

THE FOOLISHNESS OF GOD

1 CORINTHIANS 1-4

wiser than man's wisdom

1 Corinthians: Church Gone Wild!

People usually have a view that the bible presents a perfect picture that can never be lived out in real life. Clearly, people usually do not read the same bible as me.

In fact, most of the New Testament is written to churches presented with difficult and often very imperfect circumstances. Some are a downright mess. If this is true, then the Corinthian church is the most imperfect, messed up church in all its pages.

It is church gone wild. Within this letter we find a variety of problems:

- Factional fighting
- False pride
- Incestuous Immorality
- Lawsuits
- Prostitution
- Sex outside of marriage
- Marriage outside of sex
- Loveless exercise of freedom
- Idolatry
- Disorder in gatherings
- Greed
- Selfish use of gifts

It's a long list.

This set of studies deals with chapters 1-4 only. It concerns the factional fighting at Corinth, which flows from their false spiritual pride. The remedy is remarkable. It is a strong dose of humility, poured from a topsy-turvy statement of God's grace in the gospel: the gospel as the foolishness of God.

Author & Date

There is no doubt that the author of the letter is Paul. Paul had first met the Corinthians after travelling from Athens. This is recorded for us in Acts 18, where we are told he stayed for a year and a half, and saw many people believe, be baptised and taught the word of God.

But this was not the end of his interest in Corinth. In fact, we know of four letters to the church in Corinth, of which two survive. This makes up the most extensive letter-ministry of Paul's that we are aware of. Unfortunately, only two of these letters survive for us.¹

What we can piece together shows a relationship that goes something like this:

Contact	Paul's first visit	Paul's 'former' Corinthian letter	News from 'Chloe's house' to Paul & a letter from the church	1 Corinthians	Paul's 'painful' visit	Paul's 3 rd 'severe' letter	2 Corinthians	Paul's anticipated visit
Evidence	Acts 18	1 Cor 5:9	1 Cor 1:11 & 1 Cor 7:1	1 Cor!	2 Cor 2:1	2 Cor 1:23-2:4; 7:8-13	2 Cor!	2 Cor 13:1

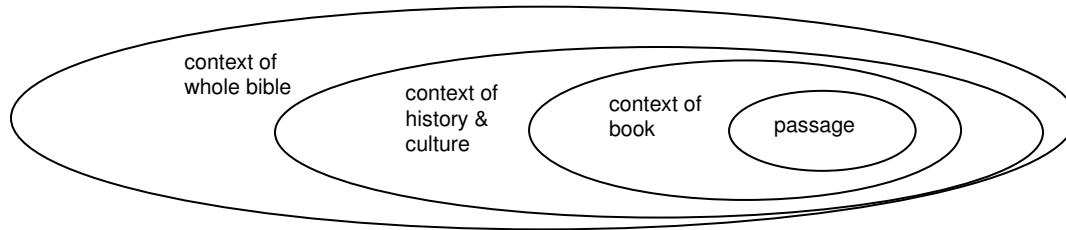
It certainly was a rich, but rocky relationship. What else we know of Paul's travels places Paul's writing of 1 Corinthians around 51 or 52 AD.

Setting

It helps to have some awareness of the cultural context of Corinth.

All the time we are reading in context, and moving back and forwards between different contexts to check the accuracy of our reading:

¹ Given that we have 'lost' two letters to the Corinthians, what does this say about the completeness and reliability of the bible? Good question, huh? Anyone find anything good on the web to read about it?



In this case we consider the context of history & culture. You can sense an awful lot of the culture of Corinth in the letters themselves, but some historical background helps underline what we find there.

Corinth, like many great cities, was a product of location, location, location! It sat near the thin isthmus of land that connected northern and southern Greece, and over which ship merchants would traffic their cargo east-west in order to avoid sailing around the Peloponnese.



