

1 Corinthians 1-4

The letter of 1 Corinthians was written by the apostle Paul to a church that had drunk very deeply from its own culture's view of leadership, wisdom and power. Despite being a letter from another time and place, the problems experienced then bear an eerie resemblance to many of the problems that confront us today. However, while the problems are all too familiar, Paul's solutions are surprisingly fresh, radical and—in stark contrast to many of our own DIY approaches to problem solving—profoundly theological.

For this month, our Bible readings will be taken from chapters 1-4 of 1 Corinthians. The great advantage of taking the month to get through these few chapters is that it will force us to stop and listen—really listen—to Paul's diagnosis, prognosis and treatment of these all too common problems. So, whether you read these chapters as a leader, or as one who is led (and most of us are both in different contexts), prepare yourself for a study that will rebuke and challenge cherished notions of leadership, and return our focus to our most perfect and merciful leader—the Lord Jesus Christ. May you know his leadership in 2004.

How to use these readings

- **With a penitent heart**, the true prerequisite for all Bible reading. Open with prayer (perhaps using the prayer suggested).

- **With 15-20 minutes** of peace and quiet. If you can take longer, and want to read and pray further—great! But we have designed the readings to be done in a fairly short space of time.
- **With an accurate modern translation.** We recommend the new ESV translation for personal and group Bible study. Bible Brief writers refer to this translation. Contact us for further details about the ESV or visit www.matthiasmedia.com.au/ESV.
- **With a notebook.** Even if you only jot down brief ideas, writing focuses the mind.
- **As a guide and help, not a straitjacket.** Feel free to dig further into the passage, to notice and ponder things that the questions don't point to.
- **As a launch-pad for prayer.** Use the 'Prayer ideas' at the end of each reading as a starting point for your daily prayer. Many of the points that will arise from the readings will be things you can pray for yourself, and also for others (family, friends, neighbours, etc.). Why not compile a list of people you want to pray for, and use the prayer ideas from each reading to pray for the next person on your list?

Prayer for each day

*My God and Father,
Please grant me understanding of your word today.
Change in me those thoughts, attitudes and actions
that have yet to be transformed
by the cross of your Son,
Amen.*

This month's Bible Brief was prepared by the team at Christ Church, Gladesville in Sydney.

✓ NB: Tick in the box when you've completed each study.

Reading 1 Acts 18:1-17

1. This is an account of Paul's ministry in Corinth. What were the marks of his ministry in Corinth?
2. What is the encouragement Paul receives from God?

PONDER How might God's encouragement to Paul be an encouragement to you?

PRAYER IDEAS Consider the year ahead. In which tasks do you need the Lord's encouragement? In which circumstances do you need the reminder that God has 'many people' in that place? Commit these things to the Lord in prayer.

Notes

Reading 2 ■ 1 Corinthians 1:1-17

This introduction to the letter anticipates in subtle ways issues that will be raised in the body of the letter.

1. Make a list of the sorts of issues raised here.
2. If you are familiar with 1 Corinthians, underline the words/ideas in these verses that you know will resurface later in the letter (if you are not so familiar, a quick skim-read through the whole letter would be very worthwhile!).

PONDER If the apostle was writing to your congregation, what are some of the issues he might address?

PRAYER IDEAS Pray that the time you spend in 1 Corinthians this month will issue in repentance and faith.

Reading 3 ■ 1 Corinthians 1:1-3

1. What reasons does Paul give for listening to the message of this letter?
2. What does Paul mean when he describes all the Corinthians as 'holy' (NIV)/ 'saints' (ESV)?
3. What is the grace and peace referred to in verse 3?

PONDER Do you regard yourself as called by God and as a saint/holy?

PRAYER IDEAS Pray that we would treat the words of the apostle as the very words of God. Thank God for calling us and setting us apart ('sanctifying us') for his service. Thank him for his grace and peace.

Reading 4 ■ 1 Corinthians 1:4-9

1. How was the grace of God evident in the Corinthians' lives?
2. The word translated "spiritual gift" in verse 7 is the same as "grace" in verse 3. What is Paul saying about what they have as a church?
3. What is promised in verse 8? How is that promise substantiated in verse 9?

PONDER Consider the privilege it is to be called into fellowship with God's Son.

PRAYER IDEAS Thank the Lord for grace toward you in so many ways. Pray that you would be true to your calling.

Reading 5 ■ 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

1. What is dividing the Corinthians?
2. What has Paul already said in previous verses that speaks to this issue?
3. What is Paul's argument here?
4. What was Paul's mission?

PONDER Is your faith too tied up with a particular person or pastor?

