

Central Sydney Presbyterian Church



Life between The Cross and The Resurrection

1 Corinthians 1-7

Prayer Points

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Cover Picture—The Temple of Apollo at Corinth

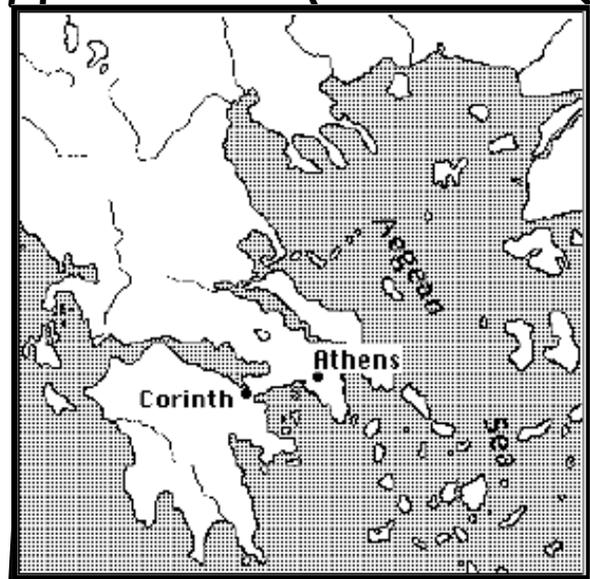
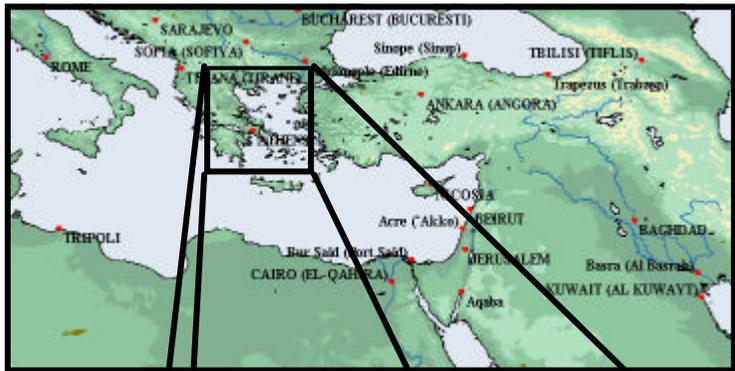
By David Thurston 2001



CENTRAL SYDNEY Presbyterian Church

Changing God's World Through God's Word

Prayer Points



Prayer Points

1. A Church 1 Corinthians 1v1-17

Corinth was an old Greek city that had been destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC and rebuilt by Julius Caesar a hundred years later, as a Roman colony. This new city not only attracted Roman veterans, but Greeks, Syrians and Jews.

Geographically, Corinth stood on the isthmus of Corinth, a narrow neck of land connecting mainland Greece with the southern peninsula (the Peloponnesus), between the Aegean and Adriatic seas. It was in a brilliant position for trade. Sailors used to haul their boats over land at the narrow neck to cut out the long and dangerous sea voyage south – the present Corinthian canal does a much better job. It was a significant trade town, not only because it was a short cut for sailors, but if you travelled the north/south route by land you had to go through Corinth.

It was also known for its sport and arts. Every two years the 'Isthmian Games' were held in Corinth and attracted competitors and spectators alike. It is also noted for its bronze work made according to a secret formula. It had the property of being very shiny. One of the doors to the Temple was made of Corinthian bronze. Alongside great wealth and luxury there was poverty and great need in Corinth.

As a consequence of all this, Corinth was a rich, multi-cultural and multi-national city. Corinth was dominated by the 'Acro-corinth', the steep rock on which the acropolis and a temple to Aphrodite (the goddess of love) was built. Aphrodite was not the only god or goddess worshipped – like Athens, Corinth was full of religion.

Prayer Points

Temple prostitutes and a large 'floating' population helped to give Corinth a very bad name for all kinds of immoral behaviour. An immoral person in the ancient world was said to be 'playing the Corinthian'.

Paul stayed in Corinth for eighteen months, on his second missionary journey. During that time he founded a church to which he later wrote at least two letters now in the New Testament (1 and 2 Corinthians).

Read Acts 18.

