

DAILY BIBLE READING GUIDE



CHURCH
matters

Part II

STPETERSTAMWORTH

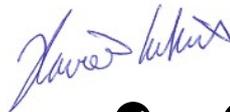
Church matters

I like the play on words ‘Church matters’! The Lord loves his Church, it *matters* to him enormously because he gave up his life for his bride, that is his body the Church. As a result there are certain *matters* that the Lord wants his Church, his people, to know. This series of daily devotions will reflect on what these Church matters are. If you have been saved by the Lord, you are a member of his precious Church, you matter to him and he wants you to know what matters for you in his Church.

- Set aside time (15-30 minutes) in your day to meditate on the passages proposed and to talk to your Lord. You can tick off the days you have done as you work through these. If you are married, you could do this with your spouse each morning as you start your day.

These verses will also be part of the sermon series and studied in more depth in our Growth Groups in second term. Using this guide will be a good way for you to get more out of Growth Groups and Church gatherings and will help you to be a blessing to others.

Yours sincerely, Xavier



	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Week of 17th-21st May					
Week of 24th-28th May					
Week of 31st May-4th June					
Week of 7-11th June					
Week of 14-18th June					
Week of 21-25th June					
Week of 28th June-2nd July					
Week of 5-9th July					

Day 1

God's Church

READ: 1 Corinthians 1:1-3

1 Paul, called as an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will, and Sosthenes our brother:

2 To the church of God at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called as saints, with all those in every place who call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord—both their Lord and ours.

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

REFLECT: We continue in our series on Church matters and we begin to tackle one of Paul's longest letters to a gifted church that had a whole stack of problems. Before we get into those 'matters' let's consider who this letter is written to.

- Who is Paul writing to?
- What does he call them?

This letter is addressed, in the first instance, by God's messenger Paul, to God's church in Corinth - a Church with a whole host of problems. *(See Acts 18 to see how the Church came to life)* No other church in the New Testament had so many issues needing dealing with, from disunity to sexual immorality, to confusion over marriage and to lawsuits between Christians, to problems with idolatry to problems in their main gatherings and more. Yet, and this is the amazing thing, God still considers them his Church. He says they are sanctified, which means God has set them apart for himself, they are in fact 'saints', chosen and special.

This tells us straight away a number of things. Firstly it reveals God's kindness and patience to Christians who had a long way to go in maturity. What a relief that is for us. It teaches us that every person who trusts in Christ is a 'saint'. If you are trusting in Jesus as lord and saviour you are a 'saint'.

You may have also noticed that this letter isn't simply addressed to a 'dysfunctional' church, it is addressed to all Christians everywhere. There is plenty God has to teach us so that we might grow too. I'm looking forward to meditating on this letter, hope you are.

PRAY: Thank you heavenly Father for choosing me in Christ setting me apart for yourself. Thank you that you are patient and kind to us your people and you want us to grow. Help me in meditating on your word to grow as you want me to. Amen

Day 2

God's Church II

READ: 1 Corinthians 1:4-7

I always thank my God for you because of the grace of God given to you in Christ Jesus, **5** that you were enriched in him in every way, in all speech and all knowledge. **6** In this way, the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you, **7** so that you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

REFLECT: Yesterday we thought about the fact that the Corinthian Church was God's church, set apart for him, despite the numerous problems the members had.

- In these verses what has God given them that makes Paul thankful to God?

God gives gifts to his Church in order that each member grows in their faith. This congregation was not lacking anything they needed. They had been enriched by God in every way, in their speech and their knowledge.

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This is true of every Church. If God hasn't given us a certain 'gift' it is because we don't need it. The Lord is unlimited in resources and he gives us what we need to progress in our Christian faith as we await the revealing of the Lord Jesus.

This ought to move us to thank God for the different members of St Peter's and for the various gifts he has given us. In his divine wisdom and providence he has blessed us with what we need.

This raises a question for us. If God had gifted the Church in Corinth with everything they needed, why were there so many problems? Part of the answer to that lies in the gifts. If you focus on the gifts in and of themselves (which can puff up or discourage) rather than on the purpose of the gifts - which are meant to build up others - all sorts of problems arise. We will reflect on that in the weeks to come.

- To what extent do you believe God has given you everything you need to grow as a Child of God?

PRAY: Heavenly Father you have begun a good work in me and in your people. I thank you that you do not lack the resources to help me and your people to grow. Please help us to use the gifts you have given us to your glory for the building up of your people as we wait for Jesus' return. Amen

READ: 1 Corinthians 1:7-9

...you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. **8** He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you will be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. **9** God is faithful; you were called by him into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

REFLECT: Don't you love it when workmen finish the job you asked them to do. A half finished job is so dissatisfying.

- What does Paul say about God's work begun in the Corinthian Christians lives?

God takes great interest in his Church and in all of his children. God calls people into relationship with himself and continues to work in us, he doesn't abandon us along the way. Rather he strengthens us so that we might be ready for Jesus' return. This is so reassuring. I find it reassuring that he will work amongst us at St Peter's and he will continue to work in my life.

Paul had the confidence that although the Church in Corinth had so many problems, they would grow and be strengthened. One of the ways God was going to do that is through the apostle Paul informing them in his letter of what it means to grow. Since this letter is written, not simply to the Corinthian Christians, but to all Christians everywhere, you too can have the confidence that God will help you to grow as you meditate on this letter and ask God to work in your life.

PRAY: Heavenly Father I thank you for your faithfulness, that you are like a workman that finishes completely the job you have started. Please help me Father, as I meditate on what you have to say in this letter to be strengthened in my walk with you to your glory. Help us all at St Peter's to grow in this way. Amen

Day 4

God's church IV

READ: 1 Corinthians 1:10

10 Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, that there be no divisions among you, and that you be united with the same understanding and the same conviction.

REFLECT: Unity and diversity. The incredible nature of God's creation is such that it is unified in diversity. Take for example the pinnacle of God's creation - humankind. We sense we should be united and one, not divided, yet at the same time we ought to uphold the incredible diversity in humanity, that each and every person is unique - we are not clones and don't want to be. This reflects God's nature, for he is one God who exists in the diversity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

- What does Paul urge the Corinthian Christians to do?
- What type of unity does Paul want?

God desires that the members of his Church are united in what they say, in what they understand and in their convictions. This is because there is one God who has one purpose and there is one Lord who works in all his Children by the one Spirit.

The Corinthian Church had a number of divisions which did not reflect God's character or purpose for them. We will reflect on that in the days to come.

- How important is unity in God's church? What type of unity is it?