PRAYER IDEAS Pray for unity in your church, and that it wouldn't be a church divided on account of allegiance to anyone other than Christ.

Reading 6 ■ 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5

1. Quickly skim-read over chapters 1-2 to get a feel for what is in them.
2. In 1:18-2:5, how does Paul continue his argument?
3. What do the Jew and the Greek think of the cross?
4. What does God think of the cross?

PONDER In your view, is our society more like the 'Jew' or the 'Greek' in its view of the cross?

PRAYER IDEAS Pray that you would understand more of God's wisdom and power in the cross.

Reading 7 ■ **1 Corinthians 1:26-31**

1. What does Paul say about the type of people who were chosen?
2. How does this make his point about not boasting?

PONDER What can you be tempted to boast about?

PRAYER IDEAS Pray that you will exclude boasting in yourself and boast in Christ only.

Reading 8 ■ **1 Corinthians 2:1-5**

1. What does Paul now use as an illustration of his point?
2. How does this continue to make the point of contrast between the world's wisdom and power, and God's wisdom and power?
3. What is our responsibility in preaching the cross?

PONDER Why might Paul have been 'weak, fearful and trembling' when he came to Corinth?

PRAYER IDEAS Pray that the message of the cross might go forward, in spite of the misunderstandings of the world and the fears and weaknesses of its preachers.

Reading 9 ■ **1 Corinthians 2:6-8**

1. In verse 6, Paul describes his message as wise. How is this different from the 'wisdom' he rejects in 2:1-5?
2. How would you characterize the two types of wisdom described in these verses?

PONDER Who might the 'mature' of verse 6 be?

PRAYER IDEAS Pray for increasing knowledge of God's wisdom (see James 1:5).

Reading 10 ■ **1 Corinthians 2:9-10a**

1. List the parts of the human body described in verse 9. According to this verse, what are the deficiencies in each of these?
2. What is it that overcomes these deficiencies (v. 10)?

PONDER What are 'these things' that the Spirit reveals?

PRAYER IDEAS Thank God for giving us his Spirit. Pray that his Spirit would reveal the truths of 1 Corinthians to you as you read it.

Reading 11 ■ **1 Corinthians 2:10b-13**

Two types of spirit are described in these verses—the spirit of the world and the Spirit of God.

1. What does the Spirit of God do?
2. In what way does the Spirit of God work in the same way as a human spirit?
3. According to these verses, what role do humans play in securing their own salvation?

PONDER From what we've learnt in 1 Corinthians so far, think about the things that God has 'freely given us'.

PRAYER IDEAS Confess your inability to understand the cross of Christ on your own and thank God for his undeserved kindness to you in showing you its meaning.

Reading 12 ■ **1 Corinthians 2:14-16**

Two types of people are described in these verses—the natural person and the spiritual person.

1. What are the characteristics of the natural person?
2. What are the characteristics of the spiritual person?

PONDER What might it mean not to be subject to anyone's judgement (v. 15)?

PRAYER IDEAS Praise God for making you spiritual.

Notes

Reading 13 1 Corinthians 3:1-4

1. What in their behaviour leads Paul to describe the Corinthians as worldly and infant-like?
2. The marks of the flesh are jealousy and strife. What is the key to leaving this behind?

PONDER "I follow Paul", "I follow Apollos".
"I follow _____", "I follow _____"
—fill in the blanks for today. Why are we tempted to put people in these positions?

PRAYER IDEAS Pray that you and your Christian community will not be marked by this kind of worldliness.

Reading 14 1 Corinthians 3:5-9

1. We are reminded here that Paul is a servant. How does thinking of leaders as 'servants' change the way you think about leaders and leadership?
2. When Paul explains that it is God who gives the growth it seems so clear. Why is

it that we are tempted to think of some people (servants) as great?

PRAYER IDEAS Pray that servant thinking will deeply affect the way you lead and the way you are led.

Reading 15 1 Corinthians 3:9-15

1. Who is the building and who are the builders?
2. In the Old Testament, what was the most precious building made, and what made it so precious? (See 1 Kings 8:13)

3. What is the result of building with hay and straw?

PRAYER IDEAS Pray that your work in the Lord will be found worthy on that Day.

Reading 16 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

1. What does it mean to say "you are God's temple"?
2. What exactly is Paul identifying as God's temple? (NB. The 'you' in these verses is plural.) Compare what is said here with 1 Corinthians 6:19. How is it different?

3. What is happening in Corinth that Paul fears will destroy God's temple?

PRAYER IDEAS Pray that you will never be guilty of destroying God's temple.