As a result, it was very multi-cultural, and very rich. An example of this was the great temple of Aphrodite there, which is famed to have held 1000 prostitutes. As I said, it was a sailor's town. This interlinking of trade & pagan religion sets the scene well. It results in a city known so widely for its sexual vice that Aristophanes 500 years earlier had coined the term *korinthiazō*, meaning 'to Corinthianise, to fornicate'. Gordon Fee, a scholar of Paul, wrote, "All of this evidence together suggests that Paul's Corinth was at once the New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas of the ancient world."²

Structure

Our structure concerns only chapters 1-4.

- 1:1-3 Greetings
- 1:4-9 Thanksgiving: Riches in Christ
- 1:10-4:21 Divisions in the church
 - 1:10-17 Divided by 'wisdom'
 - 1:18-2:16 The gospel defies divisions
 - 1:18-31 The 'foolishness' of God's gospel
 - 2:1-5 The weakness of Paul
 - 2:6-16 Spiritual wisdom
 - 3:1-23 Worldliness of Corinth's 'wisdom'
 - 4:1-21 The end of pride

For us, this structure will translate into 8 studies and a prayer session

The studies will take an inductive approach, building on the Swedish method, so we can all learn to read our bibles better for ourselves.

study	title	passage
1	Holy Corinth!	1:1-3
2	True Riches	1:4-9
3	Human Division	1:10-17
4	The 'Foolishness' of God	1:18-31
5	Ministry Method	2:1-5
6	Spiritual Wisdom	2:6-16
7	The Real Judge of Our Ministry	3:10-17
8	Worldly wisdom & ministry	3:1-23
Praying through 1 Corinthians 1-4		

Further Reading

A Technical Commentary
 Fee, Gordon *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, 1987
On Christian Ministry & 1 Corinthians
 Carson, D.A. *The Cross & Christian Ministry*, IVP, 1993

² Fee, Gordon, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p.3

Holy Corinth!

We are going to warm up by just taking on the greeting for our first study together. Our method will be to follow our much-used Swedish method, and add in a few other elements to help us read deeply.

**Each group member gets the same basic study outline each week
(attached at the end of these studies)
These notes are intended for leaders only.**

The method:

<read>	Read the passage
<wonder>	Why should we bother?
<question mark>	What is not clear? Words? Ideas? Questions?
<magnifying glass>	words & ideas of particular importance
<flow-chart>	Paul's argument
<light bulb>	What is clear?
<arrow>	What should we do?

Let's try it out.

<read> **Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-3**

¹ Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, ² To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours: ³ Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<wonder> **Why should we bother?**

The phrase 'to the church of God in Corinth' should interest us. A comparison might be 'to the Christians in Kings Cross', or 'to God's people in the Eastern Suburbs'. Jesus taught that we are 'in the world, but not of it'. (John 15:19; 17:13-19).

Let's spend a moment working out what the world of Corinth was like, and then see what challenges might have faced the church of God in it.

1. Grab some laptops and i-Phones and see what you can discover – amateur internet archaeology! Give them the following hints in small groups and see what they can work out....

- a. Location, location, location!
- b. Doric, Ionian, Corinthian column comparison
- c. Aphrodite's temples
- d. Isthmean Games
- e. Horace quotes corinth

2. If you don't have fancy technology. Hand the four pictures/quotes on following pages to individuals and ask the group to build up a picture of Corinth.

3. What do you think some of the challenges might have been for the church of God in Corinth?

What are the challenges of being a Christian in a non-Christian culture that you personally feel you need help with?

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION!



A history of Greece in columns....



Doric



Ionic



Corinthian

The temple of Aphrodite in Corinth

source: wikipedia

Aphrodite is the [Greek goddess](#) of [love](#), [beauty](#), pleasure, and procreation.

Her [Roman equivalent](#) is the goddess [Venus](#). Historically, her cult in Greece was imported from, or influenced by, the cult of [Astarte](#) in [Phoenicia](#).

According to [Hesiod's](#) *Theogony*, she was born when [Cronus](#) cut off [Uranus'](#) genitals and threw them into the sea, and from the sea foam (*aphros*) arose Aphrodite. Thus Aphrodite is of an older generation than [Zeus](#).

