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LESSON - 1  
**“Who is the Church?”** (1cor 1 Part 1)  
1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Over the last few years many of our conversations have focused on the problems that exist in churches.

There are church splits, people dissatisfied with the leadership of the church, and even occasions where people are trying to get rid of some of the leaders in the church.

These conflicts inevitably rob people of the peace that God intended us to have.

They pit friend against friend and people who once sang about being one in the spirit suddenly are plotting against each other.

Many of us have been scarred by some kind of conflict or division in our past.

You understand those who say, “I love Jesus, but I hate the church”. This is not the way our Lord intended things to be.

The reason we are starting this new series in 1 Corinthians is to try to avoid division and find the unity that our Lord prayed for.

In Acts 18 we read some of the background of the founding of the church in Corinth.

We read that Paul began the church and spent a year and a half teaching them the Word of God. (Acts 18:11)

Paul faced opposition in Corinth and eventually left town. There is an interesting sidelight in Acts 18:17.

The Jews had brought charges against Paul and when they were dismissed we are told that the Jews beat up the synagogue ruler, a man by the name of Sosthenes.

In verse one of 1 Corinthians we are told that the letter has come from Paul and “our brother” Sosthenes. It is likely that this is the same man; he would have been someone the church in Corinth would have known.

1 Corinthians was part of an extended correspondence that Paul carried on

with the church in Corinth.

In 1 Corinthians 5:9 Paul wrote, “I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people”.

Since Paul had not written this in the early chapters of 1 Corinthians it would seem that Paul had written a letter before the letter we will study.

The first letter is lost. In response to that letter the people appear to have responded (1 cor 7:1) with a letter of their own with various questions for Paul to address.

This morning we will look at Paul's introductory words in the first 9 verses. In these words I believe Paul was laying a foundation for the rest of the letter.

In Paul's words he describes the characteristics of those who are to make up the church.

As Paul describes the church he touches on several themes we will return to in more detail as we continue our study.

### **THE CHURCH is A DIVINE CREATION (2a)**

Paul addressed his letter “to the Church of God in Corinth”. Immediately Paul emphasized that the church does not belong to a particular board or denomination.

It is not MY church or YOUR church. It is HIS church.

God has brought us together. We are HIS body on earth. We are brought together by God the Father through the work of Jesus and we are empowered by God through the Holy Spirit.

No matter how long we have attended a particular congregation, no matter how much we contributed to various projects . . . it is not our church, but His.

When we forget that “we are not our own but we are bought with a price” we get into trouble.

We start to become territorial and feel that the church should function in our timing, should pursue our purpose, and approach things our way. It's not our church and we need to understand that clearly.

## **IT IS MADE UP OF THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN MADE NEW IN CHRIST JESUS (v. 2b, 4-5)**

Paul understands that the church is made up of people who have entered into a relationship with Christ that has changed them.

The term “sanctified” means to be set apart for a godly purpose. In one sense we “have been” sanctified. In another sense we “are becoming” sanctified. Let me illustrate.

When we put our trust in Christ for our salvation and new life, in one sense we have become holy.

We are set apart and declared to be God's child who has been delivered from sin. However, on the practical side, we are still in the process of overcoming sin.

In our experience, we still have not gained victory. We are still in the process of rehabilitation.

The point is that the true church is a group of people that are growing in their relationship with Christ. They have been changed by God's grace and are continually being changed.

## **OUR IDENTITY IS FOUND IN CHRIST AND NOT THE LABEL WE WEAR (v.2c)**

Paul described the church is made up of those who are “together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ- their Lord and ours”.

Paul wanted to remind the Corinthians (and us) that what makes a person a true disciple is not the label that they wear, the church they belong to, or the acts they have performed.

What makes a person a child of God is that they have turned to Jesus as the one who can alone rescue them from their addiction to sin. Do we disagree on some important issues? Yes.

These issues should be discussed and even debated because we seek a true knowledge and understanding of God. However, we must understand that these debates are intramural; they are debates between Christians. The debate does not determine who is a believer.

## **WE HAVE BEEN EQUIPPED WITH WHAT WE NEED TO SERVE HIM** **(v. 7)**

Paul told the troubled church in Corinth that they “do not lack any spiritual gift”. Paul was not saying that every individual in the church possessed all of the gifts of the Spirit that Paul lists later in 1 Corinthians 12-14. He meant that they had everything that it needed to follow faithfully.

God has given us the tools we need to fulfill his purpose. He has given us the people, talents, resources we need to do what God has called us to do.

If we are unable to do a certain job it is not because God has not given us what we need. It is either because 1) we are trying to do something God does not want us doing or 2) people are not using the gifts God has given them.

