense the letter is a timeless challenge to Christians of all generations and in all places not to be conformed to the world (Rom. 12:2).

*Ciampa, R. E., & Rosner, B. S. (2010). The First Letter to the Corinthians (p. 5). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.*

## STRUCTURE

1 Corinthians seems to follow this structure, based on the questions Paul was asked by the Corinthians, and the issues he himself wants to address.

1. Letter Opening (1:1–9)
2. True and False Wisdom and Corinthian Factionalism (1:10–4:17)
  - a. Factions in the Community (1:10–17)
  - b. Negative Treatment: “No More Boasting about Human Leaders” (1:18–2:5)
  - c. Positive Treatment: “Let Those Who Boast Boast in the Lord” (2:6–3:4)
  - d. Application to the Church, Ministers, and Ministry (3:5–4:17)
3. “Flee Sexual Immorality” and “Glorify God with Your Bodies” (4:18–7:40)
  - a. Negative Treatment: “Flee Sexual Immorality” (and Greed) (4:18–6:20)
  - b. Positive Treatment: “Glorify God with Your Bodies” (7:1–40)
4. Flee Idolatry” and “Glorify God” in Your Worship (8:1–14:40)
  - a. Negative Treatment: “Flee Idolatry” (Food Offered to Idols) (8:1–11:1)
  - b. Positive Treatment: “Glorify God” in Your Worship (11:2–14:40)
5. The Resurrection and Consummation (15:1–58)
6. Letter Closing (16:1–24)

## CHAPTERS 1-4: FOOLISH WISDOM

"The Corinthians were saying that they belonged to their favourite leaders and boasted about their wisdom and power and Paul's deficiencies in these areas. To heal their divisions, Paul says four main things in response:

- (1) the message of the cross spells the end of human wisdom and power;
- (2) the cross redefines wisdom and folly, power and weakness;
- (3) instead of boasting in their leaders' wisdom and power they should boast in the wisdom and power of God in the gospel which gives them a favourable and secure status before God; and
- (4) the Corinthians do not belong to their leaders but rather their leaders belong to them, and, above all, they all belong to Christ!" (*Ciampa & Rosner*)

### HOW THEY'LL CHANGE

Another point worth noting is *how* Paul tries to fix their problems. He could have issued lots of commands, called on his authority as an apostle, or any other number of approaches. Instead, he helps them understand the gospel better. The answer to all their problems is a deeper grasp of what God has done for them in Jesus and the implications that flow from that. These are things they've either forgotten, misunderstood or rejected. A true deeper understanding of the gospel powers change to live for God.

## USING THESE NOTES

**The Code:** these notes use a symbol-based code to help you easily work out which questions might best suit your Small Group.

→ **Simpler:** questions with this arrow symbol → trace 1 idea through a passage. So they're great if you have time pressures, less mature Christians in your group, or just want to unpack and apply 1 big theme.

++ **Bonus:** questions with this plus symbol ++ fill-in the picture more. So they're great if you want to dig deeper or explore a few extra ideas. You don't need to ask every bonus question; just pick the best ones.

**The Goal:** Remember, the purpose of a bible discussion is... to discuss the bible. It's not to ask every question in the notes and tick them all off. These notes will help you dig into the bible but don't let them get in the way of the actual goal – wrestling with the bible together, loving it and living it out.

# 1 COR 1:1-9 • 29 APR-5 MAY

DIRECTION: In the midst of mess, God is at work in the Corinthians.

LAUNCH: → What do you know about the letter of 1 Corinthians?

CONTEXT: → Read **Acts 18:12-17**. What picture do you get of Corinth?

READ: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

OBSERVATION:

→ List the things that *God has done / is doing* for the Corinthians and the things that *they have done / are doing*. Notice the tenses.

God's Work	Their Work

→ What do you notice? Is it an equal share in the work?

## MEANING:

→ Why do you think Paul draws their attention to the work God has done / is doing for the Corinthians, rather than their work?

→ What comfort might this opening bring during the incoming rebukes?

→ How would knowing God's character assure the Corinthians?

→ Which verse would you pick to summarise this section?

++ Count the number of times that Paul refers to Jesus as "Christ," "Lord," or "Son." Why do you think Paul wants to remind them of Jesus' titles?

++ Follow the flow of thought from v 4-6. How is God confirming the gospel amongst the Corinthians?

++ v7 starts with "therefore." How does God's confirmation prove they don't lack any gifts?

## APPLY:

→ What makes you feel inferior as a Christian? How could this passage give you comfort?

→ How confident are you that you are saved? Or that you will last the distance as a Christian? How might this passage give us comfort?

