1 Corinthians

Not Yet Kings

Series Overview

Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth is a case-study in what makes an unhealthy church. In this series, we'll explore what made that church so unhealthy as a guide to becoming the healthy church God has called us to be.

Sermon Introduction

It's no coincidence that in a world that worships accomplishment, wealth, and fame, often the people with the biggest egos rise to the top. Which can create pressure for everyone else to keep up, to try and show everyone that we're as capable and qualified and accomplished as well. In this week's passage, Paul's message to anyone putting on airs is to get over ourselves. But also, we don't have to pretend anymore.

Passage: 1 Corinthians 4:1-17 (NIV)

1Cor. 4:1 So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God.
1Cor. 4:2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.
1Cor. 4:3 I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself.
1Cor. 4:4 My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.
1Cor. 4:5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

1Cor. 4:6 Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written.” Then you will not take pride in one man over against another.
1Cor. 4:7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?
1Cor. 4:8 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings—and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you!
1Cor. 4:9 For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men.
1Cor. 4:10 We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored!
1Cor. 4:11 To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless.
1Cor. 4:12 We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it;
1Cor. 4:13 when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.
1Cor. 4:14 I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children.
1Cor. 4:15 Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.
1Cor. 4:16 Therefore I urge you to imitate me.
1Cor. 4:17 For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.

Personal Reflection and Group Discussion Questions

1. Read the passage. What stood out to you? Was there anything that you found surprising or confusing?

2. Read vv. 3-4. How does Paul's perspective guard against either people-pleasing or calloused indifference (e.g., "I don't care what anyone else thinks–it's my life!")? What do you think he means when he says his conscience is clear, but that doesn't mean he's innocent (v. 4)?

3. Do you ever feel crushed by other people's expectations of you? Or do you ever feel paralyzed trying to analyze all your inner motives? How do you think Paul can seem so unburdened by either (v. 3)?

4. In v. 6 Paul warns his readers not to take pride in one's theological learning or tradition or spiritual leaders (cf. 3:1-9). Church history is rife with bitter theological disagreements that fueled division and even violence. How does v. 7 provide the remedy?

5. Read vv. 10-13. From these verses, what adjectives might you use to describe the Corinthian believers' image of who a Christian should be versus Paul's?

6. What is your opinion of yourself today? Do you think more highly of yourself than you should? Too lowly of yourself? How do you know? (Hint: look back at vv. 3-4.)

7. According to Paul, more important than perfectly (over) analyzing yourself and your motives is to simply imitate Jesus (vv. 16-17). Is there someone in your life following Jesus well who you could learn from? Are you modeling your relationship with Jesus in such a way that others could learn from you?

Prayer

Often a position of submission helps us physically connect with the spiritual reality of meeting God. A posture of kneeling with open hands can demonstrate our willingness to submit to God's power.

- Praise God that, because you are loved and accepted because of Jesus, you don't have to fear anyone's judgment, not even your own.
- Tell him you're feeling burdened by trying to live up to other people's expectations or if you've tried to cope by making yourself indifferent to other people's opinions or feelings.
- Thank him that you don't have to live up to anyone else's expectations, not even your own, for him to love you.
- Ask him to help you to imitate Jesus more closely this week–to humbly treat everyone you meet with kindness, respect, and understanding.