## **OUR FOCUS IS BEYOND THIS WORLD (7b)**

This is a reference to the Second Coming of Christ. The true people of God serve the Lord diligently in this world but know that their goal is not to create Heaven on earth. Our goal is to point the people on earth toward Heaven.

When we forget that this world is not our home it is easy to get entangled with things of the earth. It is easy to start fighting about things that don't ultimately matter.

## **OUR CONFIDENCE IS IN GOD'S FAITHFULNESS NOT OUR ABILITY** **(vv.8-9)**

Finally, Paul reminds the people that their confidence is to be in God's promise rather than their schemes. We don't have to fret, push or anything else. God is able to do what He has promised. His timing is perfect.

Many of the problems, conflicts, and casualties that come about in the church is because we feel we need to “make things happen”.

When we start pushing we often end up running over people in order to produce “results”. When there is division we feel we have to “win”.

We want change and we seem to feel we need to have it right now. We will not be effective because of change . . . we will be effective as we allow God's Spirit to work freely in us and through us.



LESSON - 2  
**WHEN GOD'S PEOPLE ARE DIVIDED**  
1 Corinthians 1:10-17

What is the battle cry for today?

Believe as I believe—no more, no less;  
That I am right (and no one else).  
Feel as I feel, think only as I think;  
Eat what I eat, and drink what I drink.  
Look as I do, do always as I do;  
And then—and only then—!?'ll fellowship with you.

We smile at this, yet we know that this sentiment is more prevalent in the church than we would like to believe.

The problems of division and conflict have plagued the church since its planting. It was the first problem that Paul addressed in the church at Corinth.

Paul considered this problem to be so significant that he devoted the first three chapters of his letter to it.

This devotion we will look at Paul's words to the church. From those words we will draw some applications for our lives.

**THE STANDARD V10**

Paul sets the standard for what we are to be as a Christian fellowship. He uses three different phrases to describe the unity that God desires.

- Agree with one another
- No divisions among we
- Perfectly united in mind and thought

It sounds good but we tend to shrug these statements off as something that is unrealistic.

It seems like an impossible standard. But it really isn't.

Paul is not suggesting that the unified church will never disagree on issues.

I believe diversity is healthy . . . it keeps us honest. Diversity is not a sin. Division is.

Though we must be united on basic issues of the faith we should be flexible and tolerant in other issues.

When the people of the church fight, the reputation of the church suffers and God's glory is tarnished.

Our job is to put our differences aside and focus on the main thing: the glory of God and the power of the gospel.

## **THE PROBLEM**

What was the problem that Paul is addressing here? Let's read V11-12

Apparently the church was divided among different factions. The congregation was lining up behind different teachers.

Some followed Paul, most likely these were Gentiles, many of whom had come to faith under Paul's ministry.

Others followed Peter, likely those who had some kind of Jewish background and resisted the freedom the Gentiles seemed to enjoy.

Still others declared support to Apollos. Apollos was most likely the second prominent leader of the church in Corinth (after Paul).

He was known for his rich speaking ability and this would have attracted the educated.

The last group claimed to "follow Jesus". It appears that Paul was confronting a group that thought of themselves as a superior group that "didn't care about theology . . . they just wanted to follow Jesus".

If these people were really following Jesus they would have been bringing the church together rather than helping it become more divisive.

I don't know how these divisions were impacting the church. Undoubtedly, the various groups considered the other groups to be "less spiritual" and perhaps even questioned the salvation of those who disagreed with them.

Perhaps the church was starting to look a little like the political parties of our country, filled with party line politics that seems to keep anything from being accomplished.

The teachers' job (v. 17) is to "preach the gospel". The teacher should be pointing people past himself to Christ and His Word.

Please notice something. There is no indication that Paul, Peter or Apollos encouraged or desired this devotion. These men were not trying to gain followers for themselves.

They were trying to proclaim the whole counsel of God. They wanted to point people to Jesus.

### **The Fix**

Paul confronted the problem of divisions in Corinth with three simple questions so that they would have perspective

1. Is Christ Divided? (obviously not)
2. Did Any of these men die for we? (No)
3. Were we baptized into their name? (I certainly hope not)

Since none of these “mere men” had anything to do with our new life in Christ, they should not be the object of devotion.

We need to remember that even the best of men are only men at best. Paul reminds us that the only person to whom we should declare loyalty, is Jesus.

Paul used verses 14-17 to tell us that he didn't baptize many people. It was not that Paul thought baptism was insignificant; his point is that he was not trying to build a following for himself.

He was more than content to preach and let others do the work of baptizing.

### **REMAINING QUESTIONS**

I think two questions naturally raised by Paul's counsel.

The first question is **How Far Do we go with this Unity?**

At the end of the book of Romans, Paul wrote, Romans 16:17-18

In the book of Jude verses 3-4 we read,

From these two passages it is apparent that there are times when we must stand against what others are teaching.