Reading 17 1 Corinthians 3:18-23

1. In the context of chapters 1-3, what does it mean to be a "fool"?
2. What does Paul command in verse 21?
3. How do verses 21b-22 conclude the issue?

PONDER According to verses 21b-22, what do you misunderstand when you line up behind certain leaders?

PRAYER IDEAS Praise God that, in Christ, all things are yours!

Reading 18 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 and 4:1-7

1. Look back at 3:1-4. How had the Corinthians been viewing Paul and other leaders in the church?
2. According to 4:1-5, how are they to view them correctly?
3. How are they to view themselves correctly (v. 7)?

PONDER What do *you* have that you did not receive?

PRAYER IDEAS Pray for the same attitude of Paul towards our own lives and that of our ministers. Thank God for the servants and stewards he has given us.

Reading 19 ■ 1 Corinthians 4:8-13

1. What is Paul indicating is the Corinthians' problem in this section?
2. How does he correct their misunderstanding?

PONDER What sorts of theological misunderstanding might lead to the kind of thinking in verse 8?

Reading 20 ■ 1 Corinthians 4:14-21

1. In what ways is Paul like a father to the Corinthians?
2. How are the Corinthians, as Paul's children in Christ, to respond?

PRAYER IDEAS Pray for discernment in your own life to see where worldliness creeps in. Ask God to help you remain humble and give thanks for the forgiveness of past failures in these areas.

PONDER Despite all we know of the Corinthians, for Paul they are still his "beloved children".

PRAYER IDEAS Ask that we would become like Paul as he became like Christ.

Notes

INTERCHANGE

Church and worship



THANKS FOR YOUR excellent articles on 'worship'. However, I'm wondering whether too much is based on an argument from silence.

You say, "the one place in the New Testament that the different words we translate as 'worship' are striking by their absence is in describing what we do in church" (*Briefing* #299). I have no expertise in the Hebrew language but, having just preached through Leviticus, I would say the same about this book. As far as I can see the 'worship' words are entirely missing. Yet Hebrews 9:1 seems happy to summarize its contents (at least those of chapters 1-16) as "regulations for worship" (*latreia*). Might, therefore, the absence of 'worship' words from New Testament gatherings be less significant than you have supposed?

Alan Black
Tooting, London, UK



I AGREE WITH TONY PAYNE's central thesis about church being a gathering, and 'worship' language being unhelpful to describe what goes on in our church buildings on a Sunday morning.

However, despite the implication in Tony Payne's article (*Briefing* #302) that previously the only choices available for evangelical 'worship' were either a sort of asset-stripped Roman Catholicism or freewheeling charismatic praise-athons, the perspective put forward by him in his article is essentially that of the Reformation, as expressed in the *Book of Common Prayer*.

While I would not necessarily advocate returning to its language or even its precise structures in our gatherings, the *Prayer Book* represents a Word-centred, Christ-centred spirituality that is thoroughly biblical and could form the basis for an approach that reflects both

the biblical insights of the 'church as gathering' perspective, while avoiding its dangers (such as the potential for over-emphasizing the 'horizontal' at the expense of the 'vertical').

We can see this in the introductory words spoken by the minister at morning and evening prayer in the *Book of Common Prayer*, when he speaks of how:

"we assemble and meet together" (gathering);
 "to render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at his hands" (thanksgiving);
 "to set forth his most worthy praise" (praise);
 "to hear his most holy Word" (the Word);
 "and to ask those things which are requisite and necessary, as well for the body as the soul" (prayer).

Note that the word 'worship' does not appear in this list. There then follows confession, the singing of psalms and scriptural canticles, readings from Scripture, a declaration of faith, and prayers.

This month's Bible Brief was written by the ministry team at Christchurch, Gladesville, in Sydney.

1 Corinthians 5-7

This month we return to our studies in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. As we might expect, we continue to see the many ways in which the gospel bears on our relationships—with 'notorious sinners', in law courts, marriages, families and churches. There is also a particular interest in our bodies—how we view them, what we do with them, and what their final destination is.

Our studies this month also include helpful adventures into other parts of Scripture—allowing the whole word of God to illumine our understanding of this vital letter.

NB: In a few of the studies this month we will spend 2-3 days on one passage—giving you the chance to really suck the marrow out of the passage.