PRAY: Heavenly Father when your Church is divided over matters that don't matter you are not magnified amongst us. I realise that our unity should not be at any cost but should be based in the truth of who you are and what you have revealed to us. Help me to play my part in living out the unity you have created in our Church family for your glory and honour. Amen

Day 5

God's church V

READ: 1 Corinthians 1:11-17

11 For it has been reported to me about you, my brothers and sisters, by members of Chloe's people, that there is rivalry among you. **12** What I am saying is this: One of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." **13** Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptised in Paul's name? **14** I thank God that I baptised none of you except Crispus and Gaius, **15** so that no one can say you were baptised in my name. **16** I did, in fact, baptise the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't recall if I baptised anyone else. **17** For Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the gospel—not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ will not be emptied of its effect.

REFLECT: Rivalry! Not a good thing in the Church of God. What is rivalry? It's competition and fighting over something so that it becomes yours and not that of your rival. Pride is often the attitude that promotes rivalry. Paul has been informed of a type of 'spiritual' rivalry that is going on in the Church in Corinth.

- How would you describe the problem?
- How might that manifest itself in the Church today?

Spiritual oneupmanship is an ugly reality that can be present amongst Christians. In the sporting world this often takes place. Friend will rib another friend over the wins or losses of the team they support. However in the Christian Church we are all on the same team. It is even possible to claim 'Christ' as the trump card to get the upper hand in proving who is more spiritual.

- How does Paul start to address this problem?

PRAY: Heavenly Father please remove the pride in my heart which can lead to spiritual rivalry. Amen

WEEK of 24th-28th May

Day 1

Power in God's Church I

READ:

1 Corinthians 1.17-19

17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ will not be emptied of its effect. 18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but it is the power of God to us who are being saved. 19 For it is written,

I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will set aside the intelligence of the intelligent.

REFLECT: In last week's meditations, we considered some of the problems that existed in the Corinthian Church. There were rivalries about which Christians to follow, who were the most influential, who perhaps therefore had the most power.

- Where is God's power to be found?
- What different responses does the gospel produce?

The Christians in the Church at Corinth were arguing about which Christian leader to follow. No doubt these arguments focussed around who had the most influence, who had the greatest power. Paul however directs the attention of the Corinthian Christians away from focussing on men and their gifts and draws their attention back to the gospel which is the power of God. The word of the cross is not impressive to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it has great power for it reveals to us God's character and how we can get right with him. Nothing else in God's universe has this power.

- If the message of the cross is the power of God for salvation, what implications does this have for us as Christians?

PRAY: Heavenly Father, men in their intelligence can never discover who you are or what you have done. Rather you have chosen to save those who come to the cross of Christ and trust in what you have done for us there. Please help me to trust in the power of your gospel. Amen

Day 2

Power in God's Church II

READ:

1 Corinthians 1.20-25

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the debater of this age? Hasn't God made the world's wisdom foolish? 21 For since, in God's wisdom, the world did not know God through wisdom, God was pleased to save those who believe through the foolishness of what is preached. 22 For the Jews ask for signs and the Greeks seek wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. 24 Yet to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God, 25 because God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

REFLECT: People are impressed by many things. People's success, their eloquence, their human wisdom, their wealth.

- What does human wisdom achieve in relation to God?
- In Paul's day, what impressed the Greeks (non-Jews)?
- What impressed the Jews?

Trusting in the message of a crucified man does, at one level, seem like foolishness. It does look like weakness to the world. However, that which is considered weak is actually God's power, that which seems pathetic and foolish is actually God's wisdom.

- If this is the case to what extent can human wisdom and power enhance the gospel message?

I hope you answered that question by saying that we can't enhance or add to God's power and wisdom. Rather as Christians our responsibility is to proclaim the gospel clearly for we can't add to its power.

PRAY: Heavenly Father, I thank you that your power and wisdom is hidden from those who are wise in their own eyes. Thank you that your wisdom and power far surpasses mine or that of any other human being. Please help me to trust in the power and wisdom of your gospel. Amen

Day 3

Power in God's Church III

READ:

1 Corinthians 1.26-29

26 Brothers and sisters, consider your calling: Not many were wise from a human perspective, not many powerful, not many of noble birth. 27 Instead, God has chosen what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen what is weak in the world to shame the strong. 28 God has chosen what is insignificant and despised in the world—what is viewed as nothing—to bring to nothing what is viewed as something, 29 so that no one may boast in his presence.

REFLECT: Think about the members of your Church family.

- Who are those who are powerful and influential in our world?
- Who are those who are experts in certain human fields?

I remember hearing a survey (wish I had it to hand) which revealed that amongst the scientists, doctorates, researchers there isn't a lower percentage of believers because of their intelligence. There isn't either a higher instance of believers either. This reveals that when God calls people it's not based on their intelligence or wisdom.

Paul could ask the Corinthian Christians to consider the makeup of their church family, it was the same. In fact a child who simply trusts in the Lord can shame an adult who refuses to believe. Paul says God has chosen those things of the world that are often overlooked and even despised to show that it is not human performance or cleverness that brings us into relationship with God. It is rather God who takes the initiative and saves those he chooses to. The result is that we should not boast in our cleverness, intelligence or be impressed by that of others, rather we should thank God that he has revealed himself to us in the gospel of his son.

PRAY: Heavenly Father, thank you that you do not choose according to human criteria, rather you choose people from all walks of life according to your mercy and grace. Please help me to remember that you have chosen me not because I was somehow impressive and would be a good asset to your kingdom. Rather you simply had mercy upon me. Help me to not boast in anything other than what you have done for me. Amen

Day 4

Power in God's Church IV

READ: 1 Corinthians 1.30-31

God has chosen what is insignificant and despised in the world—what is viewed as nothing—to bring to nothing what is viewed as something, 29 so that no one may boast in his presence. 30 It is from him that you are in Christ Jesus, who became wisdom from God for us—our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption— 31 in order that, as it is written: **Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.**

REFLECT: Boasting - it's a fairly common human trait. We are so good at this we even manage to boast while trying to appear humble - the 'humble brag'. On social media this is fairly well known. Someone might post: "I'm so humbled that so many of you follow my tweets. I hope they enrich your life. God bless all 300,000 of you!"

- What does Paul say about boasting in this passage?
- Why should we boast in the Lord?

Christians, if they are going to boast, ought to boast in the Lord. This is because we are God's children simply through what God has done for us. Paul says 'it is from him' that we are united to Christ and share in all the riches that go with being united to him. Because of God's kindness we know his wisdom - which is Christ himself. He is our righteousness - he allows us to stand before God without blame. He is our sanctification - we are set apart for God, holy in his sight through Christ. We are redeemed - bought back by God at a great price and now we belong to him. These are the reasons we ought to boast in the Lord and not ourselves.

PRAY: Heavenly Father, thank you for revealing to me your wisdom in Christ, for declaring me righteous in your sight, set apart for you, belonging to you. You know my tendency to want to boast in what I have done or what I have. Please help me to remove that pride and boast in you alone. Amen

READ: 1 Corinthians 2.1-5

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, announcing the mystery of God to you, I did not come with brilliance of speech or wisdom. **2** I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. **3** I came to you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. **4** My speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of wisdom but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, **5** so that your faith might not be based on human wisdom but on God's power.