At the temple of Aphrodite on the summit of [Acrocorinth](#) (before the Roman destruction of the city of Corinth in 146 BC) intercourse with her priestesses was considered a method of worshipping Aphrodite. This temple was not rebuilt when the city was reestablished under Roman rule in 44 BC, but it is likely that the fertility rituals continued in the main city near the agora.



Horace on Corinth

“It is no mean glory to
have found favour
with the leaders of
men. It is not
everyone that can get
to Corinth.”

<read again>

1 Corinthians 1:1-3

¹ Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, ² To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours: ³ Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<question mark>

What is not clear?

<magnifying glass> words & ideas of particular importance

Holy / Sanctified

Paul's greetings often contain a well-chosen word, a little upfront jab, an early warning. In this case it's the phrase 'called to be holy'. It is actually the same as the word 'sanctified', so it could read 'those made holy in Christ and called to be holy'.

Check this word out in a bible dictionary.

I suggest that you do a quick trip round the bible with your group and see if you can learn what it means by the wider biblical context: Romans 12:1-3; Romans 16:16; Ephesians 1:4; Ephesians 5:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:7.

<flow-chart>

Paul's argument

You could skip this task this week if you like as it is not a complex little passage.

<light bulb>

What is clear?

It is clear that there are two kinds of holy in the New Testament:

Definitive holiness (or definitive sanctification) – which is the declaration of our holiness given to us through Jesus' work. We do not have to become holy, Christ makes us holy – he 'sets us apart' for God. We *are* holy. Any unholiness in us does not challenge this great holiness given us by God.

Progressive holiness (or progressive sanctification) is that call to be as we really are. To more and more (1 Thessalonians 4:1) please God as we live out the life he has made for us, in His power.

This distinction is worth teaching your group. It is *essential* to emphasise that our holiness is not undermined by lapses into sin – it is a gift in Christ! It is grace! It is God's work through Jesus, not ours!

But this passage does tease us with the question of what holiness for God (being set apart for God) might *look like* in a city like Corinth. A question that will become massive in 1 Corinthians 7 and following.

It is clear we are to be in some way separate from our culture for God, even while we live in the middle of it.

<arrow>

What should we do?

I would suggest doing this in small prayer groups if you can to help more open sharing.

A question we began with - what are the challenges of being holy in a non-Christian culture that you personally feel you need help with?

Share with each other and pray for each other.

The Church that Lacks

I don't know if you have ever thought about it, but when people feel they lack something they can become very anxious and insecure. Today's study finds Paul setting a platform for the very anxious and insecure Corinthians to 'count their blessings' in Christ and not operate from lack.

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(attached at the end of these studies)**

These notes are intended for leaders only.

<read> Read 1 Corinthians 1:4-9

⁴ I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. ⁵ For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge—⁶ because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. ⁷ Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. ⁸ He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

<wonder> Why should we bother?

Christians often spend time comparing themselves with what other Christians are like. Sometimes this can be really helpful (imitation), sometimes not (envy).

When you have found yourself comparing yourself to other Christians, what have you felt you lack. Be brave, and share something a bit vulnerable.

<question mark> What is not clear? Words? Ideas? Questions?

The aim here is to let the group help each other understand the words. Don't feel like they need to have nailed a perfect biblical meaning. Help the knowledgeable share with and teach the young.

Listen to who does it well and you may discover a future leader/teacher.

<magnifying glass> words & ideas of particular importance

Enriched in every way

For Christians who feel they lack this is critical. Good question to ask:

Q: How are they enriched in every way.

A1: In Christ. God's grace in Jesus is not just for our salvation, but for all we need for life in God. Think on that!

A2: We are enriched *together!* The 'you' is plural. We, the church, are enriched together. We have all we need together. Think on that!

Spiritual gift

This is a key phrase in the letter. (The Greek is *charismata*, for what that is worth. It is where we get the phrase 'charismatic church' from - a church concentrating on spiritual gifts).