Prayer for the Month

*Dear Father,
Thank you that you raised up our Lord Jesus,
and that you will one day raise us up by that
same power.
I pray that today, as I study this letter,
you will help me to know more of your mind
and rejoice in your will,
for Christ's sake.
Amen.*

How to use these readings:

- with a penitent and prayerful heart
- with around 15 minutes of peace and quiet
- with an accurate, modern translation (e.g. ESV, NIV, NASB)
- with a notebook (to help focus your thoughts)
- as a guide not a straitjacket
- as a launch-pad for prayer

✓ NB: Tick in the box when you've completed each study

Notes

Reading 1 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

1. 1 Corinthians 5 gets us thinking about the notion of 'holiness'. For some background, briefly read over Leviticus chapter 18. Leviticus 18-21 is the so-called 'Holiness Code' for Israel, outlining how Israel is to be holy (that is, set apart). Why do you think Israel was given a holiness code like this one?
2. Do Christians today have a 'Holiness Code'? If so, what do you think it is? How is it different to the code given to Israel? How is it similar?

PONDER What does it mean for us to be 'set apart' for God?

PRAYER IDEAS Pray that you will desire to live your life for God and that you will find his ways attractive. Take some time now to confess any sin in your life, remembering God's readiness to forgive (1 John 2:1-2).

Reading 2 1 Corinthians 5:1-2

1. What is the sin Paul speaks of here?
2. What should have been the Corinthians' attitude to this sin in their church? What attitude have they taken instead?

PONDER In what ways can we deceive ourselves about our sin, and the sin of others? (Cf. Is 47:10-11.)

PRAYER IDEAS Pray that you will take sin as seriously as God does.

Reading 3 1 Corinthians 5:3-5

1. What authority does Paul have over the Corinthian church?
2. Does Paul have authority over your life? Why is this the case?
3. What could it mean to "deliver this man to Satan"?

PONDER How can Paul have authority over the Corinthians even when he is not physically present with them?

PRAYER IDEAS Pray that as you continue to study Paul's letter, you will grow in your understanding of what it means to be a Christian, and the wonderful blessings the Christian life brings.

Reading 4 1 Corinthians 5:6-8

1. What attitude does Paul call them to account for?
2. What does it mean for you that Christ is your Passover?
3. What does it mean to celebrate the festival with unleavened bread, in sincerity and truth?

POINTERS

For background to the Passover, see Exodus 12-13.

PONDER What does it mean to be sincere as Christians?

PRAYER IDEAS Pray that you will live to please God, in all sincerity and truth.

Reading 5 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

1. From verses 9-11, what did the Corinthians misunderstand about Paul's last letter?
2. What should be the differences between the non-believer's behaviour, and Christian behaviour?
3. How should we deal with other people's sin?

PONDER Consider Luke 17:1-4.

PRAYER IDEAS Pray for the holiness of your church.

Reading 6 1 Corinthians 6:1-8

1. What are the Corinthians rebuked for?
2. How should such disputes be resolved? What reasons does Paul give for this?
3. "Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?" (v. 7). When do you find it difficult to not cling to your rights?

PONDER Consider Philippians 2:4-8.

PRAYER IDEAS Pray that your attitude would be like that of Christ Jesus.

Reading 7 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

1. How would you describe the change in identity that has taken place for the Corinthians?
2. How did the change occur?

PONDER "And such were some of you" (v. 11). Ponder the grace of God on display in these verses.

PRAYER IDEAS Thank and give praise to God that, in Christ, you are not now what you once were.

Reading 8 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

1. "All things are lawful for me" (v. 12). From these verses, how were the Corinthian Christians using this saying? What did they want to justify?
2. In what sense does Paul agree with the saying? In what sense does he disagree with it?
3. In verse 12, what does Paul say their behaviour really leads to?

PONDER How does this passage shape our understanding of Christian freedom?

PRAYER IDEAS Pray that you will know true freedom from that which enslaves.

Reading 9 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

1. What view of the body is Paul refuting?
2. What reasons does Paul give for his view that what we do with our bodies matters?
3. Why do you think Paul refers to Jesus' resurrection in this context? What are its implications for our bodies?

PONDER Do you think about your body the way Paul, in view of Christ's resurrection, thinks about bodies?

PRAYER IDEAS Thank God that he who raised the Lord up will also one day raise you up.

Notes

Reading 10 ■ **1 Corinthians 6:12-20**

1. What is Paul's instruction in verse 18? Why do you think he is so emphatic about it?
2. What does it mean for your body to be a temple of the Holy Spirit?

PONDER What does it mean to sin against your own body (v. 18)?

PRAYER IDEAS Pray for the strength to obey the two imperatives of this passage—to *flee* and to *glorify*.

Reading 11 ■ **1 Corinthians 7:1-7**

1. In this section, why is it good to marry? (Refer back to chapter 6, especially vv. 12-20.)
2. In marriage, what are the husband's and wife's obligations regarding sexual behaviour and morality? Why?
3. According to verses 6 and 7, how should we view marriage and singleness?