1. Compare and Contrast Sydney (Newtown/Surry Hills) and Corinth.

2. What do you expect will happen in a new church in that environment?

3. Read 1 Corinthians 1.—Fill in the gaps

From _____, called to be an _____ by the will of God,
and our brother _____,

To the _____ in Corinth,

those _____ in Christ Jesus and called to be _____, together with

those

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

6. How does Paul develop a sense of purpose and vocation for Christians through this principle? What does it mean for you?

7. What do married people in the group feel about v33-35?

8. What do single people think about v33-35?

9. What will it mean to be content in your circumstances?

10. What will it mean to honour God in your circumstances?

11. What can you pray about arising from this study?

4. Is the letter of Paul to the Corinthians a letter to you?

5. What does this verse mean when it talks about having been 'sanctified' and being called to be 'holy'?

A Thankful Paul

6. If you've already read through 1 Corinthians before you might wonder if Paul was stretching the truth a bit here but he is thankful to God, why? v4

7. What does Paul mean by 'because of the grace given you in Christ Jesus'? v4

8. Paul gives two examples of how the Corinthians 'have been enriched in every way' - speaking and knowledge. What other ways have they been enriched?

9. Why would Paul pick out these two gifts to be particularly thankful about?

10. What gifts or abilities might Paul pray for us that while being thankful to God for might also be a source of problems?

11. In v7 Paul helps the Corinthians over the danger of being satisfied now. What is it?

12. How will the Corinthians remain faithful to the end? v8-9

An Appealing Paul

For Paul part of the essential quality of being God's people was being united. Therefore when ever there was strife or division there had been a serious breach in the rule of Jesus in his people's lives. When there are divisions we can sometimes be proud of them as with the Corinthian Christians. When that happens it's time for straight talking.

13. What is Paul's ideal for a church? v10

3. According to this chapter, how can single people:

- show contentment in their circumstances?

- honour the Lord?

4. What does v14 mean?

5. What are the principles that everyone should apply to their circumstances at first v17?

8. Marriage & Sex

1 Corinthians 7

To marry or not to marry and when – the issues of Paul's day are still well and truly with us. While he answers a lot of questions he leaves us with a principle to keep on applying – a principle that is not even considered in our culture but still deeply longed for – contentment.

1. According to Paul, how can married people:
 - show contentment in their circumstances?

 - honour the Lord?

2. Is there a connection between sex and praying together v5?
What is it?

14. How was the church divided? v12

15. Who are

Paul

Apollos

Cephas

16. Who is the "I follow Christ!" party?

17. What sorts of divisions are there in Modern Christianity and Evangelicalism?

18. Do we have a similar problem to the Corinthians?

19. Some people wanted to claim special status because Paul baptised them. How does he prick their balloon?

20. What is the heart of Paul's mission? v17

21. How might the cross of Christ be emptied of its power because of the divisions in the Corinthian church?

22. How can you help to build bridges with Christians who don't think the same about us in everything?

10. People think the Bible's teaching about sex is outdated. How does this passage show the Bible has always been at odds with societies norms?

11. How does our culture treat sex?

12. How does this passage help us to see the spiritual nature of all of life and especially sex?

What can you pray about from this study?

5. Paul raises another objection and we come to the heart of the problem-some people are using prostitutes. Paul's thinking at this point is provocative to say the least. He bases his objection on the principle of marriage. How is being with a prostitute a violation of our status with Christ v15-17?

6. We often hear that there is no difference qualitatively between different sins but Paul is raising another objection to the Corinthian's thinking, he makes a distinction about differences in sins' consequences at least v18. What is it? What should we do when tempted?

7. What does this say about sex and who we are?

8. Paul raises another objection in v19. It goes to the heart of who we are and what the implications of that are. So who are we and what should that mean v19?

9. The last objection to this worldly way of thinking has to do with our understanding of whom we belong to. We naturally think we belong to ourselves but for Christians this is worldly thinking. Why v19-20?

2. Turning the Tables

1 Corinthians 1v18-2v5

1. The Corinthians were divided over whether some were baptised by Paul or not, for Paul this was so unimportant he couldn't even remember whom he had dunked. What was much more important was the message of the Cross but it made an even greater division. Describe the division the gospel brings v18?

