



1 CORINTHIANS
MARKED
BY THE GOSPEL

PART 2

Marked by the Gospel

PART 2

1 Corinthians 3-4

To review what we have seen in 1 Corinthians 1-2: The Corinthians are part of the church of God, and as such they are sanctified in Christ Jesus and are called to be saints. Their position in Christ is one of great spiritual richness: They have received the grace of God in Christ Jesus, enriching them in all speech and knowledge through the Gospel. They are equipped with every grace-gift and will be established on the day of Christ as those who are blameless because Christ has sustained them. They have the highest possible privilege — they are called by their faithful God into the fellowship of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. All of this is true of you too, if you have trusted in the Lord Jesus alone!

In light of these riches and this glorious position they have in Christ, Paul calls the Corinthians to repent of their prideful pursuit of worldly status through association with those they thought had the more impressive grace-gifts. Paul shatters their esteem of worldly wisdom and greatness and shows them what it is like to be shaped by a worldview that is centered on the cross of Jesus Christ. He shows them that the power of God for salvation is in the message of Christ Jesus crucified, not in the greatness or persuasiveness of the speaker. All boasting should be in Christ Jesus, not in human leaders. God has revealed true wisdom by His Spirit, and all who are truly spiritual will recognize the greatness of Christ over and above what the world considers great.

As we enter into 1 Corinthians 3-4, Paul continues his rebuke of the pride that led the Corinthians to create divisions and factions based on their pursuit of worldly status. He shows them the right way to think about how God uses servants of the Lord as His stewards, as instruments in His hands. He continues to remind them that true greatness is seen in a life of sacrifice, suffering and service for Christ Jesus. May we at Faith Bible Church continue to grow in how we humbly boast in Christ Jesus and are willing to serve Him through any hardship or difficulty we encounter. May the humble, sacrificial life of Christ that marked the Apostle Paul so clearly continue to mark each of us!

SCHEDULE

March 26	1 Corinthians 3:1-9 Repent of fleshly thinking and recognize that God causes the growth of His church.
April 2	1 Corinthians 3:10-15 Build with care on the foundation of Christ.
April 9	No Growth Guide lesson (Resurrection Sunday)
April 16	1 Corinthians 3:16-17 The Church is God's temple.
April 23	1 Corinthians 3:18-23 Do not boast in human leaders.
April 30	1 Corinthians 4:1-5 Servants of Christ are evaluated by the Lord.
May 7	1 Corinthians 4:6-13 Do not be puffed up but rather embrace suffering for the Gospel.

May 14

1 Corinthians 4:14-21 Be humble imitators of Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Week 9 - Repent of fleshly thinking and recognize that God causes the growth of His church.

Sermon March 26, discuss in Growth Groups March 26-April 1

Learning & Application Objectives

Recognize the need to repent of jealousy and strife because it is not fitting for those who have received the Spirit. Rejoice that God is the One who gives new life in Christ and causes spiritual growth.

Launching Question

When have you seen someone acting wildly out of character? What did you think about that person?

1 Corinthians 3:1-4

1. What is the mood of these verses? What is Paul telling the Corinthians?

2. What are the Corinthians guilty of according to 3:3-4?

Discussion Questions

3. Look at 1 Corinthians 2:14-16. What do you see that is true of the “spiritual person”, which is not true of the Corinthians according to 1 Corinthians 3:3-4?

Milk

According to Paul, the Christians in Corinth should have been more spiritually mature by this point, especially in light of all he had already taught them. They really had no excuse. However, due to their sinful behaviors, they were still ‘babes’ in Christ. Listen to the following quote from Mark Taylor in the *New American Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, p. 99: “By referring to ‘solid food’ Paul uses their language that means that the contrast in this case is not between two different diets but between ‘the true food of the Gospel (whether milk or meat), and the synthetic substitutes which the Corinthians have preferred.’ Paul knows only one kind of wisdom, Christ and him crucified.”

4. Some people would focus a lot on what the content of the “milk” teaching is that Paul is referring to in 1 Corinthians 3:2. However, we see in 1 Corinthians 1-2 that Paul’s message to the Corinthians has always been the message of Christ and Him crucified. Rather, we should focus on the metaphor of them being “infants in Christ” and how the “milk” comments relate to that metaphor. Because they were acting like babies, Paul says he still needs to feed them milk. What is Paul emphasizing with the comments about their need for milk?

