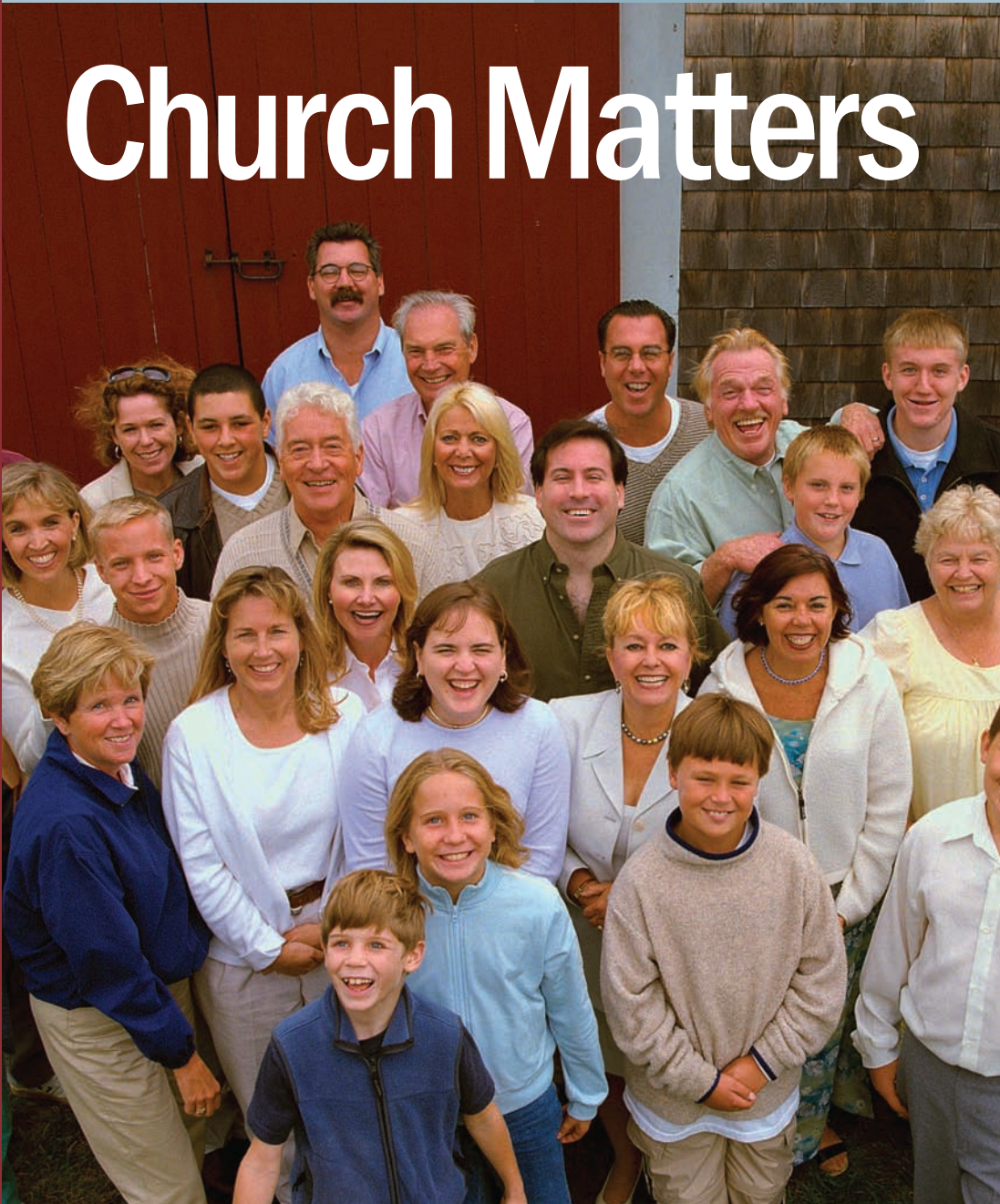




PATHWAY BIBLE GUIDES

1 CORINTHIANS 1-7

Church Matters





PATHWAY BIBLE GUIDES

Church Matters

1 CORINTHIANS 1-7

BY BRYSON SMITH



matthiasmedia

Church Matters

Pathway Bible Guides: 1 Corinthians 1-7

© Matthias Media 2006

Matthias Media

(St Matthias Press Ltd. ACN 067 558 365)

PO Box 225

Kingsford NSW 2032

Australia

Telephone: (02) 9663 1478; international: +61-2-9663-1478

Facsimile: (02) 9663 3265; international: +61-2-9663-3265

Email: info@matthiasmedia.com.au

Internet: www.matthiasmedia.com.au

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ISBN 1 921068 52 3

All rights reserved. Except as may be permitted by the Copyright Act, no part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means without prior permission from the publisher.

