

...but you were  
**'Washed'**  
a series looking at 1 Corinthians

## INTRODUCTION

I am so pumped up about this 8-part sermon series with these adjoining home group studies. This is going to take us all the way up to Easter, and so on Easter Sunday we're going to be closing the series in chapter 15 revelling in the resurrection – very apt. That makes me think back with great fondness to an American theologian I knew many years ago who died before finishing his last work – it was a commentary on 1 Corinthians, and he died whilst writing his conclusion focussed on chapter 15, which includes the words “where o death is your sting...” This letter reminds us how we can both live and die well, and how all of that revolves around the undeserved love of Christ.

Why am I excited about studying 1 Corinthians? Because if God chooses to love on and journey with a church as messy and confused as the one back in Corinth, then we've got to believe that He wants to dance with us too.

So, to help set the context for this series here's a few words of introduction to the context, people and flow of communication from the Apostle Paul:

Morally, not much would've been questioned back in Corinth. So much so that the Greeks had a word for leading a life of debauchery: Korinthiazein, in other words “to live like a Corinthian.”

The city stood on a narrow isthmus connecting the southern part of Greece to its bigger northern body. Rather than circumnavigating round the whole of the South of Greece ships would simply unload at one port on one side of Corinth, and have all the cargo carried overland through Corinth to the port on the other side of Corinth to re-embark. Quite literally all traffic went through Corinth making it a great city of trade and commerce.

Dominating the city was the Temple of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, and some have suggested that a few hundred years earlier that temple had become known for shrine prostitution. Meaning that these erotic servants would glorify their goddess through sex acts. If that is true, then it is no surprise that Corinth was such a popular port for many sailors

who'd been away at sea on long voyages. Isn't it amazing that Paul planted a church in a city like that?

And, Paul loved the Christians in Corinth. Immediately that's a challenge to us – do we love the parts of Peckham whose lifestyles we want to question? Acts 18 tells us that he pumped loads of time and energy into the church there, in fact he planted the church there in the house of Titius Justus, ironically next door to the synagogue who'd shooed him away! After he'd spent eighteen months pastoring and teaching day in day out, he finally left, and Apollos came to take over.

A while after Paul had left he began to receive some worrying reports that the Corinthian Christians were doing things, and indulging in things quite contrary to what he'd taught in the Gospel. It caused him great concern, and 1 Corinthians 5:9 tells us that he'd even written to the Corinthian church an earlier letter warning them about forms of sexual immorality, which were common in the pagan world back then. Other than trying to work out what might have been in that letter through what's recorded in I Corinthians, we have no other way of knowing what Paul said since no record of that letter is left. Presumably the Corinthians either never received it, or even worse – received it, and dismissed it because Paul's teaching didn't sit with their worldly wisdom and sexual appetite.

The next concern in the chain of communication for Paul is when, probably based at Ephesus towards the end of his second missionary journey, he received news brought from Stephanus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (recorded in 16:17) concerning the church in Corinth. What Paul hears breaks his heart, and he immediately gets to writing a letter – it's the letter we're reading today. So, yes, this is 1 Corinthians, but not Paul's first letter there.

I've tried as much as is possible to lump chapters together that seem to be wrapped up in the same themes. But we'll have to forgive Paul if an immediate structure to the book isn't obvious. He's writing in the early 50's AD, probably a couple of years after his first time in Corinth, and as alluded to above, there are 1001 things he needs to address. And, as we dive in, as messy as some of the issues we'll engage with are, let's not forget, Paul starts by writing to the saints.

Never forget, whoever we are, whatever we've done, if we've come to Jesus then we've been washed. Why not let that sink in each time you read a chapter...



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Chapters 1-2

## **THE CROSS IN A WORLD OF INFLUENCERS**

What are some of the words and themes repeated in these opening chapters?

What are some of the obvious ways the World has different views on wisdom from the Church?

What examples can you think of where worldly wisdom has seeped into the Church?