++ What title do you prefer to give to Jesus? How can you grow to live with Jesus as "King" and "Lord" this week?

++ Some Christians say that certain gifts are necessary to prove that you are a Christian. How does this passage change that thinking?

PRAY: Praise God for the work he has done, is doing, and will do in us.

# 1 COR 1:10-17 • 6-12 MAY

**DIRECTION:** We want to give our allegiance to Christ alone.

**PRAY TO START:** Pray that we may listen to and follow only our King.

**LAUNCH:** → *Who's* your favourite Christian preacher, author, podcaster / social-media influencer? *Why* do you find them better than others?

**READ:** 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

**OBSERVATION:**

→ In your own words, what does Paul command them to do / be in v10?

→ What issue in the Corinthian Church leads him to command this?

++ What do you know about the Christian leaders Paul refers to in v12?

**MEANING:**

→ Why might the Corinthian Church have divided over this issue?

→ Division can be a symptom of the true disease: a lack of belief. What is it that the Corinthians aren't believing?

→ Why would the "cross of Christ be emptied of its power" if Paul was to preach with "wisdom and eloquence" (v17)?



→ Paul will take most of chapters 1-4 to fix this problem, but in this first bit of his argument how does he try to bring unity and undo their divisions?

## APPLY:

→ Is it helpful to have a favourite Christian preacher / author / podcaster / social-media influencer?

→ When could that become a problem?

→ So how can we learn from Christian leaders without worshipping them?

→ Are divisions among Christians always unhelpful? Should we always try to be “perfectly united in mind and thought” as Christians?

→ When is division a really good thing?

++ What divisions do you think are popular among Christians today? Are they helpful or unhelpful?

++ How can you keep the “cross of Christ” the main thing in your life: this week? This year? For the rest of your life?

**PRAY:** Praise God for the thousands of Christian leaders, teachers and examples he’s given us all across the world and all through history.

Ask for his help to worship, follow and give our loyalty and allegiance to Christ alone though.

# 1 COR 1:18-25 • 13-19 MAY

**DIRECTION:** In choosing to save people via the foolish weak message of Jesus dead on a cross, God is judging human wisdom and power.

**LAUNCH:**

→ Have you ever felt embarrassed by the gospel or ashamed of Jesus?

**CONTEXT:**

→ What's the first problem in the Corinthian Church Paul is trying to fix?

**READ:** 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

**OBSERVATION:**

→ Read this paraphrase. What words would you put in the blank spaces?

Jesus didn't send me to preach with lots of fancy words and impressive language; if I did people would trust me more than the cross!

I get it: the message of the Cross seems like \_\_\_\_\_ to most people, but to those God is saving it has \_\_\_\_\_ to save.

It's like God said: I'll annihilate and crush conventional human wisdom; I'll expose human experts as shams. So where can you find someone truly wise in this day and age? Hasn't God exposed all human "wisdom" as \_\_\_\_\_ by refusing to use human wisdom to reveal himself?

Since the world could never use \_\_\_\_\_ to know God, God in his wisdom \_\_\_\_\_ to use the message of Christ murdered, of all things, to \_\_\_\_\_ people. Jews request \_\_\_\_\_ and Greeks go in for \_\_\_\_\_, but we go right on proclaiming \_\_\_\_\_. Jews treat this like an anti-miracle, and Greeks think it's absurd. But to us who are \_\_\_\_\_ by God – both Jews and Greeks – Christ is the ultimate display of \_\_\_\_\_ power & wisdom, because human wisdom is so \_\_\_\_\_ next to the "foolishness" of God, and human power can't even begin to compete with God's "weakness."

## MEANING:

→ What do the Corinthians find powerful and impressive?

→ Where does actual power come from?

→ Why does the message of the cross seem foolish and weak to some?

→ Why do you think God chooses to save in a way that'll make no sense to people if they're using the lens of human wisdom and power to assess it?

++ What makes the foolishness of the cross sound like good news to us?

## APPLY:

→ God deliberately chooses to save via an approach that causes people to stumble or write it off as foolish. Does that seem fair or good to you?

→ Paul says *"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes"* (Romans 1:16).

Can you say the same thing? Why yes, why no?

→ When you're trying to share the good news of Jesus with someone who doesn't believe, what do you think the best strategy is?

→ Should we try *not* to persuade or speak clearly when teaching the bible to Christians, or sharing the gospel with unbelievers? Why yes, why no?

**PRAY TO END:** Help us not to be ashamed of the shameful message of the Cross! Please use us and your gospel to powerfully save those we know and love who are far from you God.