Cover design and typesetting by Lankshear Design Pty Ltd.

CONTENTS

Before you begin	5
1: God's church (1 Corinthians 1:1-17)	7
2: Power in God's church (1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5)	11
3: Wisdom in God's church (1 Corinthians 2:6-16)	15
4: Leadership in God's church (1 Corinthians 3)	19
5: Faithfulness in God's church (1 Corinthians 4)	23
6: Judgement in God's church (1 Corinthians 5:1-6:8)	27
7: Purity in God's church (1 Corinthians 6:9-20)	31
8: Godliness in God's church (1 Corinthians 7)	35
For the leader	39

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Church can evoke different feelings for different people. For some, church is boring, stifling and full of awkward people. For others, church is wonderful; they can't wait to jump out of bed on a Sunday to be with their church family.

Whatever we may feel about church, it's important that our behaviour and attitudes are shaped by the way God feels about church. 1 Corinthians is a very helpful book because it shows us how precious church is to God and therefore how we should treat it with great care.

At one level, it's a bit strange to be looking at this subject in 1 Corinthians because out of all the first-century churches mentioned in the New Testament, you'd be hard-pressed to find one as troubled as the church at Corinth. It was fractured by factions and divisions. It suffered from elitism and open hostility, with members taking each other to court. The rich looked down on the poor and ignored their needs. People were indulging in sexual immorality, with one congregation member having sex with his stepmother without qualms. There were those who were getting drunk at church meals. There were those who were bickering over spiritual gifts in the church. During meetings, prophets would leap up with a 'word from the Lord' while others would leap up to speak in tongues, much to the irritation of those who weren't into those sort of things. In addition, even though Paul was the founder of their church

(Acts 18), the Corinthians didn't seem to think much of him and his 'foolish' message!

Yet despite their flaws and difficulties, Paul still described the church at Corinth as precious and blessed, for it was no less than the church of God (1:2). The Corinthian Christians have been cleansed, sanctified and justified, enriched with the blessings of God's grace, endowed with every spiritual gift and brought into the fellowship of Jesus Christ. Their new identity as God's people could not help but change the way they relate to one another and the world—particularly as they gathered together before God.

Is this how you view yourself? Is this how you view your church?

In these studies, we'll work through the first seven chapters of 1 Corinthians and take a closer look at all the different 'church matters' that Paul raises with the congregation he fathered. It is my prayer that as you learn more about how God views his church, you will grow in your appreciation of what it means to be part of it, and in turn understand how it is to be valued. For church really does matter!

Bryson Smith

June 2006

1. GOD'S CHURCH

1 Corinthians 1:1-17



Getting started

What thoughts, feelings and/or images does the word 'church' produce in you? Why?



Light from the Word

Read I Corinthians 1:1-9.

1. Who is this letter written to? Who is it from? How are they each described in verses 1-2?

2. List all the things that God has done for the Corinthian church (vv. 4-9).

3. Do you think these things are true of every church? If so, to what extent?

Read I Corinthians 1:10-12.

4. What problem does Paul describe here?

5. How do you think this problem may have arisen?

6. Do you think this can still be a problem in churches today?

Read I Corinthians 1:13-17.

7. What seems to be Paul's main point in these verses?

8. What effect do you think this should have on the divisions and quarrelling in the church?

9. In verses 4-9, Paul reminds the church of the abundant blessings they have in Christ. What effect do you think this should have on the divisions and quarrelling in the church?

10. In the coming studies, we will see that the Corinthian church had lots of problems. Why do you think Paul chose this particular problem to tackle first?



To finish

Compare your 'Getting started' answer to your answer for Question 2. Are there any attitudes or behaviours towards your own church that you need to change?



Give thanks and pray

Give thanks for the church family which you are a part of. Ask God to protect your church from quarrelling and destructive gossip.