REFLECT: Where does God's power reside? Sometimes that which might seem lowly and insignificant can be that which has the most power. When you consider the health of societies and nations, we might be tempted to think the power for good health largely resides in the medical system of trained professionals - hospitals, doctors, nurses and more. Yet you could argue that those who work to provide us with clean water and good sewerage systems contribute more to the health of a society than the number of hospitals or doctors we have. It's initially counter intuitive but makes sense when you think about it. So where is God's power to be seen? Consider the passage:

- Paul came to the Corinthians with God's powerful message of salvation, yet how did he come to them?
- What did Paul rely upon for God to do his work?

As human beings we are often impressed by the externals. The impressive foyer to a large company, the large private yacht, the clothes that people wear and the confidence and power they exude. Yet it seems that God's extraordinary life changing power doesn't come clothed like this, in impressive 'human dress'. In fact the great apostle Paul felt weak, inadequate in himself and came to the Corinthians with fear. Yet he believed in the power of the gospel message and it changed these people's lives.

There is both a comfort and a challenge here for us. The comfort is that the power to save people doesn't reside in how 'with it' we are, or how 'impressive' by worldly standards we are. The power to save resides in the message of the truth of the Lord Jesus faithfully proclaimed. The challenge for us is to see things from God's perspective and not be ashamed of the gospel. On this subject of impressive power, it may seem very impressive to have miracles like someone blind being given sight or even a dead person raised back to life, yet the most incredible miracle God does is largely hidden from the human eye. He changes people's hearts, he takes those who were dead spiritually and makes them alive. From an external human perspective this might seem like nothing, from spiritual perspective this is the greatest miracle that can ever happen.

PRAY: Heavenly Father thank you that the power for salvation does not reside in 'human impressiveness' but in you. Thank you that you saved me, not through an impressive display of power from the heavens, but through the message of the cross. Please help me to trust in the power of the gospel and use me in my weakness to bring glory to your name. Amen

WEEK of 31st May-4th June

Day 1

Wisdom in God's church I

READ: 1 Corinthians 2.6-7

6 We do, however, speak a wisdom among the mature, but not a wisdom of this age, or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.

7 On the contrary, we speak God's hidden wisdom in a mystery, a wisdom God predestined before the ages for our glory.

REFLECT: "God's foolishness is wiser than men" wrote Paul in chapter 1. Let's reflect on human wisdom a little bit. Human rulers are constantly in search of 'wisdom'. In our modern day they rely on advisors who come from different fields. Politicians refer to polling companies, rulers ask the advice of experts and researchers in different fields (military, medical, financial and more). They do this for various reasons, from the most altruistic - for the betterment of a nation - to the self centred - how to remain in power. However all this wisdom, in the grand scheme of things, heads no where for those rulers and those they rule all pass away. God's wisdom goes beyond this life.

- What does Paul say about wisdom in this passage?
- What does Paul claim he speaks?

God has a wisdom that can be known which is greater than man's wisdom. It is a wisdom that can be received and understood. Paul says people (Christians) who are 'mature' can receive it. What does Paul mean by the 'mature'? He is not referring to some Christians who have special insight and others who don't. He is not referring to some Christians who have the Spirit and some who don't (See 1 Cor 3.16). Rather he is challenging the Corinthian Christians who are spiritual and have spiritual wisdom but who are looking at things from a worldly point of view. He is exhorting them to come back to God's wisdom which is found in Christ. In other words he is taking their pursuit of wisdom and seeking to get them to pursue the wisdom which really matters, that which comes from God. We'll keep reflecting on this in the days to come.

PRAY: Thank you heavenly Father that you have revealed to me a wisdom in Christ which does not come from the so called 'intelligent' people of this world. It comes from you and is found in Christ. Please help me to know him better as my wisdom. Amen

Day 2

Wisdom in God's church II

READ: 1 Corinthians 2.7-8

7 ... we speak God's hidden wisdom in a mystery, a wisdom God predestined before the ages for our glory.

None of the rulers of this age knew this wisdom, because if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

REFLECT: Yesterday we were thinking about the Corinthian Christians and their pursuit of wisdom. Their pursuit was misguided because they were still worldly and thinking in worldly terms. God's wisdom was once hidden and has now been revealed to those who have received God's Holy Spirit. God's wisdom can't be known without God working in the heart and mind of a person. Consider the passage on the left:

- What did the rulers during Jesus' earthly ministry do?
- If they had known God's wisdom what would they have done?

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The rulers of this age, Paul says, crucified the Lord of glory. The rulers Paul is talking about are both Jewish and Gentile. Herod, Pilate, the teachers of the law, the Saducees, the Pharisees and the members of the Sanhedrin all came to a common mind that Jesus needed to be removed. In their collective worldly 'wisdom' they ended up killing the author of life, the very one who gave them breath and all good things.

God's wisdom therefore is to be found in Christ and God's purposes in Christ. Anyone who rejects Jesus, rejects God's wisdom. To reject God's wisdom is to not be part of the 'intelligentsia' but to be foolish.

PRAY: Heavenly Father your wisdom is to be found in your purposes that find fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. Please help me to know him better and what you have done for me through him, that I might know your wisdom and point others to what you have done. Amen

READ: 1 Corinthians 2.9-11

But as it is written,

What no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no human heart has conceived— God has prepared these things for those who love him.

10 Now God has revealed these things to us by the Spirit, since the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

11 For who knows a person's thoughts except his spirit within him? In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

REFLECT: To know another person requires that person to reveal themselves to you. Of course you can know someone through their behaviour, whether they are trustworthy, faithful, kind, gentle and more, all these characteristics will be seen in their actions. Yet to really know them, they need to reveal to you why they do those things. The actions themselves are an indication but true knowledge of that person comes when they let you know what they think, when they speak to you and communicate. This is something a person generally has control over. You will know the expression, he/she is very hard to get to know! A person who is reluctant to share their thoughts and feelings is indeed hard to know. In knowing God this is also true. We can only truly know him if he chooses to reveal himself to us. No amount of human wisdom or intelligence will ever enable us to know God. We are dependant on him choosing to reveal himself to us.

- What does Paul say about God here?
- What does the Spirit of God do?

Here we see one of the key roles of the Holy Spirit. He knows God intimately and fully. He also reveals to us who God is and what God is doing and why. What an extraordinary thing this is to contemplate. Paul wrote elsewhere: *"God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ."*

If you have come to trust in Jesus as your Lord and saviour, it is because God in his kindness has revealed himself to you by his Spirit.

