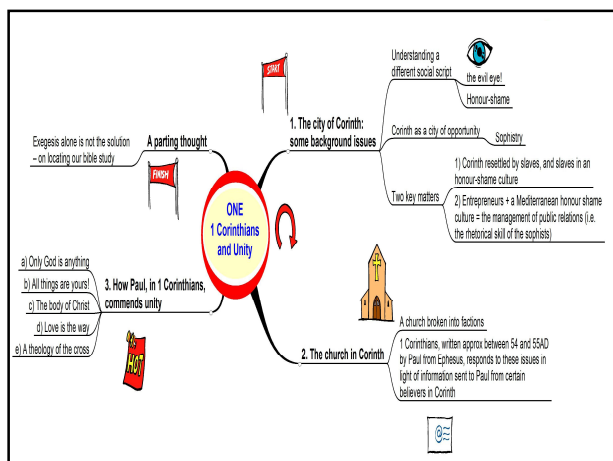


The Bible and Unity

1 Corinthians

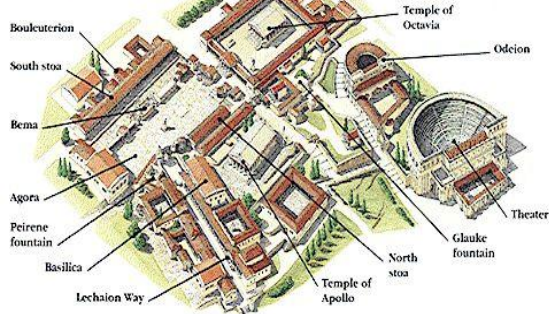
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1. The city of Corinth – background issues

RECONSTRUCTION OF ANCIENT CORINTH (c.AD 100)



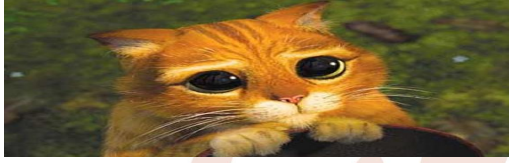
Understanding a different social script

- The evil eye (Galatians 3:1)
- *the first century Mediterranean world as, in some respects, more like rural parts of the modern Mediterranean world than contemporary English culture.*
- Honour-shame



Philip Esler

“[A]lthough the evil eye is one of the most prevalent beliefs in the Mediterranean region, people with a Northern European background usually have no knowledge of it or its significance. Such ignorance could cause us some difficulties during a visit to the Middle East or rural parts of Greece or Spain. So seriously is belief in the evil eye and its potentially disastrous effects on children taken, that the local inhabitants are likely to be quite hostile to strangers paying any attention or, worse still, any compliments to their children. They are likely to interpret such interest as motivated by envy and is designed to cast the evil eye on the child concerned...”



... Foreign visitors who imagine that Arab women, at least where there has been little Western influence, might share the enthusiasm of Northern European or US mothers are proudly showing off their babies would be making a fundamental cultural blunder

(The First Christians in their Social World: Social-scientific approaches to the New Testament interpretation, by Philip F. Esler)

'Honour is the pivotal social value in Mediterranean society... Honour means the perception that someone has of his or her own worth and an appreciation of how he or she is rated by a relevant social group. It is a claim to worth and the social acknowledgement of worth' (Esler)

In such an honour-shame culture, 'a person's sense of worth is based on recognition by others of one's accomplishments' (Anthony Thiselton)

'Females lead essentially private lives at home. Men lead public lives. If women go out of the house they may be covered in clothes from head to foot or even chaperoned to ensure nothing happens to them which might bring their honour and that of the family into question' (Esler).

First key issue:
Corinth resettled by slaves, and slaves in an honour-shame culture



This map illustrates the Roman Empire in AD 476, divided into the Western and Eastern Empires. The Western Empire is shaded in pink and includes the Diocese of Britain (with Caerleon), Diocese of Gaul (with Paris and Bourdeaux), Diocese of Spain, Diocese of Africa, and parts of the Diocese of Italy. The Eastern Empire is shaded in orange and includes the Diocese of Italy (with Rome), Diocese of Dacia, Diocese of Thrace, Diocese of Pontus, Diocese of Asia, Diocese of the East (with Jerusalem and Alexandria), and Diocese of Egypt. A red circle and arrow point to Constantinople, the capital of the Eastern Empire. Other regions shown include the North Sea, Atlantic Ocean, East Goths, West Goths, Black Sea, Caspian Sea, Armenia, and the Sassanids. Major cities like Cologne, Mainz, Corisae, Sardina, Carthage, Crete, Cyprus, and Ankoah are also marked.