It seems to me that the Bible teaches that there **MUST** be agreement on primary or essential doctrine.

Essential doctrinal issues would be: the nature of Christ, the sinfulness of

man, the authority of Scripture, the way of salvation, the resurrection of Christ and the future return of Christ.

When there is not agreement in these areas we must contend for the faith. We can't simply overlook these things. These are doctrines which we are to defend.

Secondary differences are those that relate to non-essential issues: the styles of worship, singing in the church, preferred version of the Bible, and other issues like these are all secondary.

Personally, I believe it is wrong to fight over these differences of opinion. There is room for diversity in these areas. As we discuss these things in a civilized manner we can grow in our faith.

It appears that the problem in Corinth was not about essential doctrines. The problem was either over secondary issues or was because of petty interpersonal issues.

These issues should be resolved for the sake of Christ. Too often we turn the lists around. We argue passionately over our preferences even as we ignore serious departures from the faith.

### **How Should we handle Conflict Situations?**

Since it is inevitable that there will be conflicts in the body of Christ (just like there are conflicts in any home), let's look at how to preserve the unity of the church at times like this.

First, let's talk about what we should NOT do. It is always wrong to:

- Gossip and slander others
- It is wrong to have "secret meetings" to lobby support for we position
- It is wrong to draw unwarranted conclusions. For example, if someone doesn't agree with we preference we need to be careful that we don't conclude that the person is "obviously" not a true disciple? This is the equivalent of saying that no one can go to Heaven unless they believe as I believe.
- It is wrong to engage in personal attacks. Personal attacks beget other personal attacks. The damage from such actions create wounds that seem to never heal.

Paul gives us a good example of how to handle a problem. His criticism is general. He identified the problem, acknowledged the source of his information, and identified why it was wrong and did it without allowing it to become personal.

Unfortunately, as sinful people, we tend to view every disagreement as a personal contest.

We look at a disagreement as a win or lose proposition, and we want to win. Voices increase in volume, anger boils, and we become more intent on winning than on searching for the truth.

Let me be even more practical. The first thing to do when there is tension in a church is to take a breath.

Nothing good comes from people who have lost control. Ask yourself some key questions,

1. Is this an issue with eternal importance?
2. Have I brought this to God in prayer?
3. Is God trying to teach ME something?
4. Is it possible that the problem resides in me? Is this an ego problem? Am I making my preferences the standard for everyone else?
5. Is this an issue I should simply overlook?
6. Is this worth risking hurt feelings and a possible church split?
7. Would Jesus Spend His Time on This?

Learning to show respect and love to each other even when we disagree is, I believe, the key to Christian love and maturity.

# LESSON - 3

## TWO DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO GOD

### 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5

I'm sure you've had the experience of talking to someone about something and then all of a sudden the conversation seems to take a sudden turn and you don't know where the new subject came from.

On first glance it appears that Paul has suddenly changed subjects in 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5.

Paul had been talking about the divisions in the church and now he seems to suddenly change to talk about the foolishness of the cross. I don't think Paul has changed course at all.

Since in chapter 3 he comes back to the groups who were following Apollos, Cephas and himself it seems to me that he never left the subject.

I believe Paul is drawing attention to one of the chief causes of conflict: losing sight of what is important.

He shows us that there are two different ways of viewing the world and the gospel.

### **THERE ARE THOSE WHO SEE THE GOSPEL MESSAGE,**

#### **1. AS FOOLISHNESS (Verse 18)**

In verse 18 Paul says there are two kinds of people; two responses to the gospel message.

The first group of people see the cross as foolishness, the others see it as the power of God. Paul has just described one of the biggest challenges we face in our society today: the fact of different worldviews.

**A worldview** is: "a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true, or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic makeup of our world. It is the "lens" through which we view the world.

If you have prescription glasses most people are either far-sighted or near-sighted. Your glasses are designed to correct that problem. There are degrees of far-sightedness and near-sightedness but for the most part but most eye problems fall into these two categories.

In the same way there are two basic ways of looking at the world. There is what is called a secular worldview (which sees the world basically without God) and a Biblical (or God-centered) worldview.

The first group holds what we can call a secular worldview. This means that they exclude God from their thinking. They reject the idea of absolute truth and think that many determine their own destiny.

These people believe that the world needs more education to solve it's problems. They don't believe God created the world and discount notions of sin and judgement.

To this group of people, right and wrong is determined by the consensus of the people. To these people talk about the Bible, right and wrong and salvation through Jesus Christ is foolishness.

### **In verse 20**

Paul asks a simple question about this worldview: "Where has it gotten you?" How has this godlessness advanced the world?

We haven't solved the problems of poverty, hatred, or prejudice. We have not advanced in our morality . . .we have actually become more selfish, reckless and immoral!