For a partial list of what they include see 1 Corinthians 12:7-11. Don't get bogged down on unfamiliar details here.

<flow-chart> Paul's argument

Not tonight folks!

<light bulb> What is clear?

Let the group share what is clear to them from . Your job is to tease their responses out a little further with questions like.....

Q: Is that clear to you from Paul's argument, or does that strike you because of some relevance to your life?

Q: do you think this is clear to all Christians, or are some confused about this? How? Why?

<arrow> What should we do?

Again, this is to be led by the groups sharing, and your job is to keep pushing our application of God's word deeper by asking what I think is the key question of application:

'What will stop us doing this?'

Or more pointedly: 'What will prevent YOU doing this.'

Study 3 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Human Division

One of the Corinthian's basic issues was very common, and in essence, very simple. They were dividing in order to declare themselves better/wiser/greater than the others.

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<read> read the passage

¹⁰ I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. ¹¹ My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. ¹² What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas^[a]"; still another, "I follow Christ."

¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into^[b] the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. ¹⁶ (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

<wonder> Why should we bother?

A couple of options:

1. Someone in the group may wish to reflect for a few minutes on the dynamics underneath a church division they have experienced. Godly speech the rule.
2. Someone may wish to share about the pain of division, to set the scene for the importance of the passage.

<question mark> What is not clear?

<magnifying glass> words & ideas of particular importance

'perfectly united in mind and thought'

'lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.'

<flow-chart> Paul's argument

<light bulb> What is clear?

<arrow> What should we do?

What are the implications for:

Quarrels over trivial matters?

Quarrels with roots in personal or factional pride?

Quarrels over serious matters?

The talking up of some Christian leaders? What is really behind the talking up of some Christian leaders?

For Preaching...

For Listening to preaching...

The Foolishness of God

This is where Paul reveals just how deeply the gospel turns the world upside down. Your group ought feel the earth shift beneath it!

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The method:

<read> Read the passage

¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”

²⁰ Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. ²² Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.

²⁶ Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him. ³⁰ It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹ Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”

<wonder> Why should we bother?

Two of the high values of our age are educational achievement and profound religious experience. What significance have these values had in the life experience of our group, and are there any benefits or dangers in them having an impact on church life?

How urgent do you feel these issues are?

<question mark> What is not clear?

Where does the verse 19 quote come from?

Nullify?

<magnifying glass> CIRCLE ALL words & ideas of particular importance

<flow-chart> Paul's argument

The key thing here is to get the group (perhaps on a whiteboard) to work through text in the following way...

1. Place all MAJOR phrases at the left of the page.
2. Place all CO-ORDINATE phrases directly below the prior phrase.
3. Place all SUBORDINATE phrases indented below them, and all SUBORDINATE phrases indented below them.
4. The key to these decisions is in the 'connecting' words.
Eg. Co-ordinate phrases are linked by words such as 'also', 'and'.
Subordinate phrases are linked by words such as 'therefore', 'because', 'so'.

Let me show you how it might work out with our passage:

¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

¹⁹ For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”

²⁰ Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

²² Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom,

²³ but we preach Christ crucified:

a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,

²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

....

²⁶ Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.

²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

²⁸ He chose the lowly things of this world

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³⁰ It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

³¹ Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”

<light bulb> What is clear?

<arrow> What should we do? What should I do?

Ministry Method

We are going to learn a lot from this passage about Paul's method, and have a lot to reflect on our own manner of serving Christ.

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<read> Read the passage

¹ When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. ⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

<wonder> Why should we bother?

'I have been serving God as a Christian for 21 years, and it has almost always felt an activity of great feebleness, done in great weakness. This has, at times, greatly distressed me. It is of major significance to me that I understand how I am both weak and strong in God, and where his power resides. I really don't want to live and work uselessly for God, or worse, to live and work even in my best intentions *against* him.' Jim Crowweller

Does this question worry you? How? Perhaps you can give an example?