# PULSE CHECK • 20-26 MAY

PRAY: Help not to settle or drift in our Christian lives but to keep growing

## PULSE CHECK:

→ If you haven't done this already, take 5-10 min to fill out the 'pulse check' at [www.saltchurch.info/pulsecheck](http://www.saltchurch.info/pulsecheck)

→ Now, use those questions to reflect on how you're going as a Christian, and share with your Small Group:

→ What were you most encouraged by from your 'pulse check'?

→ What were you most challenged by from your 'pulse check'?

→ What's one change you want to make after doing your 'pulse check'?

→ More generally, what big thing is God teaching you at the moment?

→ Thinking about our *Small Group* now:

→ What could we do as a group to help each other grow as Christians?

→ What could we do more of? Do less of?

READING GOD'S WORD: Let's dig deeper in 1 area from the 'pulse check': reading the bible on our own. Split into pairs and for each of the passages in the table try to answer these 2 questions:

→ In these passages how is God's word described?

→ In these passages what are the benefits of reading God's word?

Passage	How it's described	Benefits of reading it
Psalm 1:1-3		
Psalm 19:7-11		
Psalm 119:18, 105		
Matt 4:1-4		
1 Thess 2:13		
2 Timothy 3:14-17		

→ Share your answers with the whole group. What struck you most of all?

→ What do you find hard about reading the Bible on your own?

Sometimes we don't read the bible on our own as much as we'd like as we haven't made a *plan* to read it, even though we have the best of intentions.

Split into pairs and share this:

→ *When*: What time of day do you / will you read God's word?

→ *Where*: In what location will you be able to focus on it uninterrupted?

→ *What*: What plan/approach/book of the bible would you like to use?

→ *How*: Is there any resource you need to help you read God's word?

**PRAY TO END:** Keep growing our love, trust and obedience of you.

Please grow our Small Group so we help each other know you better and learn to love each other like you love us.

# 1 COR 1:26-2:5 • 27 MAY-2 JUNE

**DIRECTION:** The Corinthians and Paul are 2 examples of how God doesn't use human power and wisdom. Why not? So we only boast in Him.

**PRAY TO START:** Help our faith to rest on your power not ours.

**LAUNCH:** → When have you been instantly humbled?

**READ:** 1 Corinthians 1:26-2:5

**OBSERVATION & MEANING:**

→ In 1:26-31, how is the Corinthian Church a live example of Paul's point?

→ In 2:1-5, how is Paul's ministry to them a live example of Paul's point?

→ Why did God choose to do it this way?

→ What do you think it looks like to "boast in the Lord"?

++ Read Jeremiah 9:23-24. What does this add to our answers?

++ Why do you think Paul brings up "boasting" here? Why is that so bad?

++ What do you think Paul *forgot* in order to "know nothing... except Jesus Christ and him crucified"?

→ What is the danger in using persuasive, clever, impressive, wise speech?

## APPLY:

→ “Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called” (1:26). What reasons do *you* have to boast before God?

→ Even though you have none, what are you tempted to boast in anyway?

→ How can we help each other to trust God’s power alone?

**PRAY:** Take time to “boast in God” – thank, praise and honour God for who He is and what He’s done. Especially for how he gives a righteousness, holiness and redemption we could not earn. Ask for his help to cling to it!

# 1 COR 2:6-16 • 3-9 JUNE

**DIRECTION:** Having demolished the human wisdom causing their division, Paul now replaces it with the true *spiritual* wisdom they need.

**LAUNCH:** → Who do you know so well you can almost read their mind?

**READ:** 1 Corinthians 2:6-16

**OBSERVATION:**

→ List what the Spirit does in this passage.

→ Who are the different groups here? How do they respond to the gospel?

Group	Their response to the message

**MEANING:**

→ Try to summarise the passage in 1 sentence, 15 words or less.



→ Read **1 Thess 2:13-14 and 1:4-6**. How does this illustrate Paul's point?

++ Where does the Holy Spirit speak to us?

++ Have you ever felt like God the Holy Spirit was speaking directly to you?

## APPLY:

→ Imagine the spirit of the world spoke to you. How do you think it would differ from the Holy Spirit? What would it say? What would it sound like?

→ Do you know many of the deep things of God (2:10)? How does this passage encourage you to get into your bible more?

→ How does this passage encourage us as we try to share the gospel?

→ Who could you boldly share "God's wisdom" with this week? Play it out with a partner: how might that conversation go? Pray for a conversation.

**PRAY:** Thank God for making himself known. Pray we may know more of what "God has freely given us" (v12).

# 1 COR 3:1-9 • 10-16 JUNE

**DIRECTION:** The Corinthians are living like immature Christian babies so need to step up, and can do that as they know God gives the growth.