In what ways can the foolishness of the Cross deeply bless our 21<sup>st</sup> Century social media influencers?

What can we do when we're made to feel weak and foolish for following Jesus?

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Chapters 3-4

## **FOOLISHNESS AND WISDOM IN CHRIST'S EYES**

In what ways do we see spiritually childish behaviour in the Church today?

What does moving from milk to solid food look like? And what does it not look like (with ref. back to 2:5)?

What will it entail for us to be imitators of Paul (4:16)?

Why should we feel awkward upon hearing talk of "climbing up the church ladder"?

How does All Saints Peckham being called the Temple of God challenge/encourage you?

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Chapters 5-6  
**YOUR BODY MATTERS**

How do you think Paul was feeling when writing these chapters? Why – what's the issue?

What is the point Paul is making by referring to baking in 5:6-8?

What are some of the principles surrounding church discipline? You could compare these chapters to Matthew 18:15-20. How can churches be focussed on this issue for the wrong reasons?

In 6:12-20 how does Paul revolutionise the way we think about our bodies? Why do you think God cares so much about what we do with our bodies?

*'You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.'* (6:19-20). How might meditating more often on the blood Christ shed for you shape your attitude towards temptations?

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## Chapter 7

### HOW TO CULTIVATE DEVOTION

Why might this chapter cause embarrassment for us, and how does it evoke those feelings of foolishness v wisdom from chapters 1-2?

What do you make of Paul implying that marriage and singleness are both gifts from God (7:7)?

What are the main principles Paul seeks to convey regarding marriage and how do they differ from the reasons many give for getting married today?

How does Paul's future hope impact his present personal views regarding marriage and singleness? What can we learn from that?

How can we as a church look out for both single people and those who are married?



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Chapters 8-10

## **CHOOSING TO LOVE KILLS SELF-INFATUATION**

Can you think of any areas of freedom (areas which perhaps lack clear biblical teaching) where Christians hold differences of opinion today?

Paul doesn't tell the Corinthians what to do, but he does offer some principles. How might we be able to apply such principles today?

How is his personal testimony throughout chapter 9 a demonstration of him pursuing love rather than his own rights?

With reference to Israel's history in chapter 10, how can overfamiliarity with God be a huge stumbling block in our pursuance of holiness?

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## Chapter 11

### DESPERATE FOR JESUS

Look at 11:1, would you ever say to someone else with regards to how to approach life, “follow me”? Why, or why not?

In 11:2-16 we find some verses people view as quite contentious – make sure to speak with grace and listen with patience. Traditions are spoken of: in what ways were women and men in public worship back then both potentially dishonouring God? Do you think the issue of head coverings still exists today? How are 11:11-12 a great rebuke to any male chauvinistic belittling?

What was the problem surrounding holy communion in Corinth? And, do you think Paul would similarly rebuke us for the way we approach communion? If so, what do you think would be his reasons?

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Chapters 12-14

## LOVING OUT RESOUNDING GONGS

We live in a society that promotes individualism. Subconsciously, it will have seeped in to our thinking. Where does Paul's body metaphor challenge us the most?

How does the variety of spiritual gifts Paul mentions make you feel?

What gift would you love to have most? Why? (it may be a gift you currently enjoy practising!)

What is more important than all the gifts Paul mentions? And, why might chapter 13 be squeezed in the middle of chapters 12 and 14 – what is the point Paul is driving home?

How do you see the different spiritual gifts functioning at All Saints, and what can we do to encourage their breadth all the more?

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Chapter 15

**ON THE THIRD DAY – DEATH DEFEATED**

What jumps out at you most from the Gospel message Paul preaches in 15:1-11? What strikes you most about the evidence for the resurrection there?

It's been said that Christianity rises or falls on the truth of the resurrection – what do you make of this?

How does a belief in the resurrection help you: navigate loss? work with focus? focus on mission? prepare for death?

What most excites you about the way Paul speaks of the resurrection body in 15:35-49?