As a parent you sometimes have to let your child do something that you know isn't going to work. You watch them struggle, get frustrated, and fail. But you have to let them do it their way. They need to see that they don't know what they are doing before they will finally turn to you for help.

Paul wanted the people to see that the ways of the world don't lead anywhere. Solomon discovered the emptiness of this secular view of the world. He wrote in the book of Ecclesiastes 1:16-17

### **In verse 21**

These are the two choices: the way of the world, or the way of God: the wisdom of men or the foolishness of what was preached: that salvation is found only in Christ.

Paul illustrates this with the Jews and the Greeks of his own day in verses 22-25,

Everyone seems to have an excuse as to why they don't accept the teaching of Christ. For the Jews, they wanted more signs. The Jesus that was

preached did not fit what they thought the Messiah was to be. They were waiting(still) for King than carpenter.

They wanted “proof”. Jesus told the Jews that the only proof they needed was the resurrection. People can always find excuses for not believing.

The Greeks were different. Paul said, they “look for wisdom”. That doesn't mean they were open to the truth.

It means they wanted to discover and negotiate truth. They wanted to do things their own way. They didn't want to accept God's Word as truth.

They loved the debate, they relished the philosophies.

They aren't looking for truth . . . they are trying to be God! They want to decide want to decide their own truth. They want to do their own thing. They don't want to submit to anyone . . . especially God!

## **2. THE POWER OF GOD FOR SALVATION**

The secular worldview is the first lens through which we see the world. The other “lens” through which we view the world is what we would call a Biblical worldview.

This viewpoint starts with the belief that God created the world. It believes that God is involved with His creation and has entered the world in the person of Jesus and has revealed Himself through the Bible which gives us an unwavering standard or Law.

**The person with a Biblical worldview realizes that we are all sinful people in need of what Christ alone can provide.**

### **In verses 26-31**

Paul here asks the church to look at their own makeup.

It may sound like Paul is insulting the church. That's not the case at all. Paul is making a point: God has always reached out to the common man.

Those who were filled with a sense of their own wisdom and importance lacked the humility required to receive God's grace.

Back in Deuteronomy 7:7 Moses reminded the people of Israel, (Read the verse)



God requires that we come to Him with humility; willing to be led by Him. God wants us to “boast” in him and not in ourselves. Consequently, the gospel of Jesus is received more by common people than the “celebrities” and the “movers and shakers” of our world. They resist this idea of dependence.

In verse 30 we are told, (Read verse)

Basically, Paul tells us that those who accept the message of the cross (that Jesus entered the world, gave His life as a sacrifice, and rose from the dead) are able to live in fellowship and peace with God.

These people gain a new perspective on life. They see things from God's point of view. Theirs is not a changing standard of truth. It is unchanging; it is an anchor that we can build our lives on.

Paul says that those who turn to Jesus for salvation and new life all of a sudden “get it”. It is as if a light turns on in our soul and suddenly life has purpose and direction.

Much of what was confusing suddenly becomes clear. The message of the gospel is no longer foolishness; it becomes the motivation for our worship and praise.

Paul tells us these people have a right-standing before God. We are forgiven and made new. God begins the process of building His life, understanding, and perspectives into our lives.

LESSON - 4  
**GROWING UP IN THE TRUTH**  
**1 Corinthians 2:6-16**

Every one of us understands that the normal course of development is for a child to move from simple thinking to more complex reasoning.

They should move from basic skills (such as crawling and walking) and learn to do more complex skills (running, skipping, jumping, climbing). A child that fails to mature in this way is not healthy.

If the child does not mature in this way we take them to the Doctor because we recognize that there is a problem. These children are called handicapped because they do not grow as they should.

As we move to study Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 the Apostle Paul encouraged the church in Corinth to mature in faith rather than to stay where they are and suffer a spiritual handicap.

Paul wanted the Corinthians (and us) to move on to maturity.

### **1. MATURITY IS NOT THE WISDOM OF THIS AGE**

#### **1 Corinthians 2:6-16**

Let's go back to our text. Paul begins by saying,

Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that there was much to learn in the Christian faith. The wonderful thing about the gospel is that it is simple enough for a child but profound enough that even the finest theologian cannot fully probe its depth.

We need to understand however that spiritual maturity and academic knowledge are not the same thing. You can have a ton of education and still be a spiritual infant.

You can be thought of as brilliant in the world and still not have a spiritual clue. You can even teach in a Seminary and not have spiritual wisdom.

This is important to understand. All around us worldly smart people denounce Christianity.

Lets Look at verse 14,

Paul said that these people CANNOT understand the truth. It is foolishness

to him. The Greek adjective for “**foolish**” refers to someone on whom truth, duty, and excellence do not produce their proper effect.

To these people, the message of the gospel is absurd, ridiculous and distasteful.