2. Why should Christians be united?

3. Is God against intelligence, wisdom and power v18-19?

The World: The spirit of the world is the opposite of the Spirit from God (1 Cor. 2:12). The world is the place, the mindset of antagonism to the rule of God. It is the epitome of rebellion and arrogance.

4. Why does God not want the world to know him through its wisdom?

5. Why do you think God chose a man dying on a cross to be the means of salvation of his people?

6. Paul seems to be saying that God has gone out of his way to chose a means of salvation that is offensive. What are the two standards Jews and Greeks require if God is going to say something to them?

7. How is the cross, what Paul preaches v23, the very antipathy of that?

8. What does a person who is a 'Jew' or a 'Greek' have to do if they are called by God v24?

7. Body Matters

1 Corinthians 6v12-20

It is possible to be so 'spiritual' that what happens in the body doesn't matter. Well its possible but not if you're a Christian. The body matters forever not only because of the resurrection but because that's where God's Spirit dwells.

1. Paul quotes a popular slogan of the Corinthians in v12: "Everything is permissible for me". How could this justify sexual immorality?

2. "Everything is permissible for me". What are the two qualifications Paul adds in v12?

3. In v13 there is another slogan: "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food". How might this justify sexual immorality?

4. "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food". What two objections does Paul add and what does Paul add in v13-14?

14. How easy is it to give up our rights in our relationships and be like Christ?

15. What can you pray about arising from this study?

9. Think about the way God has worked in the past. Are there other examples of God using what is foolish and weak?

The Church

10. God's pattern of weakness and foolishness demonstrated in the cross is further reflected in whom he has called to be his people. What sorts of people make up the Corinthian church?

11. Why does God choose people like them and us?

12. If God chose the wise, influential, noble, strong of the world what would it say about salvation?

13. The message is not flattering to the human ego in fact it allows us to boast in only one thing, who and why?

The Messenger

14. As with the message so with the messenger - how was Paul's nature as a preacher fitting to the nature of the message and the recipients' nature v2-3?
15. What is the implication of an ordinary message and an ordinary messenger for the Corinthians faith v4-5?
16. Does this message have anything to say about what church should look like and what dangers we could fall into as God's people?
10. "The Corinthians fail to take into consideration the past, what Christ has done and how he has done it and the future-what will be theirs." How does this make sense of v2-8.
11. With a failure to live in the light of the past (the cross of Christ) and the future (the resurrection reality) what to the Corinthians have left and how does this explain their actions?
12. In v9-11 Paul warns the Corinthians, he reminds them of what they were and now what has happened because of the Lord Jesus. What effect does Paul want to flow from this?
13. How can we guard our church against sin and yet still be gracious?

5. What ends are served by the man being put out of fellowship?

6. Paul uses the ideas associated with the Passover Festival as a way of calling the Corinthians to cleanness of living. How is the gospel message similar to the story of the Exodus?

7. How does the saying, "The Corinthians weren't in the world but they were certainly of it." make sense of v9-13?

The worldly values of the Corinthian church become a tale of failure from beginning to end. Paul now turns to the next disaster.

8. What's the problem v1?

9. What 3 reasons does Paul give as to why this amounts to a profound misunderstanding of who they are in Christ v2-6?
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.

3. Mature Wisdom

1 Corinthians 2v6-16

The Corinthians thought that they were spiritual hot shots. But they were using the wrong standards. It's a bit like this: the Corinthians had always played games where the person with the most points win. Now, they were being introduced to the game golf by Paul the apostle. Like someone playing for the first time with the wrong idea about scoring, they think they have won because they've got over two hundred and their friend, Paul, only made seventy-eight shots. The only thing Paul can do is try and explain what the aim of the game is again, and that's just what he does in this section. It's a hard lesson to learn for the Corinthians, it's a hard lesson for us, so take note!

1. How does Paul describe his 'message of wisdom to the mature' v6?

2. Read v7 what do you think God's secret wisdom is?

3. How does 1 Corinthians 1v19,20,26 help us understand the significance of v8?

4. Who were the rulers of this age who crucified the Lord of glory?

5. As we saw in chapter 1 while the 'great' and 'wise' fail to see the power and wisdom of God in the cross of Jesus, some do see it. How v9-10?