PRAY: Thank you heavenly Father for your kindness to me, for you have revealed who you are and your purposes in the world to me. You have done this, not because I deserve to know you, but you have loved me and despite my sin, you have called me to yourself. Amen

READ: 1 Corinthians 2.12-13

12 Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who comes from God, so that we may understand what has been freely given to us by God. **13** We also speak these things, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people.

REFLECT: If you have ever tried to share the gospel of God's grace, you may have experienced some people's inability to understand what you are talking about. You may clearly say, "it is only by God's generosity that we are saved, it has nothing to do with what we do or how good we are, we have to simply rely on what God has done for us in Christ." Having explained things as simply and clearly as possible the unspiritual person will still respond, "Yes as long as I try to do good, I'll be okay!". It's like you are speaking a foreign language to them which they don't understand.

- What does Paul say about the Spirit here?
- Who can receive what Paul teaches?

It is only people who have God's Spirit, who are 'spiritual people', who can understand what Paul is saying. This is true of all the scriptures. They are inspired by the Spirit and it is only the 'spiritual person' who understands them.

A mark of someone who is truly 'spiritual' is their attitude to the scriptures (and to Paul's writings which are scripture). Often people will say that the Bible didn't mean much to them before they were converted. They describe reading the Bible as dry words which had little impact on them. But when they came to know Christ and what God has done for them in him, all of a sudden the scriptures became alive to them. That which seemed dry and dead becomes nourishment and life. Truly spiritual people will testify to the vital life giving role the scriptures play in their life. This is something that is beyond human wisdom and only comes from God by his Spirit.

PRAY: Thank you heavenly Father for giving me the gift of your Spirit. Your word has come alive to me and nourishes and guides me. I ask you to please work in the heart of _____ (*put in the name of one person you know who doesn't know Christ yet*) that they might, in your kindness, be given your Spirit to understand what you have done for them in Christ. Please help them to become 'spiritual', a child of yours. Amen

Day 5	Wisdom in God's church V
<p>READ: 1 Corinthians 2.14-16</p> <p>14 But the person without the Spirit does not receive what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to understand it since it is evaluated spiritually.</p> <p>15 The spiritual person, however, can evaluate everything, and yet he himself cannot be evaluated by anyone.</p> <p>16 For</p> <p>who has known the Lord's mind, that he may instruct him?</p> <p>But we have the mind of Christ.</p>	<p>REFLECT: The world in its 'wisdom' is unable to understand God and what he does. This has become evident to me recently in conversation with a man who has come to Christ and been converted. He had a violent alcohol and drug fuelled past. The authorities put an AVO on him (apprehended violence order). Yet since the Lord has grabbed hold of him and revealed himself to him, he has radically changed. The violence has gone, his dependence on drugs and alcohol has been removed, his relationships are being restored. Understandably the government may not remove the black mark against his name and give him a second chance as a transformed person in society. This is because the authorities don't know or understand the power of God to change someone's life. They aren't always able to evaluate these things because they are spiritually discerned.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you find striking from the passage for today? • Why do you think the 'spiritual person' can evaluate everything, yet is not subject to other people's evaluation? <p>If it is true that God created all things, sustains all things and has revealed himself to us in Christ - it stands to reason that to not know this would be a huge handicap in evaluating what is going on in the universe. An unspiritual person may be able to discern and evaluate many things, but the most fundamental aspect of reality will escape them and their evaluation of life will be affected - radically!</p> <p>PRAY: Thank you heavenly Father that at the end of the day, it is not other people who will evaluate me but you yourself. I know that I am a sinner, underserving of your love and not worthy to be in your presence or partake in your kingdom, yet in your grace towards me, by bringing me to trust in Christ, you have made me your dearly loved child. No-one can take this status I have before you away. No scheme of man, no power of hell can ever remove me from your hand. Please help me to see the world you have made through the clear lens of your will revealed to me by your Spirit in your word. Help me to evaluate things the way you see them, that I might live to your glory. Amen</p>

WEEK of 7th-11th June

Day 1	Leadership in God's church I
<p>READ: 1 Corinthians 3.1-4</p> <p>But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, 3 for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? 4 For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human?</p>	<p>REFLECT: Today we consider the seeming paradox in the life of the Corinthian Christians. They are 'spiritual people' in the sense that they have come to know Christ, they are saved and have received God's Holy Spirit, they are set apart for him - yet they are still, in their thoughts and behaviour, unspiritual!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why does Paul say he can't address them as spiritual? • What is the manifestation of their worldly attitudes? <p>The Corinthian Christians while having God's Spirit are not behaving in a way which is manifesting the work of the Spirit. The rivalry that is present amongst them is evidence of this.</p> <p>Continued on the following page...</p>

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It is not that from time to time they are slipping back into old habits, rather they are continually behaving as if they had never changed. Paul finds their behaviour completely inconsistent with the change that has taken place in their lives. Paul expects that someone who is converted will be controlled by God's Spirit even while they still struggle with the flesh. However it seems like the 'flesh' is winning the battle amongst the Christians in Corinth. They have the Spirit but they are not living in step with the Spirit.

- How are you seeking to keep in step with God's Spirit? How do you see the battle going on in your own life?

PRAY: Heavenly Father the struggle I have between the old nature and the new is ever present in my life. This is a comfort that your Spirit is at work in me. Please help me to keep in step with the Spirit and not to grieve him. Help me to change where you want me to, to your glory. Amen

READ: 1 Corinthians 3.3-9

For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? **4** For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human?

5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. **6** I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. **7** So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. **8** He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. **9** For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

REFLECT: The rivalry that was occurring amongst the Corinthian Church members was about Christian leadership - their rivalry however was totally unspiritual - simply human!

- How does Paul start to break down their ungodly attitudes?
- Where does Paul put the emphasis?

The Corinthian Christians seemed to be focussed on men and their different leadership styles and gifts. They were arguing about who was greater and who to follow. They were totally misguided in their approach because the beginning of the Church can't be attributed to men neither can its growth. God is behind it all and Paul, Apollos or any other Christian leader is simply a worker that God has put in place. They are servants established by God and their different ministry strengths are determined by God. The Corinthian Christians were in effect choosing one leader over another when they didn't need to do that. Paul says that he and Apollos are fellow workers. They are one, not divided, because the one God who grows and builds his Church is behind them both.

- When have you been tempted to follow one Christian worker over another Christian worker?
- What might help us resist the temptation to focus on the gifts of different leaders?

PRAY: Heavenly Father I thank you that you are the one who creates your Church and you are the one that makes it grow. I thank you Amen

Day 3

Leadership in God's church III

READ: 1 Corinthians 3.10-15

10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. **11** For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. **12** Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— **13** each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. **14** If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. **15** If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

REFLECT: Focussing on the different gifts of Christian leaders or other Christians can be detrimental for the growth of the Church.