It's important that we keep this clear in our head. Paul says the “rulers of this age” are coming to nothing. They are headed no where.

## **MATURE WISDOM ORIGINATES WITH GOD**

In verse 7-9 Paul wrote,

The wisdom that is possessed by matured christians is something different from the world because it is something you can't learn from reason . . . it is something that God must disclose.

Because of sin, we are unable to grasp God's wisdom. Our eyes are blinded and God must reveal the truth to us.

In verse 9 Paul says God's design and plan is something no man could imagine or think up. It is something that is better than anything the world can offer. Think about it,

- The world tells us to indulge our desires to find happiness, God tells us to control our desires so we can know joy.
- The world tells us to fight, exact judgment, and get revenge because if you don't you will be called a wimp; God's wisdom tells us to love our enemies and to extend forgiveness to others. For then we will be called a child of God.
- The world says we should do whatever we can get away with; afterall, everyone is doing it; God's wisdom says, “we will all face judgment for every idle thought and hidden deed” (i.e. we won't “get away with anything”).
- The world says medals, trophies, possessions, and titles is what is most significant; God's wisdom says character and commitment are the most important things.

## **MATURE WISDOM IS GIVEN BY GOD'S SPIRIT**

Paul tells us that “the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.”(10)

Paul explains this concept with an analogy. He points out that even your spouse or best friend does not know the “real you”. The only way people

can know what I am actually thinking is if I tell them.

In the same way, says Paul, the only One who truly knows God is His Spirit. The incredible truth of the Bible is that God gives us His Spirit when we acknowledge and repent of our sin and put our hope and trust in Christ.

Jesus said the Holy Spirit would live in us and help us to know the mind and wisdom of God. When we follow of Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit is given to us to help us.

The Holy Spirit guides us, empowers us and equips us to serve the Lord. Paul taught that the Holy Spirit is given to everyone who believes. In fact, in the book of Romans, Paul said the person who does not have the Spirit does not really belong to Christ (Romans 8:9).

The general work of God's Spirit in regard to spiritual wisdom can be summarized with three words: Revelation, Inspiration, and Illumination. REVELATION obviously means to reveal, "unveil", or uncover something. In this case, the Holy Spirit, in a sense "pulls back the curtain on God."

The Holy Spirit reveals the true and living God.

INSPIRATION speaks of God working in and through the writers of the Bible so that their words were nothing less than the Words of God. They were written with the human personality of the author but God watched over the process so that the very words that were spoken truly revealed God's character.

In 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul told us all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and because of that fact it was profitable for teaching, rebuking, correction, and training in righteousness.

Inspiration is why we call the Bible "The Word of God". In the Words of the Bible, God speaks to us with clarity. In the Bible, God reveals Himself to us through His inspired Word.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

How does this relate to conflict? Paul wanted the church to understand that if they were living by the Holy Spirit they cannot entertain the spirit of competition with other Christians. The Spirit of God does not tear apart the body of Christ by divisions. The concern of the body is the glory of God not the petty parties of men.

Someone has said that in the great depth of God's greatness the church is filled with ankle-deep disciples. Frankly, we are too distracted. We spend our time and energy running after the trivial things of the world.

The whispers of God's Spirit can't be heard because there is little quiet time in our lives. The television is on, our ipod is playing, the cell phone is ringing or we're watching videos.

We no longer know how to "be still and know that He is God". In all our activity, we have drowned out the whisper of the Spirit that God has planted in us.

## LESSON - 5

### WORKING TOGETHER IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

#### 1 Corinthians 3:1–9

This morning we turn our attention to 1 Corinthians chapter 3. This is somewhat of a continuation of what Paul talked about last week, which was the problem of conflict caused by spiritual immaturity.

In this passage, Paul addressed the Corinthian church as brothers—he cared for them, and wanted them to hear what he had to say.

In order for us to understand what Paul was saying in this passage, we have to know the history of the Corinthian church.

We find the back-story of the Corinthian church in Acts chapter 18. Paul came to the city of Corinth and began to preach there, as he did in every other city he visited.

He stayed for about a year and a half, planting a church in Corinth. After Paul left to continue his missionary work, a well-educated man named Apollos showed up, and after being instructed by some of the leaders of the church (Priscilla and Aquila), he began to preach boldly about Jesus.

When we understand that Paul went into the city of Corinth as a missionary, what he wrote in verses 1 and 2 makes more sense.

When Paul first came to Corinth, he bottle fed the gospel to them. He didn't get very deep into theology; he just stuck to the basics, because that was all they could handle at that point. Paul wasn't chastising them because they only got the basics at that time—Paul was chastising the Corinthians because they were still at that level, they hadn't moved at all. And that was what was causing problems in the church.

Paul was telling the people what they were doing wrong, and why they were having problems in their church—but I think we can also look at this passage from a slightly different perspective.