<question mark> What is not clear?**<magnifying glass> words & ideas of particular importance****<flow-chart> Paul's argument****<light bulb> What is clear?****<arrow> What should we do?**

What are the implications of this passage for:

Sunday School teachers?

Youth leaders?

Parents of kids?

A person sharing their faith with a non-Christian?

For people listening to preachers?

Spiritual Wisdom

After apparently giving no value to wisdom, Paul turns and outlines the wisdom that is included in God's purposes. It's a difficult passage, but very helpful. It relates the gospel, the work of Jesus and the critical role of the Spirit in us understanding the 'foolish' gospel and knowing Christ.

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The method:

<read> Read the passage

⁶ We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. ⁷ No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ However, as it is written:

"No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love him"

¹⁰ but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. ¹¹ For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. ¹³ This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. ¹⁴ The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment:

¹⁶ "For who has known the mind of the Lord
that he may instruct him?"

But we have the mind of Christ.

<wonder> Why should we bother?

Let's begin with a request this week - hands up if you are confused by the Holy Spirit?

Today's passage is a significant passage on the Spirit, and does a critical job often missing in discussions of the Spirit - it connects the Spirit to the work of Christ and the message of the gospel.

If this sounds like a very theological motivation for looking at this, it's because it is.

Would you like to understand what God is doing through the Holy Spirit better?

<question mark> What is not clear?**<magnifying glass> words & ideas of particular importance**

You ought help the group quickly mull over the meanings of the following....

'mature'.

'God's secret wisdom'

The use of the quote in v.9.....which, by the way, is usually taken to refer to the future, but which actually refers to God 's wisdom in Jesus. God has already revealed to us what we could never have conceived - the astonishing wisdom of the cross - known only by the Spirit.

What does v.15-16 mean??? Psssst....the context of all that has gone before with Corinthians passing judgment on Paul vs Apollos vs Cephas may shed some light. Paul is defending himself against the judgment of the Corinthians on the basis of the Spiritual nature of his ministry, don't you reckon?

<flow-chart> Paul's argument

Actually, today it would be more helpful to put up the following phrases and get people to describe the relationship between them.



<light bulb> What is clear?

<arrow> What should we do?

- What should we do?
- Not do?
- Praise God for?
- Change in our ministry mindset?

The Real Judge of our Ministry

After defending his ministry against the worldly judgment of the Corinthians, Paul makes very clear how our service for God is really judged, and by who. The judge is God, of course, as for how he judges it.....the study makes clear.

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<wonder> Why should we bother?

The judgment of God is such a despised truth that many Christians can only say they have escaped it, and certainly do not find any aspect of the judgment of God to love. Shame. This passage is a classic passage to enlarge our understanding of the judgment of God.

Before we start, why not mind map the groups thinking about the judgment of God, and then see how this passage expands it.

<read> Read the passage

¹⁰ By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴ If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. ¹⁵ If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

¹⁶ Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

<question mark> What is not clear?**<magnifying glass> words & ideas of particular importance****<flow-chart> Paul's argument**

Not sure this task is necessary today.

<light bulb> What is clear?**<arrow> What should we do?**

Some different ideas are found here for application – a hypothetical & a group reflection.

A hypothetical

John has been serving for years in kids ministry. He loves the kids, though he knows less of them less well now than he used too. He also loves teaching, and many people have told him he is good at it. It is fair to say though that after many years he is a little jaded, and often frustrated that other people do not step up to the plate like he does. His prayers may have begun to reflect this a little too, and dwell a little less on the discipleship of his kids.

What impact might this passage have on thinking about different aspects of his ministry?

- His teaching
- His praying
- His relating with other people in the ministry

Would this passage guide him to change – and in what ways?

A group reflection

Put three columns up on a board.

Ministries of our group

Quality work

Less than noble work

1. Write up all the ministries of your group – you may need to remind people that caring for family, and working a job are ministries too! Ministry exists outside church – it is all of life.