**LAUNCH:** → When did you start to really feel like an adult?

## CONTEXT:

→ Read **2 Cor 5:15-17**. What is it like to use a “worldly point of view?”

## READ: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

## OBSERVATION:

→ Paul calls them Christian babies. What evidence does he give of this?

→ There's 3 types of people in 3:1-4. Draw a picture of what they're like.

## MEANING:

→ So what's 1 underlying reason there are divisions in their church?

++ What worldly desire might be causing the Corinthians to act this way?

→ What will motivate them to be “people who live by the Spirit?” (3:1)

## APPLY:

→ How would rank yourself on this (made-up) scale?

*New Christian*

*Perfect*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

→ What criteria did you use to come up with that rank?

→ When do you act like a “mere human?”

++ What would it look like for us to live by the Spirit instead?

→ Where does the power and hope to grow as a Christian come from?

→ If you never learnt anything new about God, would you be ok with that?

→ Do you want to grow as a Christian this year? Why/why not?

++ What do you think of the idea we should “let go and let God grow us”?

**PRAY:** Thank God for the Spirit’s work in your life so far. Confess ways we live as “mere humans” and ask him to lead you into deeper maturity.

# CHOOSE YOUR OWN • 17-23 JUN

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## 1 COR 4:1-7 • 24-30 JUNE

**DIRECTION:** Confident judgementalism of ourselves or others doesn't mesh with knowing God will judge accurately. And confident boasting doesn't mesh with being those who receive everything from God.

**LAUNCH:** → What was one of your greatest achievements in school?

**READ:** 1 Corinthians 4:1-7

**OBSERVATION:**

→ What emoji captures how you think Paul feels, based on 4:1-5.

→ What emoji captures how you think Paul wants the Corinthian Christians to feel, based on 4:6-7.

**MEANING:**

→ Instead of saying "I follow Paul" (1:12) and aligning themselves with Christian leaders, how does Paul want them to see and treat him?

→ Why do you think Paul tells them not to judge him?

→ What do we learn about God's judgement?

→ Why are we badly suited to judge even ourselves, yet alone others?

→ Should Christians be scared of God's judgement? Why, why not?

++ Paul speaks of his conscience in 4:4. How would you define conscience?

++ What is useful about our conscience? What are its limits?

→ Read **Phil 2:5-8**, **1 Peter 2:21-23**. How is Jesus the perfect model to us?

## APPLY:

→ Why does it make no sense for us to boast in what we have or know?

→ We're saved by grace alone through faith. But as we carry on living the Christian life, we can be tempted to think we've racked up some runs on the board. How does this passage correct us?

→ Do you care too much about the judgements and opinions of others? How could you learn to care less and to value God's opinion more?

→ How could we stop, either self-criticising or self-praising, and leave judgement of us up to God?

**PRAY TO END:** Thank you for the perfect model of Jesus, and the perfect obedience he won for us. Help us to imitate him by your power.

# 1 COR 4:8-17 • 1-7 JULY

DIRECTION: Their divisions would be solved if they'd only imitate Paul.

LAUNCH:

→ Split your group in 2 and debate this, 1 side agreeing, 1 disagreeing:  
"You can't be a godly Christian and be liked by unbelievers too."

READ: 1 Corinthians 4:8-17

OBSERVATION:

→ In v8 & v10 do you think Paul is saying true things or being sarcastic?

→ Why does Paul say all this to them?

→ How are the apostles treated or seen? How do they respond?

How they're treated or seen ?	Their response?
v9	v12
v10	v12
v11	v13
v13	

## MEANING:

→ How would this description of the apostles help the Corinthians to stop aligning themselves behind different apostles?

→ Do you think this description of the apostles is a good description of what the Christian life should look like for all Christians? Why yes, why no?

++ Read **John 15:18-20, John 16:33 and 2 Timothy 3:12**. How do these verses expand on or flesh out this same idea?

## APPLY:

→ Are you surprised when the world hates you or unbelievers reject you?

→ In what ways is your life similar to Paul's life? Different? Why is that?

→ What do you think of this quote (from Steve McAlpine, *Being the Bad Guys*):  
"The church used to be recognised as a force for good, but this is changing rapidly. Christians are now often seen as the bad guys..."

→ As hostility towards Christians ramps up in Australia, how is Paul's example a rebuke to you? A relief for you?

→ The tag-line for our 1 Corinthians series is: "*living for God in a world that isn't*". From 1 Corinthians 1-4 what's most challenged you? Comforted you?

**PRAY TO END:** Thank God for all he's taught us in 1 Corinthians 1-4. Ask for his help to embrace this way of life that he has called us to.



**saltchurch.**

To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – their Lord and ours...

**1 Corinthians 1:2**