We can look at it and ask, “What do we need to do to avoid the problems the Corinthian church was having?” I think there are two primary principles that we can draw from this passage.

#### **Grow Up**

The first principle is that we should grow up. We talked about this a little last week. Spiritual maturity means more than just learning a whole bunch of facts. Spiritual maturity means that we have the mind of Christ—moving beyond our former way of thinking and acting to think and act the way that God wants us to.

What we need to learn is that as a church, we must grow up. As long as we buy into the world's philosophies and the world's way of thinking and believing, we will have the same kinds of problems that the world has!

So, we can see that it is important for us to grow up in our thinking and in our actions, but the question is, how do we go about that? I think there are three basic ways of working at growing spiritually. The first is to spend time learning about who God is and who we are.

### ***Learning about God and Ourselves***

We have questions about all sorts of different issues today—and we almost always know where to go to find the answer.

We go to the internet to check facts, to a doctor to find out about a nagging pain, to a mechanic to find out what's causing that noise, a plumber to know what's causing the leak. We have no problem seeking out the answers to our questions—we go to the experts. But where do we turn to learn about God and about ourselves?

There are all sorts of “experts” we could go to for answers, such as the internet or friends, but often times that would be like asking your plumber to tell you what's wrong with your neck. It's really outside of his expertise.

We need to seek the expert to learn about God and ourselves. God is the expert, so we need to look to the Bible for these answers. The problem that we often face is that we know the Bible has the answers, we just don't know how to get them. So let me make a suggestion to help you.

Ask yourself four questions whenever you read a passage of Scripture.

1. What does this passage mean? In other words, what is the author driving at? What is the main idea of the passage? What was the reason he was writing this?
2. What does this passage teach me about God? Does it teach me about his character? Does it demonstrate his power? Does it teach me about God's track record?
3. What does this passage teach me about myself? Does this passage teach me about my purpose? Does it teach me about my position before God? Does it teach me about how I should behave?
4. What changes do I need to make as a result of this passage? In other words, in light of this new knowledge, what needs to be different? Do I need to change my theology—the way I think about God and the world? Do I need to start doing something? Stop doing something? What do I need to change?

We need to interact with the Bible. When we ask questions, we will interact, and we will grow. It's ok if you come away with more questions than you started—be aware

of those and seek out the expert for the answers. You will surely grow.

### ***Be Honest***

If you think about a *Alcoholic Anonymus* group, you know that they all have one thing in common—they only work if you are honest. The first step is always to admit you have a problem. And, those who attend these groups will tell you that unless you are willing to be honest, you are going to fight the battle alone.

We often feel that we have to hide things from one another. We don't grow because we don't want anyone to know what we're really like. So we pretend, and we face our battles alone.

We don't grow because we are too busy hiding. Before we can be honest with each other, we have to be honest with God.

We have to come to him and tell him what we're dealing with and what our struggles are. Many people think they can't be honest with God either, but the fact is God already knows our struggles and what we're thinking—we don't need to hide those things from him.

So let me encourage you to simply be honest with the Lord. Be honest about your struggles, about the areas where you are confused, about the sins that trip you up most often—don't try to rationalize them. Present your struggles honestly and God will give the strength and perspective you need to overcome them.

### ***Follow Directions***

The third thing that we should do in order to grow is to do what we are told. The world gives us all sorts of rules to live by, and we understand most of those rules.

We follow them because they make sense to us, or because we know there are consequences for disobeying.

We stop when we see red lights, we pay taxes on everything. We know we can't shoot some animals. We know we are supposed to recycle our cans and our plastic. We may not always understand the reasons behind the rules, but we still follow them.

God has given us rules to live by as well. When we follow his rules (even when they don't make sense to us) we will grow. When the rules of the world and the rules of God come into conflict, follow God's rules—for we are seeking spiritual wisdom, not worldly wisdom.

When we are obedient to God's commands, we will also see that he knows what he's talking about. We don't see the big picture like God does. Believe it or not, God



actually sees the big picture even better than Congress. We need to trust and obey his rules. It is often not until we have followed the commands that we understand the reason for them.

So the first principle to learn from this passage is to grow up. The second principle that we should learn from this passage is to fulfill our purpose.

## **Fulfill Your Purpose**

Paul addressed a specific problem in the Corinthian church in verses three through nine.

He was returning to the problem he first mentioned in chapter 1. The Corinthian church had started to divide over which teacher they liked best.

They were fighting over who the best pastor was. Paul's explained the root of the problem by using an analogy that would have been easy for them to understand.

It's an analogy that's easy for us to understand as well. Paul used the illustration of a farmer.