1 Corinthians 3:5-9

5. What do you learn about the role of Paul and Apollos in the work of ministry?

6. What does this passage show us about God’s role in the work of ministry among His people?

Discussion Questions

7. How do those who “plant” and “water” in Paul’s metaphor do their work? What does planting and watering look like in the work of discipleship?

8. What are some ways that God causes growth in the lives of His people?

9. Why does Paul say that the one who plants and the one who waters are one, and that they are God's fellow workers? What is he emphasizing?
10. What does it mean that the Corinthians are "God's field" and "God's building"?

Application

11. How do you want to grow in working together with other believers in gospel ministry to each other and to the world? In other words, how do you want to pursue being a more faithful servant of God in your planting or watering, confident in God who causes the growth?
12. Write a prayer thanking God for the way He has caused growth in you and in the lives of others to whom you have ministered the Gospel.

Equipping for Evangelism

13. Are you confident in God's work as the one who saves people? Do you scatter the seed of the Gospel broadly, knowing that it is God's work to cause the growth? Who do you want to seek to share the Gospel with this week? What truths in 1 Corinthians 3:1-9 encourage you to boldly proclaim the Gospel?

Prayer Requests/Sermon Notes

1 Corinthians 3:10-15

Week 10 - Build with care on the foundation of Christ.

Sermon on April 2, discuss in Growth Groups April 2-15

(Growth Groups at church will not meet Wednesday, April 5 because of spring break.

Discuss with your group when you will be meeting.)

Learning & Application Objectives

The church (the people who trust in Christ, not a physical building) is God's dwelling place. Christ is the foundation of the church, the temple of God. We must take care how we build on the foundation of Christ through our ministry. God will test and reward each person's work.

Launching Question

Have you ever had an experience with a bad foundation or poor building on a good foundation (either in literal construction or in a figurative way)?

1 Corinthians 3:10-11

1. Describe the work that Paul says he was doing in laying a foundation. Use the context, including verse 9, to list everything you see about Paul's work.
2. What is the warning or command Paul gives at the end of verse 10?

Discussion Questions

3. Paul teaches us that the foundation of the church, God's people, is Christ. Think about how people are saved. What does it mean in reference to how people get saved that Christ is the foundation? What does it mean regarding the ongoing spiritual growth of believers that Christ is the foundation?

4. What are some of the false foundations that people try to use as the basis of salvation or spiritual growth? How do church growth and self-help models that are based on worldly wisdom abandon building on the only true foundation, which is Christ?

1 Corinthians 3:10-15

5. What motivation does Paul give us for being careful how we build on the foundation of Christ?
6. What does Paul say will happen to each person's ministry or work in verses 13-15? What are the two options he describes?

Discussion Questions

7. What do you think Paul means by listing different materials used for building on the foundation?
8. What do the phrases "revealed by fire" and "the fire will test what sort of work each one has done" potentially show us about what the different materials refer to? (Consider 2 Peter 3:10 for some context about "fire" and Revelation 21:19-21 for some ideas about the materials.)

9. What reward and what loss might Paul be referring to in 1 Corinthians 3:14-15?

Judgment

"Thus, it is to 'the Day' that Paul looks. Here is where the final vindication will be seen in the battle of the 'wisdoms.' The day will make things clear. Paul has already referred to it as 'the day of our Lord' in 1:8, where it is seen positively as the day when God's people will appear 'unimpeachable' before the Lord's judgment seat (see also 5:5). 'The Day' is drawn from an Old Testament background and looks forward to the time of judgment. Its link to a refining, eschatological judgment of fire is seen in Isaiah 66:15–16, Zephaniah 1:17–18, and Malachi 3:2–3. In the New Testament, this 'Day' is the time when Christ returns to save and to judge."

"From earliest times fire has been linked in the Scriptures with the awesome presence of God as one who is holy and who reveals himself as Judge and Savior. He pledged himself in his covenant relationship with Abraham, as a smoking fire pot passed between the pieces of the sacrificed animal (Gen. 15:17). He judged Sodom and Gomorrah with fire (Gen. 19:24). He appeared to Moses in a flaming bush (Exod. 3:2) and descended upon Mount Sinai in fire (19:18). In Hebrews 12:29 God is said to be a 'consuming fire.' Therefore, to say in the New Testament that fire judges or tests is to say that the Lord himself will judge and test. It does not point to the judgment of hellfire because the fire in question also reveals who is good (cf. 1 Pet. 1:7). The picture here is like that spoken of in Revelation 3:18 where Jesus counsels the Laodicean church to 'buy from me gold refined in the fire.' As all gold is assayed to determine its quality, so the quality of the work of building Christ's church will be assayed by the Lord at his coming. This will clearly show the quality of the work that has been built on the foundation of Christ crucified." Quoted from: *1 Corinthians, the Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, Paul Gardner, p.176.