PONDER Pray that you will rejoice in your "gift" from God, and use it well.

PRAYER IDEAS Pray that you will glorify God in the way you use your body.

Reading 12 ■ **Colossians 2:16-23**

1. 1 Corinthians 6:12-7:11 suggests a certain view of the body amongst the Corinthians which Paul is out to correct. What is this view and what is wrong with it?
2. Look at Colossians 2:16-23. What wrong understanding of the body is on view here? Why would people want to make rules restricting behaviour and consumption? According to Colossians, what is the problem with such rules?

PONDER Do you have a negative view of the body? How would you summarize the view promoted by 1 Corinthians 6-7 and Colossians 2?

PRAYER IDEAS Pray that you might rightly enjoy the Christian freedom you have, in the view you take of your body and the bodies of others.

Reading 13 ■ **1 Timothy 4:1-4**

1. What things do the false teachers in this passage forbid and command abstinence from?
2. According to this passage, what is the right view of what God has created?
3. What sorts of things do we normally consider to be demonic? Is that different from what Paul here labels as demonic?

PONDER Can you think of ways in which we, or our society, deny the truth of verse 4?

PRAYER IDEAS Think over the good things you have received from the hand of God today. Pray that you might receive what God has created with thanksgiving.

Reading 14 ■ **1 Corinthians 7:6-11**

1. If we are single, what should we do/not do? Why? (Cf. v. 17 and vv. 32-35.)
2. If we are married, what should we do/not do? Why? (Cf. Malachi 2:10-16.)

PONDER What steps can you take to make it easier to stay faithful to the one you're married to/might one day be married to? Or how can you help others in this regard?

PRAYER IDEAS Pray for strong marriages for our community, congregations and congregational leaders.

Reading 15 ■ **1 Corinthians 7:12-16**

1. What are the potential spiritual benefits for children/spouses of Christians remaining faithful?
2. What potential for marital disharmony is suggested by verse 15? Why is this so? (Cf. 6:15-20.)
3. In marriages between believers and unbelievers, what is Paul's overriding concern?

PONDER How do relationships between believers and unbelievers create problems?

PRAYER IDEAS Pray for Christians in, or contemplating, marriages with unbelievers.

Notes

Reading 16 1 Corinthians 7:17-20

1. What is Paul's general rule concerning the life of Christians?
2. How is this rule applicable to circumcision?
3. What is of more value than circumcision or uncircumcision?

PONDER Consider how you serve God and obey his commands in the situation that you are currently in. How do you serve him already? Does your situation permit greater service or obedience?

PRAYER IDEAS Pray that you may obey and serve God wholeheartedly in your current situation.

Reading 17 1 Corinthians 7:20-24

1. Where is Paul's general rule (see question 1 from yesterday) repeated in these verses?
2. How is this rule applicable to slavery?
3. As a free person, how and why should you find yourself in service of Christ?

PONDER Consider the price at which you were bought (v. 23). How should that affect the way you live as a Christian in your current situation? What practical steps should you take to use your freedom to serve?

PRAYER IDEAS Thank God for the freedom that we enjoy in this country. Pray for those whose situation makes life and Christian obedience difficult.

Reading 18 1 Corinthians 7:25-28

1. What authority does Paul possess to be able to give advice on this issue?
2. What is the nature of the context in Corinth, within which Paul gives his advice?
3. Despite the advice, was it wrong for a Corinthian to marry at that time? Why?

PONDER In verse 26, what do you think is meant by the "present distress"? What clues can you see in the passage?

PRAYER IDEAS Ask for wisdom in how to live according to current times.

Reading 19 1 Corinthians 7:29-40

1. What do the words "this is what I mean" (v. 29) suggest about how this passage relates to yesterday's passage?
2. In light of the situation in Corinth (vv. 26, 29), what reasons does Paul give for a person to remain unmarried?

PONDER Can you think of any ministries you have benefited from because a person has remained unmarried?

PRAYER IDEAS Thank God for your current situation—physical (where you live, work, etc.) and relational (friends, marital status, etc.). Ask that you would faithfully serve him in your situation.

Reading 20 1 Corinthians 7:29-40

1. What is said in these verses about getting married?
2. Is it wrong to marry?
3. What is said about divorce?

PONDER Think back over this month's studies. What has God taught you? What areas of life has God challenged you in?

PRAYER IDEAS Thank God for his work in you over the past month.



Next month's Bible Brief will be from Matthew 8-16.