- What is the foundation upon which the Church is built?
- What should Christian workers do?

The Corinthian Christians needed to build on the solid foundation of Jesus Christ, rather than focusing on men and their differing personalities and charisma.

The list of different materials - gold, silver and precious stones contrasted to wood, hay and straw - focusses the attention on the imperishable quality of some Christian work over the perishable quality of others. The Christian leader and worker needs to focus on that which is of lasting eternal value and not on that which is fleeting and fashionable for a time. The Corinthian Christians were in danger of building upon that which was passing, human and of this world. The day of judgement would reveal that nature of their ministry and therefore it is a challenge to them to consider the nature of their ministry so that it is based on that which lasts.

- How can Christians or Christian Churches build in a way which forgets that which is of eternal value?
- What do you think are the fundamental things we need to be focussed on in our Church life?

PRAY: Heavenly Father I thank you that you have laid the foundation for your Church. This passage makes me realise that we can build with an eye to eternal things or we can build in a worldly way. Please help us as your people to build in a way that focusses on Christ and to build according to what you tell us in your word. Help us to assess the fads and fashions that come and go in Church life. Help us to do that in the light of your word. Amen

Day 4

Leadership in God's church IV

READ: 1 Corinthians 3.16-17

16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? **17** If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

REFLECT: We protect things of great value. That might be expensive objects like precious jewels that we keep in vaults, or intellectual property that we protect with patent laws, or people we seek to protect in many and various ways. God's temple, his Church, is sacred ground for him that he seeks to protect.

- What does Paul say about God's people, the Church?
- How valuable is God's Church to him?

There were Christians, perhaps leaders, in the Corinthian Church who, because of their on going rivalry, were threatening the health of God's Church. Paul's words would have been a sharp reminder that God does not take it lightly when people mess around with his people. This is because the members of God's Church are precious to him, bought with the blood of Christ.

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This is both an encouragement to us and a warning. It is an encouragement that God values us greater. It is a warning to anyone who would take a role of responsibility or leadership in God's Church that they must do so realising they are dealing with a jealous God who will hold them to account for how they behave in his Church.

- How is the value that God has for his people reflected in your attitude and behaviour towards the members of God's Church at St Peter's?

PRAY: Heavenly Father I thank you for the great value you place on us as your people. I know this value comes from the fact that you gave up your Son for the sake of your body, the Church. Please help me to have your same attitude towards your people and to behave in a way that reflects the value you place on my brothers and sisters in Christ. Amen

READ: 1 Corinthians 3.18-23

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.

19 For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," **20** and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." **21** So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, **22** whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, **23** and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

REFLECT: Paul continues his discussion concerning the rivalry that was going on amongst the leaders in the Church in Corinth.

- What did some of the Christians need to do?
- What does God do to those who are wise in their own eyes?

To be wise by human standards with little or no regard for God is to set oneself up for a fall. God brings down those who exalt themselves and he raises up the humble. The futility of the Corinthians boasting in men is brought out in this section. In their boasting they sought to get the upper hand over their fellow Christians as if they were lacking something or needed to prove themselves. Paul undercuts this way of thinking for they had no need to prove themselves or get the upper hand since in Christ they had everything already.

PRAY: Thank you heavenly Father that I have everything by being in a relationship with Christ. Please help me to see that I don't have to prove myself or get the upper hand. Help me to rest in what you have given me freely in Christ, to serve you and boast in him. Amen

WEEK of 14th-18th June

Day 1	Faithfulness in God's church I
<p>READ: 1 Corinthians 4.1-2</p> <p>This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.</p> <p>2 Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.</p>	<p>REFLECT: Paul hasn't finished challenging the Corinthian Christians in their thinking about Christian leadership and who to follow. Paul now gets them to reflect on his ministry as an apostle of Christ. In doing this he helps them to understand the nature of Christian leadership which they have so wrongly understood.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How should people regard Paul?• What is required of those who are stewards? <p>When Paul describes himself as a 'servant' he means a helper in a subordinate capacity. In describing himself like this he is pointing to Christ as the one who is important. He says he is a 'steward' of the mysteries of God. Again the word 'steward' is like a manager or caretaker of someone else's estate. Paul therefore sees himself as answerable to the 'estate owner' again being Christ. The mysteries he has been given responsibility for concerns the gospel. The word mystery doesn't carry with it the idea of being 'mysterious', rather it is more like our word for secret. The gospel was once 'secret' and 'hidden' in ages past, pointed to in the Old Testament scriptures, but now it has been revealed by God through the Lord Jesus. Paul had the responsibility of making known the gospel of Christ known and he saw himself as answerable to Christ. His prime motivation was to be found faithful to Christ as his master.</p> <p>It is often said Christians have an audience of one in their ministry - namely Christ. Our goal in all our serving ought to be to please him.</p> <p>PRAY: Thank you heavenly Father for the example of Paul. Although many have called him the 'great apostle Paul' he would have probably shunned that title and preferred to see himself as your servant. Please help me to see myself in this light as one who seeks to be faithful to you and you alone. Amen</p>
Day 2	Faithfulness in God's church II
<p>READ: 1 Corinthians 4.1-5</p> <p>This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. 2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. 3 I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. 4 My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. 5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.</p>	<p>REFLECT: Paul had an 'audience of one' and this meant that he knew that there was only one person who would judge him at the end of the day. This gave him great freedom in regards to what others thought of him.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How does Paul respond to the opinion of others?• What does he exhort the Corinthian Christians to do? <p>As human beings we judge others all the time according to different standards - usually by what we deem to be good and right. Paul however knows that he will be judged by his Lord. As a result the judgement of others mattered little to him.</p> <p>Continued on the following page...</p>

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The Corinthian Christians may have been judging between different Christian leaders, their actions and motivations. Paul however says they should stop judging in this way. They do not know what is in the heart, only the Lord does and he will bring to light the motivations of each person. Each person then ought to be seeking the praise of God, not the praise of man.

- In what ways are you tempted to seek the praise of people over and above that of your Lord's?

PRAY: Heavenly Father I thank you for Paul's example, how he sought your praise. Please help me in my relationships with others to seek to please you first. Help me also to not judge the motivations of my fellow Christians for you are their judge. Amen

READ: 1 Corinthians 4.6-7

6 Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other. **7** For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

REFLECT: The Corinthian Christians, at least some of them, were proud of their wisdom and their gifts, so much so that they boasted in them and were proud of who they followed.

- How does Paul respond to their boasting?
- What is Paul's fundamental point in this section?