Let's really look at this illustration. Paul said that he planted and Apollos watered, but God made the seed to grow. This is really a pretty simple illustration to understand. Paul was telling us that he and Apollos were like farmers—Paul's job was to go and plant the seeds of faith. Apollos came along later and helped to water the seed. Farmers know that both things have to happen in order to have any sort of harvest.

Paul is saying here that we have two primary jobs to do—we need to plant seeds, but also to help them grow. It's tempting to look at this passage and say my job is to plant, or my job is to cultivate—but that's not really what Paul is saying. Sometimes the farmer needs to plant a seed, and other times he needs to cultivate it—but he needs to do both jobs.

We can't get discouraged if we don't see the results we'd like to see, because God is in control of making the seeds grow. This should be an encouragement to us, because we just have to worry about doing our job the best we can and we can leave the results up to God.

What does it mean to plant seeds and to water them? Planting seeds is when we share the message of the gospel with someone else. This doesn't have to be standing on the street corners preaching—it can be much simpler than that.

- Offer kind words and caring to a friend who's suffered a loss
- Talk to the person that is being ignored—ask them about their life
- Ask someone if there's anything you can pray about for them—then pray

Watering seeds is simply helping other Christians to grow in their faith. This too, can take on a variety of roles. You don't have to be a preacher to help people grow in their faith. You can:

- Find a place to serve in the church
- Bring your friend to worship services and midweek meetings.
- Encourage the person who you've seen growing or serving
- Pray for the person you know is going through a tough time
- Bring up spiritual things in conversation with other Christians

This certainly isn't a comprehensive list, so be creative.

Look for ways that you can share the message of the gospel with someone else, but also look for ways that you can help believers grow. You aren't responsible for the results, you're just responsible for going.

LESSON - 6  
**PASSING INSPECTION**  
**1 Corinthians 3:10-23**

There are many different kinds of inspections you may have to go through in life: troops are inspected, so are hospitals, elevators, and automobiles.

Finances and tax returns may be inspected by auditors. Your body fluids may be inspected for illegal substances.

In almost every larger city, building additions (even on your own home) and the erecting of new structures require permits and the passing of a series of inspections. Sometimes building progress stops while they wait for an inspector to approve the work.

In our text this morning Paul uses the analogy of builders who must submit their work to inspection.

Paul pictures the church of God as similar to a building that is being constructed.

The strength of the building depends on the materials with which the builders build. We are told God will inspect our work.

This is one inspection we should not take lightly. If we want to pass the inspection, Paul tells us what we need to do.

**We Must Build on the Right Foundation V10-11**

Paul says we need to build on the correct foundation. Paul called himself an expert builder. The word in the Greek is the word “architect”. Paul saw himself as functioning much like a builder and designer. He was the one who planted the church in Corinth. He laid the foundation on which the church was built. Others have come after him (Peter, Apollos and others) who built on the foundation he laid.

The foundation is what holds a structure steady. Most of the foundation is hidden. It isn't even noticed by others. In much the same way, the foundation on which we build determines the strength of our church and of our lives. It is not flashy, it is something deep. It is the conviction of our lives. It is our attitude. It is what we rely on when life gets difficult.

Those who build on a faulty foundation will look good for awhile. However, when the storms rage, these foundations crumble. When the church builds on something other than Christ, it becomes a church in name only. It is not a

true church.

### **Our Building Materials Must be of Highest Quality V12-15**

God is concerned for quality in His church and in the lives of His people. He wants us to build with gold, silver and precious stones.

Unfortunately, we are inclined to shortcuts (wood, hay, and straw). To the naked eye it is sometimes hard to tell the difference between quality and fake.

Paul says, “God knows, God sees, and the truth will be revealed.”

It is tempting to build God's church and our lives using shortcuts as well.

- We choose to do what will draw a crowd rather than what will require commitment
- We pursue what is flashy over what is solid
- We indulge our children rather than teach them to make good choices and the importance of values in life
- We do what we “have to do” instead of doing all we can
- We choose convenience over sacrifice
- We send a check rather than get involved

All these things are wood, hay, and straw.

### **We Must Have the Right Attitude 16-23**

Paul states that we must build on the right foundation, we should build with materials of the highest quality, and finally he seems to suggest that we need to build with the right attitude.

Paul spoke stern words to the church. He pointed out that the church is God's temple here on earth. God considers His church to be sacred.

Consequently, our building should be characterized by a spirit of cooperation rather than division.

When we allow pettiness and division to destroy the church, we are destroying God's temple and God takes it personally. We are in essence vandalizing God's church.

Paul challenged the people of Corinth to be done with their foolish divisions. We should view each other as brothers rather than as combatants.

## V18-20

Paul urged us to abandon the wisdom of the world and instead adopt an attitude of humility. He encourages us to be teachable rather than thinking we have things all figured out.

He says we must be willing to become a fool (in the eyes of the world) if that is what is necessary to follow the Lord. We must be humble enough to trust God's counsel and directives rather than that of the world.