6. How does v9 describe those who trust a crucified saviour?

7. How does a person see, hear and conceive v9-10?

If a person doesn't speak their mind, only they know what's going on in their head, that is their spirit v11.

8. When God has secret wisdom, who knows what is going on in God's mind v10?

6. In the World, but not of it

1 Corinthians 5-6v11

The Corinthian church had allowed the world to shape their thinking about success. Paul needed to show them that the true measure of success that God uses is the cross of Christ. Unfortunately the world's thinking had infected their standard of failure - they failed to see how compromised their fellowship was. The community of God's people must not condemn the world while being morally indifferent, 'we have been sanctified and we are called to be holy'.

1. What is the symptom of the 'worldly' disease that Paul is addressing in v1?
2. What is the bigger problem in terms of the reaction of the whole church to this situation v2?
3. What should their response have been v2-3?
4. What line of thinking could have brought the Corinthians to be proud of this act?

9. Paul is aware that there are people within the Corinthian church who are not humble but arrogant, people who live according to the world's success and not God's. What is Paul hoping will happen through his letter v21?

10. What makes you happy is a good indicator of what your standard of success is. Think about what has made you happy or what you think will make you happy, by whose standards are you living?

11. What can you pray about arising from this study?

9. So how can Paul know what's going on in God's mind with Christ v12?

10. What claim is Paul making about the message he proclaims v13?

11. Why can't some people understand the things of God v14?

12. A whole half of reality is closed to the 'man without the Spirit' that is open to the 'spiritual man' v15. How?

4. Fools for Nothing

1 Corinthians 3

1. What is it about the Corinthians that causes Paul to call them 'worldly' and 'mere infants' v3?

2. The Corinthians were dividing over leaders who had ministered among them. What word does Paul use to sum up the role of a leader v5?

3. The Corinthians are continuing to make the same mistake, that is, to see God's kingdom in worldly terms not in terms of the cross. List five standards of the world.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
 - 5.

4. List five standards of God's Kingdom.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
 - 5.

6. Paul uses sarcasm in v8-13 but not to destroy but to wake up the Corinthians to how badly wrong their standards are – they are boasting about their high score in golf again! There are two diametrically opposed measures of success in these verses; the world's, which the Corinthians are following and God's, which Paul follows. Make a table of the opposites.

The World's Idea of Success - Corinth	God's Idea of Success - Paul

7. What will a church look like that seeks God's idea of success?

8. Paul's relationship to the Corinthians is unique – he is their father in Christ Jesus. As such he is their model of how to live life. How daunting is Paul's life as a model?

5. Fools for Christ

1 Corinthians 4

1. Paul begins chapter 4 with reminding the Corinthians of his status. What is it v1?
2. What is the standard of 'success' for a steward (one given a trust) v2?
3. To whom therefore is Paul accountable to and who isn't he accountable to v3-5?
4. Why is it dangerous for us to 'play to the crowd' rather than God?
5. The saying in v6 "Do not go beyond what is written" could mean something like "Don't go beyond your job description" how could that make sense of v6-7?
5. Churches regularly make the mistake of trying to live in two realities – the spiritual and the worldly. Discuss.
6. True, mature spirituality is all about service. How does serving God and his people undercut pride and division?
7. Describe the place God has in all ministry v5-7. What attitude should we have toward our leaders and each other?
8. How does Paul describe the Corinthians v9 and how should this shape our attitudes to church?
9. Paul picks up the image of the Corinthian Church being a building. How did he develop his role as a church planting-missionary and the role of those who follow? Why is his task so important?

10. Paul and Apollos were particular contributors to the Corinthian 'building' and others will follow does God care about the quality of work v13?

11. What is the quality of your contribution to the church here?

12. In v16-17 the building transforms itself into God's house, God's temple, how should this inspire us to give of our best? (Exodus 36v1-7)

13. In v18 Paul begins to tell the Corinthians how to become wise. How can we become wise?

14. Why is boasting in men foolish v22f?

15. To say that, "When we realise we have "all things" – everything we need – through Jesus, we will not be troubled by division or jealousy as the Corinthians were." And leave it at that is to speak the truth but to speak it untruthfully. How can we make that a reality in our life?

16. What can you pray about arising from this study?