

An aerial photograph of a city, likely Hong Kong, showing a dense cluster of buildings and a large body of water. The image is oriented upside down, with the city buildings at the top and the water at the bottom. The water shows some ripples and reflections. The overall tone is grayscale with a slight brownish tint.

**1 CORINTHIANS 1-4**

# **UPSIDE DOWN WORLD**

**STUDY GUIDES**

# UPSIDE DOWN WORLD

The city of Corinth was a thriving trade city, both wealthy and cosmopolitan. In Acts 18, we heard about how Paul planted the church in Corinth and then lived among them, teaching them the word of God for eighteen months. But since then, there have been a lot of problems with the church. 1 Corinthians is partly in response to these worrying reports that Paul hears about the church, and partly in answer to the church's questions that they've asked him (see: 7:1, 8:1, 12:1). Even if Paul was no longer with them, he still considered himself a spiritual Father to them, and his heart was heavy with concern for the health and welfare of this church. So in order to answer these reports and these questions, Paul writes this letter, where he repeatedly goes back to the Gospel as an answer to all of these issues, and to flip their expectations on their head.

We just spent some time walking with Jesus in Matthew's Gospel, as he was heading to the cross, and showing us the way of the cross. And as we visit the problematic church in Corinth, we see that this is how we follow Christ, on the same journey (Matthew 16:24)—through following the pattern of the cross, into an upside-down world. The Corinthian church was the prime example of failing to understand this paradigm: they were still a

***"God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength."***

***1 Corinthians 1:25***

church who were wanting influence, power, wealth and glory now—to see these in their own lives, and in the lives of their leaders. But in 1 Corinthians, Paul repeatedly reminds them that if we look to the cross, we can't bring those expectations to church, because we follow the Crucified One. At the cross, we see power in weakness, we see wealth in poverty, we see wisdom in foolishness, and we see life in death. This is the upside-down world that we live in, by following Jesus' world-changing sacrifice on the cross.

Christian Standard Bible (CSB) is used in these studies.

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In this series, we want you all to feel like your groups are freed up to read these passages afresh, and bring your own questions to God's word. These three simple questions will be repeated in every study, to try to help that:



**What do you like about this passage?**



**What don't you understand about this passage?**



**How does God want to shape the way you live in this passage?**

There will also be more specific questions in each study, as well. One of the main themes of 1 Corinthians 1-4 is of Jesus' kingdom turning our world's expectations on their head. We see this play out in a few different ways: with power, with wealth, with wisdom, and with life. The Corinthians had very worldly expectations about each, and Paul speaks into each with the paradigm-shifting truths of the gospel.



[Watch the Bible Project Summary here](#)

# In Jesus' kingdom...

We see power  
in weakness



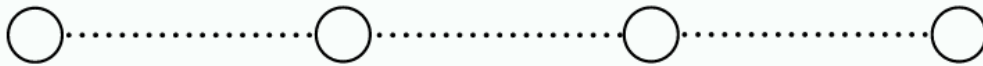
We see wealth  
in poverty



We see wisdom  
in foolishness



We see life in  
death



# In the Corinthian church...

They wanted  
power in  
performance  
and influence



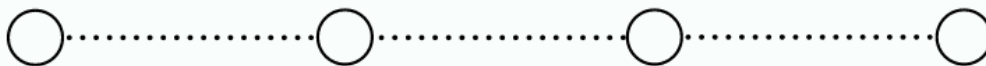
They wanted  
wealth in  
comfort and  
consumption



They wanted  
wisdom in  
charisma and  
eloquence



They wanted  
life in glory,  
here and now



While there won't necessarily be repeated questions about these themes in the studies, be on the lookout for each of these paradigm-shifts as you're reading through the passages.

An aerial photograph of a city, likely Hong Kong, showing a dense cluster of buildings and a large body of water. The image is oriented upside down, with the city buildings at the top and the water at the bottom. The text is overlaid on the image.

**STUDY ONE**

**UPSIDE DOWN GRACE**

**1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-9**

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READ 1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-9



What do you like about this passage?



What don't you understand about this passage?

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## STUDY QUESTIONS

Paul begins by identifying himself and Sosthenes. What does it mean that Paul was “called” as an apostle? Why is it important that he mentions this?

