



DESERT VIEW BIBLE CHURCH

SERIES: 1 CORINTHIANS •

MESSAGE: THE APOSTLES' MINISTRY •

1 CORINTHIANS 3:5–4:21 • 5/22/2022

MAIN POINT

Living for Christ is costly, but it is incredibly rewarding.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

How would you describe the American Dream?

Why do you think this dream is such a big part of our culture?

What do you think a church full of people pursuing only the American Dream might look like? How does that compare with God's design for the church?

Today's passage is incredibly convicting for us as Christians in America. It may be difficult, but we can't give up our pursuit Christ for the lesser rewards our culture offers. Instead, we need to encourage one another through the struggles of life and pursue the costly rewards of eternity together.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 3:5-17.

In these verses, Paul talks about the church's work in metaphors of gardening and building a house. What is the actual work that God has given His church to do? Read Matthew 28:19-20 for insight.

God has given His church the responsibility of spreading the gospel and making disciples. Why is the ministry of the gospel a team effort?

What is our reward for participating in God's work through the church?

Paul made the Corinthian believers aware that both he and Apollos, the founding evangelists of the Corinthian church, were dispatched servants through whom they believed the message of the gospel. Most scholars understand "planted" to be a reference to Paul's founding of the church and watered to refer to Apollos's later ministry after Paul left Corinth. Paul and Apollos were equal servants in the gospel work, and each would receive commendation for his labor among the Corinthian believers when the Lord returned. Our reward for joining God in His work is approval from Him and the joy of seeing His glory spread.

At Corinth, Paul was writing to immature believers (vv. 10-17). What would you say are some of the things that have most helped you grow in your own spiritual maturity? What things have kept you from growing?

Why does greater maturity naturally lead to greater unity? On the other hand, how does disunity hurt our ministry efforts?

What is one great consequence of church conflict? Why?

Paul made clear that by the quality of their works individual members contribute either to the building up or hindering of the church. We must live, speak, and maintain attitudes that honor God. If we live in ways that honor Him, God's Spirit moves evermore powerfully in our midst. A church is composed of God's people. Paul stressed that divisions discredit God's purpose for His people.

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 3:18-4:21.

Paul was so confident of his criticisms against the pride of the Corinthians that he began to ridicule their practices. Having reminded his readers that they had nothing in and of themselves, Paul accused them. First, they behaved as if they already had all they wanted. The Corinthian believers involved in prideful factions behaved as if their gifts and wisdom were perfect and complete, though these were really temporary and incomplete. Second, they acted as if they had already become rich.

Why is it important that we not see ourselves as being above suffering and persecution?

What does it look like to join in our suffering, pain, and weakness?

Paul points out that the apostles themselves—the very people over whom the Corinthians divided—did not live up to the Corinthians' boasts. Did the Corinthians feel superior because they followed Peter? Peter was persecuted, and he rejoiced in

his suffering (see Acts 5:41). Did they follow Jesus? His suffering exceeded that of every apostle. They could not rightly claim to follow these leaders and also claim to be above suffering and persecution.

Are there any Christian mentors, teachers, or leaders whose actions you seek to imitate as a fully devoted Christ follower? How has their example shaped your walk with Christ?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**In what areas of life would you say you do not have everything you want?
How can you keep your focus on God in those areas?**

**How has sacrifice, weakness, or persecution affected your walk with God?
How have these things made you more dependent and focused on Him?**

What would need to change for you to live the kind of life you want others to imitate?

Are there any younger believers for whom you are modeling how to pursue spiritual rewards? Who has God placed in your life for you to lead in this way?

PRAYER

Close your group time in prayer. Thank God for the eternal perspective He has given us by sending His Son to bring salvation. Pray that He alone would be our focus, and that He would convict us of areas of our lives where we are not living a fully devoted life focused on eternity.