Paul concluded saying in v21-23

Simply put, Paul is saying, when you fight and argue you are not pursuing some noble cause (like you think you are); you are really limiting what God has for you.

Paul repeated the phrase, "all are yours". He wanted us to understand that the inheritance we have in Christ is so much greater than the petty things we are arguing about.

God has given us a rich inheritance and it is just silly to divide over petty things.

## LESSON - 7

# ISSUES IN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

### 1 Corinthians 4:1-7

In the church in Corinth it appears they were ranking the various leaders of the church. Some favored Paul, some Apollos, others Peter. The debate was creating division.

In the early chapters of his letter to the Corinthians, Paul has been working to eliminate this spirit of competition. Paul appealed first to basic logic.

He reminded the people that none of these leaders or teachers had done anything to save them. Jesus alone deserved their loyalty.

In 1 Corinthians 4 Paul adds a couple of word pictures.

#### **THE ROLE OF LEADERS v1-2**

There are two pictures in the text. The first is found in the word “servants”. Paul does not use the normal word for servant. These men toiled in background. The slaves were a necessary part of the ship but could easily be replaced.

We could say that just as the slaves needed to work together to propel the ship forward, so the various leaders in the church had to work together (rather than against each other) for the Kingdom of God to move forward.

The second picture is in the phrase “those entrusted with the secret things of God”. The word for entrusted is the word for a steward.

A steward was a person who ran the household of his master. He controlled the staff, issued supplies, and reported directly to his employer. He was a manager. His job was simple: look after the interests of the Master.

Both of these pictures help us understand our role as Christ-followers. We serve the Lord. We have been given a great trust. We have been called to share the secret things of God.

#### **EVALUATING LEADERSHIP V3-5**

Paul addressed this spirit of competition from another level. He wrote,

In this passage Paul recognized that there were three different sources of judgment. Two were unreliable. The first is the judgment of others.

There will always be those who are eager to tell you what you are doing wrong . . . even if you don't ask them! Paul was not concerned about the judgment of others.

Don't get me wrong, we can learn a great deal from each other. Other people can often see things in us that we cannot see.

The second judgment that Paul mentions is the judgment from within. Paul said, "My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent."

Paul understood that he could believe he was doing a great job and be mistaken. Our conscience can easily be dulled so that we start believing things that are wrong, are really right.

Remember King David? He committed adultery with Bathsheba and then had her husband killed to cover his sin. By all accounts it seems that David felt justified in his actions. After an appropriate time for grieving, David married Bathsheba.

The prophet Nathan came to see David and told him a story about a very rich man who had stolen the sole cherished lamb of a poor man so that he could serve it to his friends.

David was infuriated and declared that this man deserved to be punished! Nathan looked at David and said, "You are the man!" David could see the fault in others, but was blinded to the greater fault in his own life. This can happen in our own lives,

The point I'm making is that our conscience is unreliable. It can make us feel better (and worse) than we should feel. Our conscience can be blind to our sin or can beat us up with our failures.

The third judgment is the judgment of the Lord. We should not be overly concerned about the judgment of others or the voice within.

They are unreliable. However, we should be concerned about the judgment of the Lord. Paul reminds us that God is the only just Judge.

He "brings to light what is hidden in darkness, and will expose the motives of men's hearts" God knows what we did, why we did it, and what we were hoping to gain by doing it. He knows,

- The sense of superiority we felt when caring for someone
- The way we tried to manipulate a situation for our benefit in our "act of kindness"

- He knows when we have told the truth but another person refused to believe it.
- He knows when we have given sacrificially and when we have not

## **KEEPING PERSPECTIVE**

Paul continues his instruction, V6-7

In these words Paul encourages us to be balanced in two areas: When it comes to making Judgments. Anytime you read something such as verse 5, “judge nothing before the appointed time” there will be people who conclude we should never says certain behaviors or beliefs are right or wrong.

This is to misuse this text! That is not what Paul meant.

In chapter 5 Paul “calls out” or confronts one of the members of the Church in Corinth who was living a blatantly immoral life. He told the church to excommunicate (or kick out) the man who was engaging in this lifestyle.

In chapter 6 he told the church that we should be able to judge cases within the Christian community rather than take them to the pagan courts. Paul is obviously not saying that we should never make judgments.

In verse 6 Paul said we must learn “not go beyond what it written.” This is not an easy passage to interpret but I think Paul is telling us that we need to learn to make judgments only on things on which God has clearly spoken.

We should be careful about drawing conclusions about the actions and beliefs of others. We do not see clearly.

However, we are right to announce that certain behaviors and attitudes are wrong when the Bible clearly says they are wrong. In this case we are simply reporting the conclusions of the Judge who does see clearly.