We see in Revelation 20:11-15 the "great white throne judgment" where all whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life are judged and thrown into the lake of fire. We know that all who have believed in Christ are not being judged at the great white throne judgment. Their names are already in the Lamb's book of life and they have been declared righteous because of Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5:10, we see the "judgment seat of Christ" described, where believers will also appear and "each one will receive what is due." There they will be evaluated and rewarded for what they have done, as 1 Corinthians 3:14-15 also describes. Ultimately, whatever else the reward may include, it will consist of more glory being given to Christ through our lives.

Application

10. What is one principle you need to remember or one practice that you want to commit to that will help you build well on the foundation of Christ (through how you share the gospel with new people and how you disciple those who are part of the church)?

Prayer

God, thank you for making us Your temple, Your people. We praise You for the foundation of Christ that was laid by the Apostles and by the work of the Spirit in our lives as we each believed the Gospel. Help us now to build carefully on that foundation in a way that will last. May our ministry be faithful to Your Word and to the centrality and sufficiency of Christ! Help us to build in a way that gives glory and honor to Christ! May we boast in Christ and not ourselves or others as we minister to one another.

Evangelism Equipping

11. We must always follow Paul's example of laying the foundation of Christ through faithful Gospel proclamation and teaching. What elements should you include in sharing the gospel so that you can be sure to lay a true foundation, the foundation of Christ?

12. What are some ways we can follow-up and encourage someone who has trusted Christ?

Prayer Requests/Sermon Notes

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

Week 11 - The Church is God's Temple

Sermon on April 16, discuss in Growth Groups April 16-22

Learning & Application Objectives

The church (the people who trust in Christ, not the building they might use for meeting together) is God's temple, the dwelling place of God's Spirit. Therefore, God will destroy anyone who destroys God's temple. Build up the church, God's people, carefully because God cares about His temple.

Launching Question

What are the main purposes of your home or dwelling place?

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

1. What truths do you learn in these verses?
2. The context of these two verses is the command in the end of 1 Corinthians 3:10, "Let each one take care how he builds upon it." In light of this command to build carefully, what is Paul telling us in 1 Corinthians 3:17?

The Temple of God - Individual or Corporate?

We see in John 14:17 and Ephesians 1:13-14 that individual believers have the Holy Spirit living in them. The New Covenant promise in Ezekiel 36:27 foretells this wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit working in and living in the lives of each person who trusts in Christ. In 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 6:19-20, the "you" is in the plural, describing how the church, the corporate group of believers, is the temple of God, the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Each individual believer in Christ has the Holy Spirit dwelling in him or her personally. However, God makes Himself known uniquely and specially in the church, the corporate group of Christians, where His Word is read and preached, His truth is proclaimed, and where people love each other and live out their faith in Christ (1 Timothy 3:15). God dwells in His family, His household, and makes Himself known to them through their ministry to each other (Ephesians 4:11-16).

Discussion Question

3. 1 Corinthians 3:14-15 described two kinds of building on the foundation of Christ - a lasting one that would be rewarded and another that would be destroyed while the minister was still saved. Here Paul describes a third kind of work: one that destroys God's temple. What does Paul mean when he says, "if anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him"?
4. What are some ways people might do harm to the church?
5. What might the destruction of one who destroys the church look like?

The Dwelling Place of God

God delights to make Himself known to His people in the place where He lives with them. God lived with His people in the Garden of Eden. When they sinned, they had to leave the garden. Later, God chose to live with His people through the tabernacle. In the tabernacle, God dealt with His people's sin through the sacrificial system and He met with them in the tabernacle. Next, God dwelt with His people and made Himself known through the temple. His people worshiped Him in the temple and God made a way for their sins to be covered. When Jesus came to earth, John 1:14 says "the Word became flesh and tabernacled (dwelt in a tent) among us." God made Himself known and lived with His people in Jesus, God the Son. God dealt completely with the sins of His people through Jesus. Now, we see in Ephesians 2:18-22 and here in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 that the church of Jesus Christ is the temple of God. This means that God dwells on the earth with His chosen people, saved through Jesus Christ, who comprise His church.

