

Take-Aways for Small Group Leaders to Consider

The people of Corinth had lost sight of God; their greatest danger was from within. Human selfishness had resulted in self-admiration, self-will and self-indulgence. There is only one leader at the center of every Church, Jesus Christ., but the Church in Corinth had lost sight of this and had been divided into four factions: those following Paul, Apollos, Cephas and the Christ Party.

Things to Stress:

- The Christian minister is not the head of a school or a master of people but a servant of God.
- All are doing the work of God in their role as a part of the body of the Church. While some play larger roles than others each is doing their part and none should be exalted above the other.
- ***We have a tendency to follow human leaders instead of God, to think instead of trust, to ponder the Gospel messages but not allow those messages to change our behavior, and to let the world into the Church instead of moving the Church into the world.***

Under ANALYZE THE TEXT

2. Being “of the flesh” does not mean lacking refined spiritual knowledge and experience no living in lust and sexual sin. **For Paul, being of the flesh means living in rivalry and disunity within the church.** Paul wants to shake the Corinthians out of their “spiritual elitist tendencies”(boasting in spiritual gifts, scholarly knowledge, and even doctrinal correctness, moral uprightness, or proper political concerns) and remind them what it means to live in the Spirit...to have the mind of Christ.

3. Paul explains that the role of a minister a co-worker in the field. All are building upon one foundation, Christ crucified, and not one person is more important than another.

4. To the Jews, the temple was a physical place that was unapproachable except by a select few priests. This was where God’s presence dwelt, the holy of holies. This claim is audacious to the Jews because the Jewish temple was still standing and active when this letter was written. Paul is now transferring the central point of God’s presence to people instead of a place and to Gentile Christians no less. Paul is making the bold claim that the Spirit of God is present in the community where people are praising and worshiping God—God’s Spirit is no longer localized but is found whenever the gathered community of God’s elect comes together.

6. Because we are in Christ, we participate in the reality of God’s dominion and are free from human approval and the anxiety which comes with that. “Paul and Apollos and Cephas here (v.22) symbolize any group allegiances that trick us into groveling around before human authority or trying to manipulate people into joining our party. We all belong to God; If we believed that and acted on it, it would simplify our lives enormously—and, at the same time, heal our divisions.”¹

John Calvin about preaching and the preacher:

"One of the common artifices the devil uses to diminish reverence for God's Word is to place before our eyes the person who brings it. Now it is certain that we are frail vessels and of no value, yes, of no more worth than broken pots. What is there in those whom God has ordained to be the ministers of his Word? But the treasure is inestimably great at all times, despite the contemptibleness of the vessels (2 Cor. 4:7). Let us take note then that when humans come to bear testimony to the forgiveness of our sins and the salvation we ought to hope for, our faith must rise up higher and not stand questioning whether such a human is worthy to be heard or not, or enquiring what manner of person he/she is. Let us content ourselves with the thought that God by that means intends to draw us to himself." John Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, May 15, 1558.

¹ Hays, Richard B. *First Corinthians*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997. 64.

SUMMARY AND REVIEW

1. Take 5-10 minutes to discuss the sermon from this past Sunday, *The Church's One Foundation*.

INTRO TO THE TEXT

The wonderful Church at Corinth was flailing. The carnality of the city had pervaded the fellowship of believers and the people had lost sight of God due to their selfish nature: self-admiration, self-will and self-indulgence. The Church was characterized by divisions and squabbling among each other. They forgot that God is the foundation of the Church and, while individuals can be important as they use their gifts to spread the word, it is foolish to follow one over another. One must only rely on God's wisdom instead of *human attempts* at wisdom.

READ 1 Corinthians 3:1-23

ANALYZE THE TEXT

1. Discuss some examples of people following particular Church leaders in our culture.
2. What dangers arise when the Church becomes "fleshly"? What discernments/ actions would ensue if we took the claim seriously that we have the mind of Christ? (see 1 Cor. 2:16 & Phil. 2:1-13)
3. Some churches idolize OR resist their ministers. What does Paul say about the role of a minister?
4. What does it mean that a Christian is the temple of the Holy Spirit?
5. Read Ch. 3:10-15 under *A Few Things to Consider*. Discuss how your actions have ever compromised the church's integrity or destroyed unity among believers (even within small group, Sunday School, and friendship circles)? Take time, if needed, to repent of this.
6. Read v. 18-23. What do these texts say to combat our desire for human approval?

A FEW THINGS TO CONSIDER

Chapter 3:1-9 Paul rebukes the Church in Corinth for allowing their human nature to dominate most of

their actions. If a person loves God, that person will also love others. While God uses people as instruments (i.e. field hands) to bring the message of his truth and love, it is Him alone who brings them to new life. To stick with the metaphor, individual leaders are insignificant in the grand scheme of things: they are just field hands working with other field hands under the authority of God in his field.

Chapter 3:10-15 This section serves as a warning to all leaders: "A cataclysm is coming that is going to test the structural integrity of our construction work, so we should build with great care."² Our work must be built on the foundation of Christ crucified because the reality is there will be a Day of the Lord (v.13) when God will examine and judge all human deeds and establish eschatological justice. Note, this is not talking about the fate of individuals but to the ecclesiological construction work done by different leaders. Ultimately, those who preach and teach but fail to build solid community are responsible for their actions and will be held accountable.

Chapter 3:16-23 We are the temple of God., but if men introduce dissension and division into the fellowship of the Church, they destroy the temple of God. Paul goes on to highlight the cause of this division: the worship of intellectual, worldly wisdom.

APPLY If willing, break up into men and women

1. How do you keep from pridefully favoring a pastor, music style, type of service, or particular church to the exclusion of everything else?
2. The ability to think analytically is a useful skill in life. How do you balance that skill with the call to trust God's wisdom?
3. How do you keep Scripture the sole authority above the varied opinions of others?
4. What are some practical ways you are able to plant and water God's Word in others?

MEMORIZE 1 Corinthians 3:7

So, he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow

² Hays, 53-54