The problem with boasting is that you think you are somehow responsible for what you possess, that you have earned it or acquired it through your strength, wisdom or intelligence. However to know God is to realise everything we have has come from him. Someone for instance could boast in their ability to play the piano. They have worked hard over many years and built up great skill. Yet God could simply take that away in an instant through an accident. Upon reflection, and given that God made all things and sustains all things, a person who has acquired the skill to play the piano well needs to recognise that God gave that person their fingers, a place in life to learn the piano, gave them a family that nurtured that talent, gave them the finances to buy a piano, gave them the tenacity to keep practising, gave them the teachers they needed and the list goes on. To boast is to fail to recognise God who is behind it all.

The same goes for the Corinthian Christians who are boasting in their wisdom and this and that leader they are espousing. The reality is that everything they have comes from God as a gift. He has given it to them and so there is no room for boasting.

PRAY: Heavenly Father you know the pride that lurks in my heart and how I often want to boast in things I have or have done. Please help me to realise that everything I have comes from you. You gave it to me and you can just as easily take it away. Amen

Day 4

Faithfulness in God's church IV

READ: 1 Corinthians 4.8-13

8 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign—and that without us! How I wish that you really had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you! **9** For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings. **10** We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honoured, we are dishonoured! **11** To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. **12** We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; **13** when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment.

REFLECT: The Corinthian Christians thought they were pretty ‘hot stuff’ on the spiritual stage - erudite, informed, wise! They were ‘super Christians’ who could let other Christians know how to live. They could have gone on the world stage and let every other church know how to be like them! But Paul has a sobering rebuke to make to them. He contrasts his life with those of the Corinthian Christians to challenge their ‘spiritual’ arrogance.

- Who would you think has more stature: the apostle Paul or the Corinthian Christians?
- How does Paul describe his life as an apostle?

The Corinthians are boasting in their ‘spiritual’ prowess and Paul sharply contrasts that with how he is treated as an apostle of the Lord Jesus. As an apostle, Paul was set apart by the risen Christ, with a central role in God’s purposes, yet Paul’s life was one of constant hardship and rejection by the world. He sees himself as the ‘scum of the earth’, whereas the Corinthians see themselves as rich and ruling. There is obviously something going very wrong in the way the Corinthian Christians view themselves and the nature of Christian ministry and leadership in this world.

- How was Jesus treated by the world? How should we expect to be treated by the world if we bear his name?

PRAY: Heavenly Father to follow the Lord Jesus is to follow the way of the cross and of and suffering. Please help me to see the true nature of Christian ministry. Help me not to be impressed by ‘super Christians’ who seem to have it all together, Help me rather to depend on you in my weakness. Amen

Day 5

Faithfulness in God's church V

READ: 1 Corinthians 4.14-17

14 I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children. **15** Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. **16** Therefore I urge you to imitate me. **17** For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.

18 Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. **19** But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. **20** For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. **21** What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit?

REFLECT: Paul in challenging the the ‘spiritual’ pride of the Corinthian Christians is not seeking to shame them but to help them see the true nature of Christian ministry.

- How does Paul describe his relationship to them?
- Why does he appeal to them to imitate his way of life?

Paul was the man God used to preach the gospel to the Corinthians.

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Paul is the founder of this congregation under the Lord. In that way he can call them his 'spiritual children' and he is their father in the faith. If it wasn't God working through Paul they would not even exist as God's Church. From this basis Paul exhorts them to take his life as an example to follow, an example that he applies to every Christian Church.

PRAY: Heavenly Father I thank you that the power for salvation and the power from growth doesn't come from human cleverness it comes from you. Even in our weakness you use us. Please help me therefore to depend on you in all that I do, not on my supposed gifts or abilities but on your power. Amen

WEEK of 21st-25th June

Day 1

Judgement in God's church I

READ: 1 Corinthians 5.1-5

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate: A man is sleeping with his father's wife. 2 And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this? 3 For my part, even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. As one who is present with you in this way, I have already passed judgment in the name of our Lord Jesus on the one who has been doing this. 4 So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, 5 hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord.

REFLECT: The Corinthian Christians thought they were very 'spiritual people'. However they were tolerating behaviour amongst themselves that even pagans considered scandalous! They thought they were 'spiritual' but they were putting up with sin of a kind that non-Christians condemned.

- What seems to be the cause of the scandal amongst them?
- What does Paul find most scandalous about what is happening?

The exact details of the scandal are hard to pin down. Was the man sleeping with his mother or step-mother? Was his father alive or dead? We can't be sure. What seems clear is that this man claims to be a Christian, is a regular member of the congregation and is having sexual relations with this woman (either his mother or step-mother). This appears to be known to all in the congregation and it is scandalous to even non-Christians.

However, even if that behaviour is scandalous in and of itself, that is not what is most scandalous for Paul. The greater scandal is that the Corinthian Christians think it is ok and worse still they are proud! The Corinthian Christians are accommodating sin and saying in effect that sin is no big deal! What a denial of the gospel this is as Christ gave up his life for sin.

Paul says it is time for them to grieve, to mourn and then take action to cut off fellowship with this professing Christian who is doing this. The aim of this is two fold. The purity of the congregation and the salvation of the man concerned.

We'll need to think more about this tomorrow.

PRAY: Heavenly Father help us as your people to not tolerate on-going sin in our lives. Help us to have a spirit that repents and seeks your help to change. Help us in our community life to know how to remain pure and at the same time be concerned for the salvation of those who fall into sin. Amen

Day 2

Judgement in God's church II

READ: 1 Corinthians 5.1-5

4 When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus, and I am with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, **5** hand that one over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

6 Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little leaven leavens the whole batch of dough? **7** Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new unleavened batch, as indeed you are.

For Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed.

8 Therefore, let us observe the feast, not with old leaven or with the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth..

REFLECT: The Corinthian Christians were tolerating sin amongst themselves yet were proud of their supposed 'spiritual superiority'. Paul said they had to remove the brother who was acting in this scandalous way from their fellowship for the sake of the congregation and for his own salvation's sake as well.

- What do you think it means to be handed over to Satan?
- What is Paul's point about the leaven and old leaven?

The Church is where God's Spirit is present and active in a special way. You might remember that Paul reminded the Corinthian Christians that they were the temple of the Holy Spirit, God's home. The world is the realm of Satan, where he dwells and where he is active in the children of disobedience. To hand someone over to Satan really is a way of saying to the congregation members to stop having fellowship with him. Christians have often got the emphasis wrong from this passage in Church history. Rather than having a restorative purpose towards the sinner, the focus has often been on maintaining purity. However both need to be done otherwise we risk as Christians to become legalistic Pharisees. The desire to see the man who is banned from Christian fellowship restored must be maintained in prayer and expressed in ways which show that the congregation still cares for him. Wisdom is needed in situations like this.

The illustration of leaven is an interesting one. We'll meditate on that tomorrow.

PRAY: Heavenly Father help us to deal with open and public sin amongst us in a way that does condemn the sinner but has a restorative purpose. Please give us wisdom so that we don't compromise our purity as your people yet at the same time we don't fall into being like legalistic pharisees. Amen

Day 3

Judgement in God's church III

READ: 1 Corinthians 5.6-7

6 Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little leaven leavens the whole batch of dough? **7** Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new unleavened batch, as indeed you are.

For Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed.

8 Therefore, let us observe the feast, not with old leaven or with the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth..

REFLECT: The Corinthian Christians were tolerating sin amongst themselves and they needed to take action for their own sake and the sake of the persons involved.

- What does leaven do?
- How is Paul using the image of leaven in regards to what is going on amongst them?

A leaven is any one of a number of substances used in doughs that cause a foaming action that lightens and softens the mixture. By mixing flour and water and letting it ferment you can create 'leaven'. When you mix that into the dough it will cause it to rise over time. Jews once a year had a week where they ate only unleavened bread. This was to remember their rescue out of Egypt when they only had time to eat bread without leaven.

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They would also get rid of any 'old' leaven in the house, throwing it out. This was symbolic of leaving behind their old life of slavery and sin under Pharaoh and starting again, afresh in relationship with God. It was also to recognise that sin that isn't dealt with is like leaven, it can spread and affect the whole congregation.

For us as Christians, Jesus has died and by faith we have died to sin. We are in a new relationship with God as his people, therefore we are to get rid of the old ways of sin and not let it work like leaven amongst us.

- What sins is God challenging you to get rid of?

PRAY: Heavenly Father I thank you for the new life you have given us in Christ. Please help us to cast off the sin that hinders us and to live in sincerity and truth. Help us in our corporate life to spur each other on in this way, taking sin seriously for Christ's sake. Amen

Day 4

Judgement in God's church IV

READ: 1 Corinthians 5.9-10

9 I wrote to you in a letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. **10** I did not mean the immoral people of this world or the greedy and swindlers or idolaters; otherwise you would have to leave the world.

REFLECT: It has been a temptation in Christian communities all throughout Church history to withdraw from the world, to create a 'holy huddle' and minimise contact with those who don't yet know the Lord.

- What does Paul say to that temptation that Christians sometimes feel?

It is not possible for Christians to keep themselves free from association with sinners. The Lord Jesus left his Father's side, where there was no sin, to come and live amongst sinners. He was in the world but not of the world. He associated with sinners and was known for this. His purpose in this was that people would be saved. Paul had written to the Corinthian Christians previously in another letter (That letter has been lost). It appears that the Corinthians may have misunderstood what he meant when he exhorted them not to associate with 'immoral' people. It is important for us as Christians to maintain relationships with those who don't know the Lord yet. This will not always be easy as we will feel uncomfortable and won't always be able to join in the behaviour of those who don't know the Lord yet. Yet to be salt and light we need to work at developing friendships with those who need to know Christ, not to judge their behaviour but to point them to Christ who can save them.

- In what ways are you seeking to cultivate relationships with those who don't know the Lord yet? How is it that you can be 'in' the world but not 'of' the world?

PRAY: Heavenly Father I thank you that you sent the Lord Jesus amongst us. I know that he didn't come to call the 'righteous' but to save sinners. Please help me to love those who don't know you yet, not putting up barriers to the Gospel, but being willing to point people to Jesus and what he has done for them. Amen

READ: 1 Corinthians 5.9-13

9 I wrote to you in a letter not to associate with sexually immoral people.

10 I did not mean the immoral people of this world or the greedy and swindlers or idolaters; otherwise you would have to leave the world.

11 But actually, I wrote you not to associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister and is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or verbally abusive, a drunkard or a swindler. Do not even eat with such a person. **12** For what business is it of mine to judge outsiders? Don't you judge those who are inside? **13** God judges outsiders.

REFLECT:

Yesterday we were reminded that as Christians we are to be 'in' the world but not 'of' the world. In order that other people know the salvation that comes through Christ, we need to do all that is possible to help others hear about Jesus. To withdraw from the world is not to be Christlike for he came to call and save sinners, those who are immoral. As a result it is not our place as Christians to pronounce judgement on those outside of the Church. This is God's job. However in the Church family it is different.

- What does Paul say we must do within the Christian community?
- Why do you think we are to judge those on the inside?

Paul says it is not his business to judge this on the outside of the Church. That is a challenge for us as Christians! We need to be careful that we don't become like the Pharisees. However, when it comes to life within God's people, we are to judge. If someone claims to know Christ, but their life is clearly not in line with Christ's teaching, to love them we must speak to them to point out their sin. If they don't listen to us, we ought to take another Christian along to challenge them. If they don't listen to two Christians then the Church needs to get involved. If they refuse to listen to the wider body of Christians then we are to stop extending Christian fellowship to them. The aim of this is to see the person come to repentance and not face God's judgement. This is true love. To not challenge someone who bears the name of Christ when their behaviour is obviously contrary to the gospel is to jeopardise their salvation and the salvation of others.

PRAY: Heavenly Father I thank you that you sent the Lord Jesus amongst us. I know that he didn't come to call the 'righteous' but to save sinners. Help us also as your people to love each other when we sin so that we might repent when we need to.

Amen

WEEK of 21st-25th June

Day 1

Judgement in God's church VI

READ: 1 Corinthians 6.1-3

If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly (*unbelievers*) for judgement instead of before the Lord's people? **2** Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? **3** Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!

REFLECT: As you can see, the Church in Corinth had all sorts of problems and we are about to discover that there are more to come. What an extraordinary thing that Paul can call this congregation 'Holy', that they are 'saints' set apart for God and have God's Spirit dwelling in them as his temple. It shows us that while we are set apart for God we can still have many things we need to work on with his help.

- What other problems were going on in this congregation?
- What does Paul want them to do?

Can you imagine a brother or sister in Christ, a member of the congregation you attend, taking you to court or trying to sue you? What effect do you think this might have within the congregation? What effect might it have to the outsider who was interested in joining?

The reality of life is that there will be disputes amongst brothers and sisters in Christ. A congregation member might lend a car to another Church member and it is returned dented. Someone might employ another Christian in Church for financial advice and that person loses their money in a bad investment. Somebody might engage another congregation member to do some renovations but the work is not completed satisfactorily. Disputes can arise. The temptation to sort it out in the courts may be present. It appears that this is what some of the Corinthian Christians were doing. They were taking their church family disputes to the secular courts.

Paul however challenges this mindset. He says, "don't you realise that as Christians you will be involved in the judgement of the world". Christians will even partake in judging angels. Extraordinary thought!

It appears that Paul thinks that the members of the local congregation are competent to sort out disputes amongst themselves. I wonder what this might mean and look like for us as a Church family.

We will continue to reflect on this tomorrow.

- Have you ever been in a dispute with a fellow Christian/congregation member? How was it dealt with?