Discussion Question

6. What stands out to you from the teaching box "The Dwelling Place of God"? What is most encouraging to you?

Exodus 40:34-35, 1 Kings 8:10-11

7. What do these two passages show us about what God's purpose was in the tabernacle and the temple?

John 17:20-23

8. What does Jesus pray for His people so that they will reflect His glory? How were the Corinthians violating what Jesus was praying for according to 1 Corinthians 1:10 and 3:3-4? How was their behavior in danger of "destroying God's temple"?

Unity in God's Temple

"Here is the ultimate argument for unity. They are one temple that belongs to God, and together they are the place where the one Spirit dwells. But this is also the ultimate argument for building well. They are building the place where God dwells. This probably carried all the connotations of the care with which the Solomon temple had to be built. This image is more likely than that Paul was picturing the building of pagan temples in Corinth. Thus, Paul demonstrates that the divisions, factions, and disputes about leadership are not just a sad episode in a church's life but fundamentally represent a failure to understand the significance and nature of the local church as God's temple." Quoted from *1 Corinthians, the Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, Paul Gardner, p.179.

Application

9. God takes very seriously any attempts to destroy or harm the unity and purity of His temple (His church). In what ways might you be tempted to cooperate with the enemy's efforts to destroy the unity and purity of the church?

10. God's goal is to dwell with His people in His temple and to make Himself known to them through His Word by His Spirit. We want to do the opposite of destroying God's temple. How can you build up other Christians in their knowledge of Christ and obedience to Christ?

11. God's goal is also to make Himself known to the world through His temple (i.e., Christians/His church), especially through our proclamation of His truth and our unity and purity that lives out His truth in a visible way. How can we grow in making God known to the world? Choose one practical way we (as a church or growth group) can put Him on display more clearly.

Prayer

Father, thank you for being pleased to dwell with your people! We rejoice that after the rebellion of Adam and Eve, you choose to dwell with your people in the tabernacle and later the temple. We praise you for dwelling with your people through the Word who became flesh. Thank you Jesus for making the sacrifice that was necessary so that you could send your Spirit to dwell in your people now! Help us to live in such a way that displays the reality that we are your temple and you are dwelling in us. Help us to protect the unity and the purity of your temple and to never do anything that will harm your church.

Evangelism Equipping

12. The reality that God wants to live with His people, that all who trust in Christ become part of His temple, is an amazing and beautiful thing. How would you explain that aspect of the good news to someone who is not yet a Christian? Write a paragraph sharing this beautiful reality.

Prayer Requests/Sermon Notes

1 Corinthians 3:18-23

Week 12 - Do not boast in human leaders.

Sermon on April 23, discuss in Growth Groups April 23-29

Learning & Application Objectives

Do not be deceived by worldly wisdom that boasts in people because of supposed greatness based on worldly criteria. Realize that all things are yours because you belong to Christ! Boast in the riches of Christ, not in human leaders.

Launching Question

What are some of your favorite earthly gifts from the Lord?

1 Corinthians 3:18-23

1. Paul gives the Corinthians three commands in this section and two more in the next section (4:1-5). What are the three commands you see in this section (all of them begin with the word “let”)?

3:18a

3:18c

3:21

2. Why does Paul first command them not to deceive themselves? What temptations to be deceived has he been addressing from 1 Corinthians 1:10 until the present section?

3. After the second and third commands, Paul gives an explanation for each that begins with the word “for.” Write the explanations you see after the second and third commands.

3:19-20

Discussion Questions

4. What are some examples of the worldly wisdom that Paul is criticizing in 3:19-20?

Romans 8:28-39

5. What does Paul mean that “all things are yours,” including “Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future”? Compare 1 Corinthians 3:21-23 with Romans 8:28-39 to help you to explain what this means.

Discussion Questions

6. What does it mean when he says “you are Christ’s and Christ is God’s”? How does belonging to Christ and Christ belonging to God make it true that “all things are yours”?
7. How does having all of those things make boasting in human leaders and their supposed greatness foolish?