- 'In Paul's time many in Corinth were already suffering from a self-made-person-escapes-humble-origin syndrome' (Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*)
- Corinth attracts Artisans who group together into *collegia* (social fraternities with own parties, burial obligations, officers – all organised around a patron deity)



Aspiring entrepreneurs employed rhetoricians, 'like some in the media or public relations today, to present a spin which shaped popular or public perceptions of what was believed to be the case' (Thistleton).

Second key issue:
Entrepreneurs + a Mediterranean honour shame culture = the management of public relations (i.e. the rhetorical skill of the sophists)

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2. The church in Corinth

- Its size
- In so many ways, the Church in Corinth reflected the nature of its City
- For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptised in the name of Paul? (1 Cor. 1:11-13)

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A church broken into factions

- Divisions between knowledgeable and those not 'in the know' (1 Cor. 8)
 - Divisions between rich and poor (1 Cor. 11)
 - Divisions associated with competition between endowments of spiritual gifts.
 - 1 Corinthians 6:6
- 'Moreover, some believers insisted on making room for extramarital sexual indulgencies in their lives, most likely in the context of the pagan banquets they attended in the homes of their non-Christian associates. At the "better" banquets, the host provided for all the appetites of the guest – ...

... eating extensively, drinking excessively and, after dinner, enjoying the companionship of members of the opposite sex. Frequently, these companions were hired, hence prostitutes (1 Cor 6:15-16). Such indulgencies were not moral lapses but rather the right of citizens of Corinth who, Christian or not, were simply living out their cultural mores' (David deSilva)

1 Corinthians, written approx between 54 and 55AD by Paul from Ephesus, responds to these issues in light of information sent to Paul from certain believers in Corinth

A broad overview of the structure of 1 Corinthians

Chapter	Theme
1-4	Factionalism in the Corinthian church
5-10	The church's relations in the world
11-14	The church's relations in church
15	The resurrection from the dead
16:1-4	The collection

3. How Paul, in 1 Corinthians, commends unity

- a) Only God is anything
- b) All things are yours!
- c) The body of Christ
- d) Love is the way
- e) A theology of the cross



a) Only God is anything

- 1 Corinthians 3:4-7
 - “So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth”
- 1 Corinthians 8:6 “yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist”

b) All things are yours!

- 1 Corinthians 1:2 “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints”
- 1 Corinthians 1:4-5 “I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind
- 1 Corinthians 3:21-22 “So let no one boast about human leaders. *For all things are yours*, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future-- all belong to you”

c) The body of Christ

- 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good”
- 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body-- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free-- and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many”

"20 As it is, there are many members, yet one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; 24 whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, 25 that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it. 27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Corinthians 12:20-27)

Unity is not in spite of diversity. The church's undeniable and God-given diversity is itself constitutive of the church's

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d) Love is the way

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. 7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never ends.

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e) A theology of the cross

1 Corinthians 1:18-24 18 For the message about 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, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." 20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, 23 but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Which theology of the cross?

- Penal substitution?
 - 'The wisdom of God displayed in the cross is rejected by the wise of this age. Penal substitution is an object of indignation and regularly pilloried by many of the educated class'
- '[A]lthough many Christians think of the cross as the means by which human beings get right with God, Paul thinks of the cross as the means by which God deals with the alienation of human from human, from the world in which humans live, and from God' (Marianne Meye Thompson)

A parting thought: Bible interpretation alone is not the key to unity.

On locating our bible study

Is it not the case that theologians cause more trouble than good? Are they not the contemporary equivalents of the 'I am of Apollos', and so on, in Corinth?

- Disunity is arguably not the result of incorrect or debatable interpretation of scripture
- 'All church division is fundamentally a failure of love. All division proceeds from believers assuming that they are better off apart from each other than together' (Stephen Fowl, *Theological Interpretation of Scripture*)
- Bible interpretation best within the context of church communities which strive to live in love
