



RESOURCE KIT FOR THE STUDY OF SAINT PAUL: SESSION THREE

This 'kit' is provided as a follow-up to the interactive e-conference on Paul sponsored by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference to mark the close of the Year of Paul on 30 June, 2009. It may be used by individuals or by groups of people who might meet regularly to use it as a basis for communal study, reflection and discussion.

The passages are taken from Paul's **Letters**, along with some extracts from the **Acts of the Apostles** that provide a context for what we read in the Letters. Details from the Letters and the Acts are not always in harmony, since they stem from different times. But together they fill out the picture.

The selection of passages has been made according to major **themes** that feature in the Letters of Paul. While this procedure may give a more rounded presentation of Paul's theology, it has the disadvantage of removing the passages from their immediate contexts in the wider texts. Those who have time and leisure might profit from reading the entire letters from which the selections are taken.

Those who would prefer to study **entire** letters are advised to begin with the shorter ones such as **Philippians**, **1 Thessalonians**, **Philemon**, and **Colossians**.

Though the early themes by way of introduction focus upon Paul's early life and mission, the later ones follow in no particular **order**. Individuals or groups should feel free to pick and choose among the themes as they see fit, rather than being bound to see the whole course through to the end.

The **Questions** posed at the conclusion to each selection are intended to stimulate the reflection and discussion that might promote deeper engagement with the texts. It is in no sense necessary to move through all the questions. Stay with those that you or your group find most interesting. The final questions in each case are more directed to seeking the meaning of the texts for our life in the Church today.

The accompanying **Brief Sketch of Paul's Life and Missionary Career** and the **Glossary of Pauline Terms and Concepts** are provided to help with the interpretation of the texts. If you or your group come across terms or concepts that are difficult or unusual, consult the Glossary.

In some cases the texts are accompanied—before or after— by a **Note** explaining the role of the text in the wider context and providing information essential for understanding.

The **translation** used in the texts is that of the *New Revised Standard Version* (with spelling occasionally modified to conform to Australian usage).

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SESSION THREE
PAUL'S EARLY LIFE ON MISSION (2): CORINTH

Paul in Corinth: Acts 18:1-11

1. After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.
- 2 There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, 3 and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they worked together—by trade they were tentmakers.
- 4 Every sabbath he would argue in the synagogue and would try to convince Jews and Greeks.
- 5 When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with proclaiming the word, testifying to the Jews that the Messiah was Jesus.
- 6 When they opposed and reviled him, in protest he shook the dust from his clothes and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”
- 7 Then he left the synagogue and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshipper of God; his house was next door to the synagogue.
- 8 Crispus, the official of the synagogue, became a believer in the Lord, together with all his household; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul became believers and were baptized.
- 9 One night the Lord said to Paul in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent;
- 10 for I am with you, and no one will lay a hand on you to harm you, for there are many in this city who are my people.” 11 He stayed there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

Questions:

1. What similarities do you find between Paul's missionary approach at Corinth with that which he employed earlier at Thessalonica?
2. In what ways do you think Paul's working at a trade ('working with our hands') was an asset in his missionary work?
3. What sense of the make-up of the early Christian community at Corinth do you gain from the description of Paul's first converts in vv 7-8?
4. What do you make of Paul's vision of the Lord in vv 9-10?

Introduction of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

- 1:1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, 2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:
- 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, 5 for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— 6 just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— 7 so that you are not lacking in any spiritual

gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. 8 He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Questions:

1. What similarities can you find between the way Paul begins this letter to the Corinthians and the way he began the earlier one to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 1:1-10)?
2. What sense of the Church emerges from Paul's address to the Corinthians in v 2?
3. What understanding of God lies behind Paul's assurance to the Corinthians in vv 7-10?
4. How can we relate this assurance to our situation today?

Paul describes and defends his original missionary approach: 1 Corinthians 1:17—2:5

17 ... Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.

18 For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written,

*"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."*

20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom,

23 but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,

24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

26 Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, 29 so that no one might boast in the presence of God. 30 He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 in order that, as it is written, *"Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."*

2:1 When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. 3 And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.

4 My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

Questions:

1. What do you think Paul means by the 'power of the cross of Christ'?
2. Why is Paul so insistent that he did not preach in terms of worldly wisdom? How does the cross of Christ in some sense make that wisdom 'foolish'?
3. Why does Paul remind the Corinthians their lowly social status (vv 26-29)?
4. How can we relate to such a radical message today?