



Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

18-23 January 2021

INTRODUCTION

This week we continue with readings from Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. As usual the Thoughts will be based principally on the text in bold type.

MONDAY - 1 Corinthians 6:1-11

¹ When any of you has a grievance against another, do you dare to take it to court before the unrighteous, instead of taking it before the saints? ² Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? ³ Do you not know that we are to judge angels—to say nothing of ordinary matters? ⁴ If you have ordinary cases, then, do you appoint as judges those who have no standing in the church? ⁵ I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to decide between one believer and another, ⁶ but a believer goes to court against a believer—and before unbelievers at that?

⁷ In fact, to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? ⁸ But you yourselves wrong and defraud—and believers at that.

⁹ Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, ¹⁰ thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. **¹¹ And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.**

Thought for the day

In most societies it's unusual for family members to take one another to court (nowadays usually only when there are gargantuan amounts of money at stake). Paul extends this aspect of family life to the church community. Because the community of Christians is so special, they ought to be able to sort out their own differences without airing them in public. This attitude later became an important principle in monastic life. Paul goes even further, writing that it's better to accept wrongs than to enforce rights (v7). Not that he endorses wrongdoing in itself (v9-10), but reminds his readers what they were like before they were washed (ie baptised), made holy and put right with God through their faith in Jesus (v11). It's clear that many of today's churches are no better at resolving disputes than the Corinthians were. What might Paul's attitude be to that?

TUESDAY - 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

¹² 'All things are lawful for me', but not all things are beneficial. 'All things are lawful for me', but I will not be dominated by anything. ¹³ 'Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food', and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, 'The two shall be one flesh.' ¹⁷ But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. ¹⁸ Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. **¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰ For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.**

Thought for the day

It's a seductive but dangerous fallacy to think that, because we know that through Jesus God will always forgive us our sins, we can do what we like (v12). Corinth was a notoriously licentious city and Paul addresses himself to the implications of this mistaken attitude towards sexual behaviour. As always he sees what we do with our bodies as affecting our relationship with God (v13). He uses the temple imagery again not, as in 3:13, in relation to the church community, but in relation to each Christian's own body (v19-20). What are the implications of this metaphor for our own perceptions and behaviour?

WEDNESDAY - 1 Corinthians 7:1-24

¹ Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: 'It is well for a man not to touch a woman.'

² But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. ³ The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴ For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. ⁵ Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. ⁶ This I say by way of concession, not of command. ⁷ I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind.

⁸ To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. ⁹ But if they are not practising self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion.

¹⁰ To the married I give this command—not I but the Lord—that the wife should not separate from her husband ¹¹ (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife.

¹² To the rest I say—I and not the Lord—that if any believer has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. ¹³ And if any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. ¹⁴ For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. ¹⁵ But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. It is to peace that God has called you. ¹⁶ Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife.

¹⁷ However that may be, let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you. This is my rule in all the churches. ¹⁸ Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision. ¹⁹ Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but obeying the commandments of God is everything. ²⁰ Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called.

²¹ Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it. Even if you can gain your freedom, make use of your present condition now more than ever. ²² For whoever was called in the Lord as a slave is a freed person belonging to the Lord, just as whoever was free when called is a slave of Christ. ²³ You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters. ²⁴ In whatever condition you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God.

Thought for the day

Paul's attitude to gender relationships is often used to support ideas of male superiority, as we'll see later in this letter. But in this passage what's noticeable is how even-handed his comments are - there is no different rule for men and women (see for example v2,3,4). Notice also how scrupulous Paul is in distinguishing what he regards as God-given instruction (v10) from his own (v12). In fact v12-16 is not only pastorally sensitive but suggests an openness to God working through existing relationships rather than letting one spouse's new faith cause sadness and heartache. This attitude of generosity, reflecting God's, is not always seen in the church, then or now.

THURSDAY - 1 Corinthians 7:25-40

²⁵ Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. ²⁶ I think that, in view of the impending crisis, it is well for you to remain as you are. ²⁷ Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. ²⁸ But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a virgin marries, she does not sin. Yet those who marry will experience distress in this life, and I would spare you that. ²⁹ I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, ³⁰ and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, ³¹ and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

³² I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; ³³ but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, ³⁴ and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband. ³⁵ I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord.

³⁶ If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly towards his fiancée, if his passions are strong, and so it has to be, let him marry as he wishes; it is no sin. Let them marry. ³⁷ But if someone stands firm in his resolve, being under no necessity but having his own desire under control, and has determined in his own mind to keep her as his fiancée, he will do well. ³⁸ So then, he who marries his fiancée does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better.

³⁹ A wife is bound as long as her husband lives. But if the husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, only in the Lord. ⁴⁰ But in my judgement she is more blessed if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God.

Thought for the day

Paul continues to wrestle with gender and sexual relationships. Notice (v26,29) that his reasoning is partly based on his expectation of Jesus' imminent return which will make such human relationships irrelevant. But he also has a word of encouragement for those who, like him, are unmarried (v32-35). What he says in this passage seems to have been borne out in his own life, with his almost fanatical devotion to Christ and his Gospel. In spite of the fractious nature of many modern marriages and relationships, this argument for the single life is rarely heard nowadays, or heard only with suspicion. Looking at the whole of chapter 7, how do you react to Paul's teaching?

FRIDAY - 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

¹ Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that 'all of us possess knowledge.' Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. ² Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; ³ but anyone who loves God is known by him.

⁴ Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that 'no idol in the world really exists', and that 'there is no God but one.' ⁵ Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords—⁶ yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

⁷ It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. ⁸ 'Food will not bring us close to God.' We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. **⁹ But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling-block to the weak.** ¹⁰ For if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols? ¹¹ So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed. ¹² But when you thus sin against members of your family, and wound their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if food is a cause of their falling, I will never eat meat, so that I may not cause one of them to fall.

Thought for the day

Once again, rather than laying down strict rules, Paul suggests that the impact of our actions on others should be the guide to our behaviour. The more self-confident we are, the more we should consider the potential effect on those who are 'weak' (v9), and who might find our attitudes a challenge (stumbling-block - v9) to their faith. It's hard to moderate our opinions, but the world would be a kinder place if we were to, and we have Paul's encouragement to do it.

SATURDAY - 1 Corinthians 9:1-14

¹ Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? ² If I am not an apostle to others, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

³ This is my defence to those who would examine me. **⁴ Do we not have the right to our food and drink?** ⁵ Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? ⁶ Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? ⁷ Who at any time pays the expenses for doing military service? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not get any of its milk?

⁸ Do I say this on human authority? Does not the law also say the same? ⁹ For it is written in the law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.' Is it for oxen that God is concerned? ¹⁰ Or does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was indeed written for our sake, for whoever ploughs should plough in hope and whoever threshes should thresh in hope of a share in the crop. ¹¹ If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits? ¹² If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we still more?

Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. ¹³ Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is sacrificed on the altar? ¹⁴ In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

Thought for the day

Paul was sensitive to the accusation that, because he continued to work and pay his own way (v6), rather than relying on financial contributions from his 'followers', he was not a proper apostle (this would be an easy line of attack for those seeking to undermine his teaching). So he argues for his right to be supported (v4,14), while insisting that he won't exercise the right (v12). From a different time and culture we perhaps find such arguments hard to understand - we also have the benefit of knowing that, in terms of the early spread of Christianity, Paul's impact was probably greater than any of the other apostles. It's perhaps worth thinking about how open we are to the voices of those who speak truth into our society or church from beyond our accepted traditions or norms.