Application

8. What are some ways that you can tend to be deceived by worldly wisdom? What godly wisdom and truth do you need to remember to keep from being deceived?

9. What are some of the “all things” that belong to you in Christ for which you are thankful? Write a prayer thanking God for some of the things that are yours in Christ.

Evangelism Equipping

10. How does having a heart that is rejoicing in all that you have in Christ help you to be ready to share the Gospel?

11. How can you cultivate a more consistent habit of rejoicing in the Lord and boasting in Christ in your heart so that your lips are ready to speak of Christ?

Prayer Requests/Sermon Notes

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Week 13 - Servants of Christ and stewards of the Gospel are evaluated by the Lord.

Sermon on April 30, discuss in Growth Groups April 30-May 6

Learning & Application Objectives

Apostles and other Gospel ministers are servants of Christ and stewards of the Gospel who must be faithful. The Lord will judge them based on His perfect criteria; therefore we should not seek to judge them based on our own human standards.

Launching Question

What is something that belongs to someone else for which you have become a steward? How have you approached stewarding what was entrusted to you?

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

1. We saw three commands in 1 Corinthians 3:18-23. Now in 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 we see two more commands. The first one is in verse 1 and may not sound like a command in your translation of the Bible. What are the two commands in this passage?

1 Corinthians 4:1

1 Corinthians 4:5

2. Paul is shaping their perspective on human leaders in the church, combatting their fleshly way of elevating one leader over another so as to elevate themselves. In 1 Corinthians 3:18-23 he gave them commands that were meant to shape their view of what they, as God's people, had received so that they would not boast in human leaders. Now, in 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 he is teaching them what the Apostles (and other leaders) had received from the Lord. What do you learn in 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 about what the human leaders had received and what was expected of them?

3. What do you learn in 1 Corinthians 4:3-5 about who will judge (evaluate, examine) servants of Christ and stewards of the Gospel?

Discussion Questions

4. What does it mean to be a servant of Christ? How do you know if a servant of Christ has been faithful?

5. What does it mean to be a steward of the Gospel of Christ? How would you evaluate if a steward of the Gospel has been faithful?

6. Paul says he does not consider the judgment of others or even his own judgment of himself very significant in light of the Lord's judgment of him. He points to the Lord's judgment as the one that matters. What do you learn about the Lord's judgment of ministers of the Gospel from 1 Corinthians 4:5? (Compare with the description of judgment in 1 Corinthians 3:14-15.)

7. If the assessment of the Lord and His final judgment is what really matters, what (if any) is the role of discernment and human evaluation of ministers of God's Word?

"Responsibilities of ministers and how they should be estimated"

"As in 3:10–17, Paul returns to the responsibilities of ministers and how they should be estimated. They are Christ's servants and managers of God's mysteries. As managers they are required to be faithful. Paul is not concerned about how the Corinthians assess him, remarking that he is not even qualified to assess himself. Paul is not saying that he never evaluates himself. Actually, as we see in verse 4, he is not aware of any unfaithfulness in his ministry. Still, he is not acquitted on the basis of his own self-assessment. The final judge is the Lord himself. Therefore, no-one should pass judgment on how effective anyone is before the Lord returns. When the Lord comes, he will assess each person's life, uncovering what is hidden and disclosing the motives of the heart. On the final day the reward of each person will be granted by God." Quoted from: *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Vol. 7, Thomas R. Schreiner, p.147

Application

8. What are the implications for your life and ministry from a mindset that sees yourself as a servant of Christ who is called to be faithful?

9. How do you want to grow in being faithful in your ministry in light of the final judgment of all the motives of our hearts? What heart motives do you want to remove, and with what do you want to replace them?

10. 1 Corinthians 1:9 reminds us that God is faithful. How does this help us to pursue faithful ministry?

11. How does seeing human leaders in the church as servants of Christ who will be judged by the Lord keep you from boasting in humans rather than in Christ?

Prayer

Father, you have given the church servants of Christ and stewards of the Gospel. They have faithfully preached Christ and Him crucified to us, and we are so thankful. They have taught us to obey all that you commanded them. Thank you for giving us the gift of faithful ministers. We tremble before you, knowing that you are the one who judges and evaluates all of us.

Make us faithful by your grace so that we might represent you and your Word well to the church and to the world. Help us to imitate the faithful ministry of Paul, Apollos, and Peter. May Christ be glorified on the final day because of how he has led us in faithful ministry now!