PRAY: Heavenly Father it is an extraordinary thought to realise we will be involved in the judgement of the world and angels. No doubt this is because all judgement needs to take into account Christ, who he is and what he has done. Please help us in our Church life to deal with disputes that arise amongst us in ways that honour you and promote justice and love. Amen

READ: 1 Corinthians 6.4-8

4 Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, do you ask for a ruling from those whose way of life is scorned in the church? **5** I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers?

6 But instead, one brother takes another to court—and this in front of unbelievers!

7 The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? **8** Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers and sisters.

REFLECT: Paul wants us to deal with disputes in our Church family understanding that we are family. It is very sad really when in the secular world family members take each other to court. It shows that the unity of the family has broken down.

- What does Paul say about disputes amongst believers in this section?
- What would Paul rather the offended parties do?

Being wronged by a brother or sister in Christ can be a very hard thing to deal with. People sometimes leave congregations over a dispute or personal difference with another member. The result is that the whole body suffers.

In Matthew 18 Jesus speaks about how to deal with someone who has sinned against you, he says:

15 *“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. 16 But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ 17 If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.*

18 *“Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven*

19 *“Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”*

This teaching of Jesus impacts what Paul is saying to the Corinthian Christians. When a dispute arises and the two people involved can't sort it out, other brothers and sisters in Christ can be brought in to help resolve what is going on. There is a process involved that seeks to reduce the escalation of the issue too quickly and which seeks to protect the parties involved. The process that Jesus outlines also indicates that he believes that Christians are competent to redress wrongs amongst themselves. Jesus doesn't recommend going to the secular courts (and Paul follows his teaching).

Underlying Paul's teaching is how we deal with injustice in this world, how we deal with our rights and how we react when another Christian wrongs us. The Christian who follows the Lord Jesus will sometimes accept to be wronged rather than demanding that his or her rights are met.

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This is very hard to do. However when the unity of the Church or our Christian witness is compromised sometimes Christians will not demand reparation. All sorts of issues such as trust, reconciliation and how Christian fellowship can be meaningfully maintained when the wrong isn't put right are raised. When the wrong that has been done is of a criminal nature or could jeopardise the safety of others then the secular authorities must be involved. We mustn't apply this passage to people who are suffering abuse or domestic violence as we have a responsibility to protect and keep safe those who are vulnerable. Yet with these caveats aside, sometimes, Christians will decide to turn the other cheek. This is part of the gospel message. This is what Jesus did. Aren't you glad that Jesus accepted to be wronged and not stand up for his rights? In accepting to be wronged this is how you have been saved.

In the Christian congregation, sometimes Christians will choose, for the sake of another and our Christian witness to let go of a matter, to accept the injustice, to not stand on their rights because there are bigger issues at stake.

- How are you going in dealing with someone in Church who has wronged you? How do you think Jesus wants you to react?

PRAY: Heavenly Father I thank you that the Lord Jesus accepted to be wronged for my sake. He didn't stand on his rights or demand reparation, rather he turned the other cheek so that I might be saved. Please help me to be like him, to not have an attitude of retribution, but rather when I am wronged to react like him. Amen

**READ: 1
Corinthians 6.9-10**

9 Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men **10** nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

REFLECT: Some in the Corinthian Church were wronging others by their actions and others who were wronged had to deal with this injustice in a godly way. Paul now turns to address those who do wrong. It is a common human trait to lower the bar of God's standards in a hope that we might somehow slip into God's kingdom. As Christians we can be tempted to follow the world and lower the standard of what God requires. Paul says this doesn't change God's standards. We must not be deceived about this.

- What does Paul say will ban people from God's kingdom?
- Is there a hierarchy in the list Paul gives?
- Why do you think he has chosen this list? Why isn't murder for instance in there?

The first thing Paul underlines is that God's standards of wrong doing haven't changed. Our society's standards or even our own standards might change, but not God's. The second thing to note is that there isn't a hierarchy in the list. They are all wrong in God's sight. In our modern world sexual immorality, (except sexual practices towards minors or children), is largely accepted. Greed is often promoted and gossip or slander is seen as a small thing. However God sees them all as wrong and they will shut someone out from being part of his kingdom.

The big challenge is: How can anyone enter God's Kingdom? Either we have done some of those things in the past or we still struggle with them. We'll think about that tomorrow.

PRAY: Heavenly Father please help me to not be deceived. Help me to uphold your standards for your glory. Amen

Day 4

Judgement in God's church VIII

READ: 1 Corinthians 6.9-11

9...do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men **10** nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. **11** And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

REFLECT: Yesterday we considered how God's standards haven't changed. He will judge all people according to his standards, not by ours or the world's. We also asked ourselves the question: "How can anyone enter God's Kingdom?" Read the passage again with verse 11 attached.

- Why could the Corinthian Christians enter God's kingdom?
- Yesterday we asked why Paul chose the list he did and left out things like murder. Do you have any further idea of why he might have done this?

The scatter gun list of wrong doing that Paul gives probably has to do with the people who were in the Corinthian Church. There were in their number former adulterers, people who had practiced homosexuality, thieves and more. Yet the Lord had changed them. That is what they *were*! What a remarkable thing had happened. They were no longer defined by what they had done in the past. Rather they have been washed - their sins purified, they have been sanctified - set apart for God, they have been justified - declared by God to be right in his sight. This had happened through Jesus and the work of God's Spirit in their lives.

It is also true of us at St Peter's. We all have done wrong, none of us has lived up to God's standards, yet through faith in Christ we have a new life and our relationship with God is restored. This ought to motivate us to put away all wrong doing in our lives.

PRAY: Dear heavenly Father, thank you for having washed me, set me apart for yourself and declared me right in your sight. please help me to put off all wrong doing and to live a life that brings your glory. Amen

Day 5

Judgement in God's church X

READ: 1 Corinthians 6.11

But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

REFLECT: To finish this series let's reflect a little more on what you are in Christ.

- How do you see yourself before God?
- How does God see you?

In the Old Testament holiness was a really important thing. "The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.'" (Leviticus 19.1) To be holy means to be set apart for a special purpose. God's people therefore were to be different to the world so that they might reflect who God is. However God's people of old were incapable, in and of themselves, to live in a way that expressed this holiness. Despite having God's holy laws and his prophets, they lived lives that weren't any different to the nations around them. They were full of sin and needed washing, they were guilty before God for having broken his good laws and they faced his judgement.

I wonder whether God in his purposes gave us the Israelite nation to show us that law keeping is not the way of being holy in God's sight. We can't and won't achieve it through trying to obey the 10 commandments. It was unattainable for the Israelites and will be unattainable for us. That is why need the Lord Jesus, our only hope of being washed, sanctified and justified. If you have trusted in Jesus you are all of those things Paul talks about in verse 11.

PRAY: Dear heavenly Father, that what the Israelites and myself couldn't do, you have done for me in Christ. Help me to trust in him alone. Amen