LEADER'S NOTES

1. GOD'S CHURCH

1 Corinthians 1:1-17

► Remember: 60/40/20



Getting started

Hopefully the opening 'Getting started' question will prompt people to consider their own attitudes to church. This should provide a good jumping-off point into the study as we don't have to go far into 1 Corinthians before we discover some pretty remarkable truths about what the church means to God, and therefore what church should mean to us.

Studying the passage

At first glance, Paul's opening to 1 Corinthians is nothing out of the ordinary. There is the standard identification of who is writing (v. 1) and who the letter is going to (v. 2). There is also Paul's characteristic way of defining everyone (including himself) in terms of Jesus Christ (question 1).

However, what makes Paul's opening quite extraordinary is the way he describes the church at Corinth. At one level, the church is a mess—plagued with divisiveness, quarrelling, elitism, hostility, inequality, sexual immorality, debauchery and confusion. Yet despite all these difficulties, Paul still describes it as precious and blessed. Question 2 should help highlight the fact that, among other things, the Corinthians have been sanctified and are called to be saints (v. 2), they have been enriched in every way (v. 5), they do not lack any spiritual gift (v. 7) and they have been called into fellowship with Jesus Christ (v. 9). These are remarkable affirmations, given the problems which exist in the church. It shows that despite its imperfections, the church at Corinth—the church of God—is still precious and blessed (v. 2).

Because the church is so precious to God, Paul doesn't waste any time before

addressing some of its difficulties. The first issue that Paul decides to tackle in the letter is the problem of factions: the way that certain pressure groups have developed around personalities (vv. 11-12).

Paul states that he has heard that factions have developed around himself, Apollos, Cephas and even Christ (v. 12). He does not say that any of these men have fostered such factions; certainly Paul himself hasn't! Nor does he explain what it was about these people that caused others to gather around them. But we can hazard a pretty good guess as to the reason (question 5). Paul's following was perhaps bolstered by the fact that he was the founder of the church; he was the first one to evangelize the city and loyalty to him may well have developed because of that (Acts 18). Apollos, who came to Corinth and taught after Paul, was a very gifted speaker who had brought with him a strong Greek influence, for he was very learned in Greek philosophy (Acts 18:24ff). 'Cephas' is the Apostle Peter's Aramaic name, and the use of it here may be an indication that Peter's Jewishness had attracted a following. And then there was the Christ party—a group of people who may have been tired of all the other groups and who may have smugly said something along the lines of, "Look, we belong to Jesus, not any human teacher". Technically this was a good thing to say but it was probably said in a superior, divisive, competitive way.

Whatever the precise details, the church was split into sections. What had started as an inclination towards a personal preference had now deepened into judgementalism and factionalism. The battle lines were now drawn.

So how does Paul respond to this? His response extends right through into chapter 4 (Study 5) but in this study, we should be able to grasp two important points. Firstly, Paul reminding the church of their abundance in Christ (vv. 4-9) will, no doubt, help them to put their divisiveness into perspective (question 9). If, through Christ, the church already has every single thing God considers valuable, why split the church over trivial issues of ministry style?

Secondly, after acknowledging the existence of unseemly factions in the church, Paul immediately points the Corinthians to the fact that they share a common saviour (vv. 13-17; questions 7 and 8). Christ was crucified for them and they were baptized into his name. Divisiveness in a church family should therefore be smothered on the basis of the solidarity we share in following Christ.

There may be several reasons why Paul chooses to pick this problem as the first one he deals with (question 10). Perhaps he wants to clear the matter up quickly because his own name is implicated (v. 12). Maybe he perceives that

there is no threat to God's church more serious than that of leadership squabbles. More likely, though, Paul targets this issue first because the matter highlights a serious flaw in the Corinthians' understanding of the gospel. (This will be drawn out further in Studies 2 and 3.)



To finish

Some time ago, I noticed a story on the news about the auction of one of John Lennon's guitars. It sold for a huge amount of money. I found this curious because the guitar looked as if it had been knocked around a lot. It was covered in scratches and dents. Yet despite its imperfections, it was precious because of the one it had belonged to.

How much more is this true of the church of God?

The church at Corinth certainly seems to have been knocked around a lot. It has lots and lots of problems. Yet despite its imperfections, it is the church of God in Corinth, and therefore it is precious beyond imagination and ought to be treated as such. Indeed, every church should be.