COMMENTARY

1 CORINTHIANS 3:5-4:21

3:5-7. Paul made the Corinthian believers aware that both he and Apollos, the founding evangelists of the Corinthian church, were dispatched servants through whom they believed the message of the gospel. Most scholars understand planted to be a reference to Paul's founding of the church and watered to refer to Apollos's later ministry after Paul left Corinth. The Lord was to receive all the credit for the growth; therefore, the servants were nothing. The reputation of the owner-grower was everything. No servant need establish his own reputation to the detriment of God who gives the growth.

3:8-10. Paul and Apollos were equal servants in the gospel work, and each would receive commendation for his labor among the Corinthian believers when the Lord returned (4:4-5). The word translated one in purpose is literally "one." Paul and Apollos were God's coworkers who worked His field (the Corinthian congregation). The believer who wishes to help spread the gospel must be properly instructed (Ac 18:26). The phrase another builds on it refers to later builders who would have a role in building the body of Christ at Corinth (v. 5). These builders included Apollos and others who followed Paul.

3:11-13. Paul issued a warning (as found in construction contracts) to any builder-leader who should follow him to be careful how he builds, choosing to use only quality materials, which is symbolic of faithfulness to his God-given duties as builder of God's church. The urgent reason for this diligence is revealed in verses 13-17. Even in the ancient world, large buildings were required to be tested and approved.

Stipulations within the building contract stated when the inspection day would take place. Paul used the exact words commonly used to refer to this inspection—the day will disclose it. Paul was speaking of the eschatological inspection day when God will examine how builders have built the building of God, the body of Christ, on the foundation of the “foolish message” (1:18,23; 2:2,5).

3:14-17. In the ancient world, a reward was granted to those who constructed the building on time, within budget, and according to specifications. Paul warned those who built carelessly that they would suffer loss. He called on the Corinthians to have self-awareness about the ultimate identity of their corporate body. They were a temple built by God, and the Spirit of God resided among them. Paul also gave stern notice to those who corrupted the church (chap. 15; 2 Co 11). In a wordplay on the verb destroy, Paul warned that anyone who “destroys” God’s temple will, as recompense, be destroyed by God. The word “destroy” was used in construction contracts to describe building a structure with the intent to defraud. Thus the image here is of a church leader (builder, v. 12) who is willfully negligent.

3:18-20. Paul’s advice to the self-deceived: Let the one who thinks he is wise in this age become foolish by embracing the message of “foolishness.” The “foolish one” who trusted the “foolish message” would be wise from God’s viewpoint. God determines what constitutes foolishness. These verses are filled with courtroom terminology from OT Wisdom literature (Job 5:12-13). Paul affirmed from these witnesses that any disputations (reasonings) made before God’s bench would be foolish if based on the wisdom of men.

3:21-23. The remedy for divisions in the church is the recognition that all gospel servants—even prominent figures such as Paul or Apollos or Cephas—are not their own, but belong to Christ, who in turn belongs to God. In this light, servants must never become a distraction to the church, and believers must never mistake them for the Master.

4:1-5. Paul called on the Corinthians to be aware of the responsibilities of those who manage. The church should view those in leadership as slave-stewards with a responsibility to dispatch the message of Christ. Paul was aware that the examination of his stewardship with respect to “God’s mysteries” (v. 1) came from the Lord, not humans nor even himself. All believers will be tested on how faithful they have been to the foolish message of “Christ and Him crucified” (2:2).

4:6-7. Paul did not disclose the identity of these misguided, arrogant leaders; he used the names “Apollos” and “Paul” as a foil. Paul and Apollos had illustrated dramatically in their foolish message that they did nothing beyond what was written . Paul had determined to know nothing among the Corinthians “except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (2:1-2). The church was not to be inflated with pride in favor of one person over another . They were to boast only in the Lord. Paul offered a rhetorical response to those who were claiming superiority in the Corinthian church. He who receives a gift by grace has no grounds for boasting.