Equipping for Evangelism

12. How does being a servant of Christ and a steward of the Gospel motivate you to share the Gospel with others? How do you want to apply this truth to your practice of evangelism this month?

Prayer Requests/Sermon Notes

1 Corinthians 4:6-13

Week 14 - Do not be puffed up but rather embrace suffering for the Gospel.

Sermon on May 7, discuss in Growth Groups May 7-13

Learning & Application Objectives

Beware of being proud by seeking to elevate yourself above other Christians. Realize that those who follow Christ must be willing to face suffering, persecution, and difficulty in this age.

Launching Question

What examples can you think of in sports or movies or life where someone was an underdog and they ended up being great in the end?

1 Corinthians 4:6-7

1. What is Paul warning the Corinthians about in these verses?

2. In 1 Corinthians 4:6 Paul says that he has applied “these things” to himself and Apollos for their benefit. What are “these things” to which he is referring? (Think back to 1 Corinthians 3:5-9 and 4:1-5 especially.)

1 Corinthians 4:8-10

3. Paul employs the use of sarcasm or irony here. In the context, we see that he is warning the Corinthians against being proud (4:6) and against being deceived by worldly wisdom (3:18). What does Paul say about the Corinthians in these verses?

What does he say about himself and the other Apostles in these three verses?

Discussion Question

4. Paul says the Corinthians are kings, wise, strong, and honored while Paul and the other apostles are dying and defeated, fools for Christ's sake, weak and dishonored. On one hand he is describing the "cross-shaped" life of the follower of Christ as exemplified by the Apostles, a life of taking up your cross and denying yourself and suffering. On the other hand, he is describing a "theology of glory" or a "so-called prosperity gospel" that fits the worldly wisdom assessment of true greatness. What is his point to the Corinthians?

1 Corinthians 4:11-13

5. Make a list of sufferings and hardships Paul describes in these verses.

Discussion Questions

6. How would the Greeks and Jews assess someone who experienced what Paul describes, based on what they considered as greatness? (See Paul's description of what they were looking for in 1 Corinthians 1:22-23.)
7. Paul is writing all of this so that the Corinthians would not be "puffed up in favor of one against another" (1 Corinthians 4:6b). What mindset was Paul asking them to reject and put off, according to the rebuke of 1 Corinthians 4:8-10 and the description of his own suffering in 4:11-13?

What mindset was he asking them to embrace and to put on, according to these verses and his own example?

Pride and Humility

"Paul warns the Corinthians about the danger of pride. If pride takes root in the lives of believers, it means they have forgotten that everything they have received is a gift from God, that nothing has been given to them which has not been granted to them by grace. In addition, the experience of Christians in this world is one where they face opposition. The world does not praise and commend Christians but slanders and rejects them. If society commends and celebrates believers, it is likely a sign that the latter have thrown their lot in with the world." Quoted from: *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Vol. 7*, Thomas R. Schreiner, p.153.

Application

8. How are you tempted toward pride, especially in your relationships with other Christians?

9. What does it look like in your life when you forget that everything you have is yours because you received it from God (1 Corinthians 4:7)?

10. In what ways have you embraced the worldly wisdom about greatness being signified by prosperity and popularity in this age? What thoughts or pursuits do you need to repent of and reject in favor of a humble following of Christ?

11. In what ways do you need to obey Christ even though it might mean that you face suffering or difficulty? How do you specifically need to “deny yourself” and “take up your cross” as you follow Christ?

Prayer

Father, we praise you that you have demonstrated your glory and your mercy through sending your Son Jesus to suffer and die in our place. Furthermore, we see your mercy and kindness and patience in how the Apostles and church fathers and so many other saints in Christ have been willing to suffer for the sake of Christ and His people. We are sobered and humbled by these examples. Help us to esteem Christ and His glory so much that we are willing to embrace all kinds of suffering and hardship for the sake of His name and for the sake of making Him known to the nations.

Evangelism Equipping

12. How often are you hindered in willingness to share the Gospel with people boldly because you want to avoid any suffering or persecution or hardship or difficulty? What specific forms of difficulty do you fear the most and most often keep you from faithful evangelism?

13. What truths about Christ and following Him do you need to remember so that you can boldly and faithfully speak of Christ?