2. Get a bowl. Ask people to anonymously put those aspects of their service they believe are quality on some paper scraps and toss them in the bowl. Gather them up and write them up (so no-one knows whose is whose).

3. Get the bowl again. Ask people to anonymously put those aspects of their service they believe are less than noble on some paper scraps and toss them in the bowl. Gather them up and write them up too.

Pick a few issues up there and discuss freely how such quality comes about, from what motivation, etc. What encouragement does this passage give?

Also, how less than noble ministry happens – why? What to do about it? What encouragement does this passage give?

Worldly Wisdom & Ministry

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Before we start, why not mind map the groups thinking about the judgment of God, and then see how this passage expands it.

<read> Read the passage

¹ Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. ³ You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? ⁴ For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere men?

⁵ What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. ⁶ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. ⁸ The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. ⁹ For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.

¹⁰ By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. ¹⁴ If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. ¹⁵ If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

¹⁶ Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

¹⁸ Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a “fool” so that he may become wise. ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight. As it is written: “He catches the wise in their craftiness”^[a]; ²⁰ and again, “The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.”^[b] ²¹ So then, no r boasting about men! All things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, ²³ and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

<question mark> What is not clear?**<magnifying glass> words & ideas of particular importance****<flow-chart> Paul’s argument**

Not sure this task is necessary today.

<light bulb> What is clear?**<arrow> What should we do?**

Put on the kettle and get people settled in. Have a couple of minutes of silent prayer, asking people to ask God to help them come before him in prayer tonight.

We are going to use our Teaspoon prayer structure – TSP (Thanks, Sorry, Please)

1. Thanks

You might like to have someone read the lyrics of Praise to the Lord Almighty, slowly:

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

The King of creation

O my soul, praise Him

For He is thy health and salvation

All ye who hear, now to His temple draw near

Praise Him in glad adoration

Praise to the Lord

Who doth prosper they work and defend thee

Surely His goodness and mercy here daily attend thee

Ponder anew what the Almighty can do

If with His love He befriend thee

Praise to the Lord

Who o'er all things so wonderfully reigneth

Shelters thee under His wings

Yea, so gladly sustaineth

Hast thou not seen how thy desires e'er have been

Granted in what He ordaineth

Praise to the Lord, O let all that is in me adore Him

All that hath life and breath

Come now with praises before Him

Let the 'amen' sound from His people again

Gladly for aye we adore Him

Someone to read 1 Corinthians 1:4-9

⁴ I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. ⁵ For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge— ⁶ God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. ⁷ Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. ⁸ He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Spend some time in one group praising God from this passage.

2. Sorry

Have someone, or a few people, read through these passages from 1 Corinthians and ask the group to underline or highlight words which show their sin to them.

Ask people to spend some time in private confession, or more boldly, divide into pairs, and spend some time confessing these sins to each other and asking for forgiveness.

Finish by reading a declaration of our forgiveness, total and free and deeply assuring:

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing,

But to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Not many of us are wise by human standards, not many influential, not many noble,

But God chose us, the foolish, to shame the wise.

It is because of God, and God alone, that we are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—our righteousness, our holiness, and our redemption.

So let us boast in the Lord!

3. Please

We have so much to ask for – for ourselves, for our small group, and for St John's.

Here is a list of issues addressed in 1 Corinthians 1-4. Why not consider together which of them we need to pray for, and for who – ourselves, our small group, St John's as a whole, or any of our mission partners. Then spend some time asking God for those things.

For ourselves:

For our small group:

For St John's:

For our mission partners:

The Hornes (Germany) The Bennett's (Ethiopia) The Turners (London/Philippines) The Broxholmes (China) Colin Sheehan (Long Bay Jail) Stuart Adamson (Prince of Wales Hospital) Phams (Maroubra)

Study Outline

Passage:

<wonder>

Why should we bother?

<read>

Read the passage

<question mark>

What is not clear?

<magnifying glass>

Words & ideas of particular importance

<flow-chart>

What is Paul's argument?

<light bulb>

What is clear?

<arrow>

What should we do?