Given some of the things we’re about to hear in this letter (“there are divisions among you”, “you are babies in Christ”, “you are arrogant”, “a man is sleeping with his father’s wife”), how should Paul’s confidence in the realities of verse 2 (and verse 8) be a comfort to us, if we are discouraged in our struggle with sin?

As Paul opens his letter, grace seems to shape a lot of his thinking. From verse 4, what does grace “do”?

From verses 4-9, list how many of these things are done by God, and how many are done by the people of the church.

<b>Done by God</b>	<b>Done by the church</b>



How many times does Paul mention Jesus in first 10 verses?  
What do you think this is meant to tell us?

In verses 5-6 we hear about four of the biggest themes in 1 Corinthians: speech, knowledge, spiritual gifts and eschatology (expectations around end times: "as you eagerly await for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ"). Just based on the way that Paul introduces these ideas, what do you think we might expect him to say about each?

The Corinthians lived in a culture of elitism, where social standing was everything. How does this passage challenge that culture?



**How does God want to shape the way you live in this passage?**

What's the greater reality to which Paul is calling these Christians at the end of 1 Corinthians 1:7? What do you think this might look like in their lives? What might it look like to have this perspective in our lives?

How do you need to remember God's grace, and have it speak into your life right now?



**STUDY TWO**

**UPSIDE DOWN WISDOM**

**1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-31**

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READ 1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-31



**What do you like about this passage?**



**What don't you understand about this passage?**

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## STUDY QUESTIONS

Paul urges the Corinthians to agree together, to be united in the same mind, and even to have the same judgment. Is Paul commanding this church to have absolute uniformity of opinion and belief? If not, what does he mean by this?

What is dividing the Corinthian church?

How do we see this kind of division in churches today?

Paul asks the Corinthians, "Is Christ divided?" (1 Cor. 1:13). What does he mean by that, given the context?

Paul talks about crucifixion and baptism. How are both these images pushing us towards unity?

How is the cross of Christ the ultimate image of foolishness and weakness?

How is the cross of Christ the ultimate image of God's power and wisdom?

Apollos was one of the leaders whom the Corinthians were following. Read Acts 18:24-28. What impression of him do you get? Do we get any ideas about why people would be following him?

What are some of the ways that our culture seeks to impress with the appearance of wisdom?

One of the most common (and most helpful) explanations of preaching is that it's "truth expressed through personality." So it's not as if people's personalities are meant to be muted as they preach, or as they lead the church. But at the same time, there can be a danger there: When the church follows one particular personality, and their personality holds more influence than the truth they're speaking. How can we see this happening in verses 10-17?



## How does God want to shape the way you live in this passage?

Are there any ways that you've been particularly drawn to one personality as you've grown as a Christian? If you're honest, has that meant that you've disregarded God's word when it's come from other voices?

It may not be flattering, but verses 26-31 give us a description of the church. Does this sound like your experience of church (and you)?

What would it look like for our church to be ashamed of the cross?

What would it look like for us to hold it as the wisdom and power of God?



**STUDY THREE**



**UPSIDE DOWN PREACHING**



**1 CORINTHIANS 2**

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## READ 1 CORINTHIANS 2



**What do you like about this passage?**



**What don't you understand about this passage?**

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## STUDY QUESTIONS

How does our culture decide what's "spiritual"?

In verses 1-5, it sounds like Paul purposefully embraces weakness in his preaching and ministry, for the sake of the church. How was this a loving thing for Paul to do?

What do you think this looked like?

From saying that "the cross is foolishness" in chapter one, Paul now clarifies that "we do, however, speak a wisdom among the mature" (verse 6). What do you think this wisdom might be?

How do these verses contradict where the Corinthians think they'll find God, wisdom and power?

Verses 7 & 8 both speak about "glory". What does each say, and how do they connect?

The Spirit is like a pair of spiritual glasses, to see the world through the inverted lens of the cross. All three members of the Trinity: Father, Son and Spirit are mentioned in this chapter, and all are at work to reveal truth and wisdom to us. What is each of them described as doing?