Prayer Requests/Sermon Notes

1 Corinthians 4:14-21

Week 15 - Be humble imitators of Christ.

Sermon on May 14, discuss in Growth Groups May 14-20

Learning & Application Objectives

Paul urges the Corinthians, as their father in the faith, to imitate him by humbly living lives that imitate Christ. Embrace weakness and suffering for the sake of the power of God being made known through the preaching of the cross of Christ.

Launching Question

What are some of the greatest attributes you appreciate about your earthly father (or a father figure) in your life? What are some warnings or ways he kept you out of trouble?

1 Corinthians 4:14-15

1. Paul just admonished the Corinthians very strongly in 1 Corinthians 4:8-13. What does he tell them here to affirm his love and care for them?

2. In what sense is Paul their father?

1 Corinthians 4:16-17

3. What does Paul command the Corinthians to do in 1 Corinthians 4:16?

4. What did Paul do to help them obey that command, according to 1 Corinthians 4:17?

Discussion Question

5. Reflecting on the context and how Paul has described his ministry (for example in 1 Corinthians 1:17, 2:1-5, 4:1-5, and 4:11-13), what aspects of imitating him do you think he is particularly emphasizing here?

1 Corinthians 4:18-21

6. How does Paul confront those who are arrogant in these verses?
7. What does Paul say about talk (speech, *logos* in the Greek) in these verses? What does he say about power?

Discussion Question

8. What does it mean that the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power? (Consider the context and Paul's emphasis on the power of God in 1 Corinthians 1:18 and 2:5.) What key concepts does Paul connect to the power of God in 1 Corinthians 1-4 and how does this phrase in 1 Corinthians 4:20 summarize those concepts?

“The Need to be Accepted”

"Life would be so much easier for all Christians if they were highly regarded by the societies in which they live. The temptation to be highly regarded affects Christians in all ages, including the present. If it was the reception of certain gifts of the Spirit, such as 'speech,' 'wisdom,' or 'knowledge' that married up well with the expectations of Hellenistic society, today it may be gifts such as the wealth to give liberally (Rom 12:8), or the gift of teaching, or the gift of good communication that, for the modern church, helps it marry up and consequently compromise with its secular society. There is only one 'theology' that will truly challenge the church as it seeks respect and acceptance, and that is the theology of the cross. In many churches a theology of the cross is almost entirely missing. The idea of weakness, of self-sacrifice, of humbling oneself, and of accepting persecution for the Lord is barely heard. Instead, matters of status in the world around concern people more than becoming Christ's obedient servants. Christians act as if they have become rich and have come to reign, and they seek the affection and respect of people who are rooted in the wisdom of this age. Though the kingdom of God is certainly revealed in power, this is God's power in Christ. Thus, a people who truly want to see this must decide, like Paul, 'to know nothing among [those around] except Jesus Christ and him crucified' (1 Cor 2:2 ESV)." Quoted from *1 Corinthians, the Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, Paul Gardner, p. 220.

Application

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9. What are some specific ways you want to imitate Paul and what you learn about his life and ministry in 1 Corinthians 1-4?
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10. How does the perspective of ministry and life (specifically the way that the cross of Christ and His suffering and weakness characterize our lives) that Paul teaches us challenge your perspective on life and ministry?

11. In what ways do you want the Spirit's power to work in you and through you (especially in your weakness and suffering) for the sake of God's Kingdom and glory?

Prayer

Father, we praise you for giving us spiritual fathers and mothers who have brought us to faith in Christ, cared for us, fed us spiritually, and shepherded us. We recognize that it was you caring for us through them, and we thank you for them! Help us to be faithful spiritual fathers and mothers who are willing to suffer weakness and hardship to minister to others. Give us a humble mindset that does not seek to advance our own reputations or comfort but rather seeks to humbly love as Christ has loved us.

Evangelism Equipping

12. We cannot control how people respond to our Gospel preaching. However, we can seek to faithfully, humbly, and prayerfully speak of Christ with others with the goal of seeing them become our brothers and sisters in Christ – in some regards, our spiritual children. Who are you seeking to bring into the family of God by speaking of Christ to them? What kind of suffering and hardship or weakness do you need to embrace in order to faithfully proclaim Christ?

13. How are you doing with faithfully ministering to younger brothers or sisters in the faith? How can you grow in imitating Paul in how he ministered to others?

Prayer Requests/Sermon Notes

GROUPS

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