4:8. Paul thought that those who divided the church through pretension and arrogance behaved, on the one hand, like self-assured rich people lacking humility, and, on the other, like Christians who had already received all their future blessings and took great pride in them. Third, Paul accused them of behaving as if they had already become kings. Christians hope for the day when believers will reign with Christ over the new earth, but the divisive members of the church acted as if they had already reached this destiny. They behaved as if they had no flaws, no weaknesses, and no need to grow (1 Cor. 13:11-12).

4:9. He and other apostles suffered severely for the gospel. They were like those led in public procession to the arena to die. What more humiliating description of his service could Paul offer? He felt that he had been made a spectacle to the whole universe. Everyone, both angels and men, watched with glee at his painful suffering and humiliation. That the apostles suffered so greatly further emphasized to the Corinthians their error of thinking that they had already become kings.

4:10-13. If the Corinthians wanted true strength, wisdom, and honor, they would have to seek it by being weak, foolish, and dishonored like Paul. He then digressed to describe his apostolic experience even further. He and other apostles suffered terrible times to that very hour and moment. The list of experiences in 4:11 is striking: hungry and thirsty, in rags, brutally treated, and homeless. In 4:12-13 Paul indicated that he and other apostles worked with their own hands, endured when persecuted, and answered kindly when slandered. Paul then summarized his condition as the scum of the earth and the refuse of the world. The apostles did not err like the Corinthians. They did not behave as those who had already received their rewards.

4:14. Paul’s goal was not to shame them, but to warn or admonish them. That is, though he intended to shame them to some degree, their shame was not his ultimate goal. He employed shame as a tool for admonishing them, for inspiring

them to reject their pride and repair their divisions. Paul wanted to help the Corinthian church imitate his own life, and thereby to help them avoid the consequences of the sin in their church. Love, not anger, motivated Paul to do this. He cared for the Corinthians as his dear children, and this affection guided his words.

4:15-16. Paul was justified in calling himself the father of the Corinthians. They may have had ten thousand guardians, various leaders and teachers in the church. Nevertheless, they had only one spiritual father. Paul became their father when he first brought them to faith in Christ through the preaching of the gospel. On the basis of his fatherly role in the Corinthian church, Paul urged his readers to imitate him, just as children are instructed to follow the example of their fathers. He told others to imitate him as well (Gal. 4:12; 2 Thess. 3:7). Here, he encouraged the Corinthians to forsake their pride and to gain the same kind of humility he demonstrated.

4:17. Paul assured his readers that Timothy could be trusted to remind them of Paul's way of life in Christ Jesus. That is, Timothy would tell them more of the sufferings and faithful service Paul had rendered as an apostle and of Paul's way of life when he had been in Corinth previously—both of which Paul would have the Corinthians imitate. Timothy's efforts would be reliable because he agreed with what Paul taught in every church—he would not vary from the apostle's true teachings. Paul sent Timothy as an act of love in the hope that the younger minister would be able to facilitate the restoration of the Corinthian fellowship.

4:18-21. Paul frequently revealed his keen desire to visit the churches of Christ throughout the world (Rom. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:18). This should have encouraged his opposition to rethink their attitudes and to correct their behavior, or else to prepare themselves to deal with one imbued not with mere words, but with power (1 Cor. 5:4). Although some people in the church did not believe it, Paul was determined to come to Corinth. He explained that upon his arrival he would find out two things. He would investigate how these arrogant people were talking. He would find out for himself exactly what they were saying and what power they had. He wanted to see if these proud leaders who opposed him had the gifts and demonstrations of the Holy Spirit to back up their theological claims. He wanted to demonstrate to them that their "gospel" lacked the power to mend lives and create unity. Paul mentioned the power of God on a number of occasions, having in mind God's works in the church (1:18; 6:14; 15:43). He closed this section with a pointed question: In coming to visit and test his readers, how should he treat them? Should he come like Jesus cleansing the

temple (Mark 11:15), with a whip to drive out his opponents who refused to change their ways? Or should he come to them with love and with a gentle spirit, they having heeded his warnings and changed their ways?