Father	Son	Spirit



**How does God want to shape the way you live in this passage?**

What do you think it means that “we have the mind of Christ”?

The Corinthians thought they’d find God’s fingerprints in the impressive and the successful. Is that how we tend to think?

How do you need to come back to remember God's word on the cross for you at the moment?



**STUDY FOUR**

**UPSIDE DOWN GROWTH**

**1 CORINTHIANS 3**

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## READ 1 CORINTHIANS 3



What do you like about this passage?



What don't you understand about this passage?

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## STUDY QUESTIONS

Who's the wisest person you know? What is it about them that makes you think that?

In verses 1-4, what are the signs of Christian immaturity that Paul speaks about?

What do you think it would have looked like for Paul to "feed the Corinthians with spiritual milk"?

We grow by coming back to the cross; we don't mature beyond it. How can we be tempted to rush toward the deeper waters of Christian maturity, that we may not be ready to swim in?

From verses 10-11, what was Paul trying to build in Corinth? What does he expect those who come after him to build?

From verses 16-17, what's the motivation for Christian leaders (paid and unpaid) to be careful with what they do? Do you see other Christians at Village in this way?

How are verses 21-22 an answer to the divisions of the Corinthians?



## How does God want to shape the way you live in this passage?

Do Australians have a tendency to elevate Christian leaders or cut them down? Give some examples.

How do we address this and get the balance right?

What would it look like to care for our Christian leaders so that they are driven towards the humility and faithfulness of 1 Corinthians 3, and not towards arrogance or despair?

Thinking again of verse 6, how might you be taking a step forward in playing a part in this process? In "watering" (encouraging a brother or sister, catching up weekly to read the Bible together)? Praying for God to bring spiritual growth in someone's life?



**STUDY FIVE**

**UPSIDE DOWN APOSTLES**

**1 CORINTHIANS 4**

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## READ 1 CORINTHIANS 4



What do you like about this passage?



What don't you understand about this passage?



How does God want to shape the way you live in this passage?

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## STUDY QUESTIONS

What are three words that you would use to describe Paul and the other apostles:

\_\_\_\_\_

What do you think it means for Paul and his apostolic buddies to be “managers of mystery”?

In verses 3-4, what’s Paul’s instinct when he’s been unfairly criticised?

Do you struggle with worrying too much about what people think about you?

*“What happens when you are obsessed with getting people to like you? You become flirtatious or artificial, a coward or a deceiver, a chameleon or a recluse.”* David Powlison

Does this quote ring true in your experience?

“Paul is saying that he has reached the place where he is not thinking about himself anymore. When he does something wrong or something good, he does not connect it to himself any more... C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* makes a brilliant observation about gospel-humility at the very end of his chapter on pride. If we were to meet a truly humble person, Lewis says, we would never come away from meeting them thinking they were humble. They would not be always telling us they were a nobody (because a person who keeps saying they are a nobody is actually a self-obsessed person). The thing we would remember from meeting a truly gospel-humble person is how much they seemed to be totally interested in us. Because the essence of gospel-humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, it is thinking of myself less. Gospel-humility is not needing to think about myself. Not needing to connect things with myself. It is an end to thoughts such as, ‘I’m in this room with these people, does



that make me look good? Do I want to be here?' True gospel-humility means I stop connecting every experience, every conversation, with myself. In fact, I stop thinking about myself. The freedom of self-forgetfulness. The blessed rest that only self-forgetfulness brings."

Tim Keller, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*

What do you think of this quote?

Verses 6-13 are a surprising picture of apostles. Do these verses sound similar to the three words you chose earlier to describe Paul and the apostles?

How might these verses show that the apostles are following in Christ's footsteps?

"What do you have that you didn't receive" (verse 7). How should the grace of this reality shape our thinking toward gospel-humility?

Australian culture would probably shy away from saying what Paul says in verse 16 because it sounds bold, arrogant and full of pride. Seeing as Paul is trying to combat the pride in the Corinthians, how can he get away with saying something like that? Is this something we should be saying to others?

What might verse 15 have looked like? What do you think the difference between an "instructor in Christ" and a "Father in Christ" might have been?

How do you need the cross to shape your view of church and Christian leaders more?

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# PRAYER POINTS





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2024