

365 *First Corinthians in the real (C1 or C21) world*

I've continued my repeated readings through 1 Corinthians and it's not difficult to spot Paul's heart – *Jesus the Messiah* – he can't stop talking about him. And Paul wants by all means possible to declare the good news – who *Jesus* was, what he did and said, how we treated him and how God conquered and how *Jesus* is *Lord* now and *Lord* of the future. Paul wants the church to be *built* up, to be a multi-part *body*, a holy temple *building*, bound together by love, serving one another and serving the world at large, thus declaring Jesus is Lord – that's Paul's passion. (My italic reflects Paul's word usage.)

The Bible Project's summary of 1 Corinthians is: 1–4 divisions, 5–7 sex, 8–10 food, 11–14 the gathering, 15 the resurrection (+ 16 greetings). And there are disagreements and divisions all about of them – what a church! But stop and look in the mirror – isn't the C21 church just the same? 'Ah, but that's the established church!', you might say. But is your church totally free of disagreements? Really?!

I would suggest that we all need Paul's love-based, *body-building* approach, which involves, as in 8–10 on food, being very careful to check how my firm view about what is 'right' affects my attitude to my brothers and sisters in their faith. Insisting on *my* view may well hurt others so, yes, on each issue, Paul seeks to apply principles, but he does it in such a way as to *build* others up – and that should always be our motive.

It doesn't take a genius to spot the biggest and most potentially divisive issue for the church in C21, so what *body-building* principles are we going to apply?

Well, sex is a powerful force – for both good and evil – so can we all agree on some principles? It's so intimate, personal and potentially intrusive that it must surely be confined to the safety and security of a stable, unique, *life-long relationship* – and that means chastity before marriage and faithfulness within marriage. Agreed?

But things get a little less clear when we start to think about divorce. As humans, we can so easily get our relationships wrong, so we have to do all we can to minimise personal pain when that happens, and maybe the best way to deal with divorce is *not* to apply cast iron rules: 'the Bible clearly teaches...' Maybe in such situations we should think more in terms of *body-building* love. How can the real people with real pain best sort things out?

Divorce is not ideal, but we have to live in the real world, so now let's apply that to the elephant in the room. Male-female relationships are God's ideal – for populating the earth, if nothing else – but how do we apply the principle of *body-building* love when seeking to help those members of the *body* who don't feel male-female sexual attraction?

Difficult, isn't it?!¹

Paul Bev. 13.1.24

¹ If you just answered, 'No, it's very straightforward', maybe ask your Christian friends who are gay if they feel that they are a very important part of the *body of Christ* – because they are!