

Precious Work

1 Corinthians (CGS#6) – 3:10-23

INTRODUCTION: We left off last week at verse nine, where Paul gave the Corinthian church an important illustration. He told them that they (and all believers) are God’s fellow workers, field, and building. This illustration was to help stress the truth of spiritual maturity and to point out that maturity was severely and distressingly lacking in their church. Paul’s words in the remainder of chapter three are significant and stern. Again, Paul is writing to them to shake them loose of their immaturity and sin that is not only hurting the church but harming the gospel. Here is how one commentator summarizes Paul’s tone and message in this section.

“But that requires an immediate response. These Christians must stop kidding themselves that they are wise and get back in line with the “foolishness” of God revealed in the cross (**3:18–20**). And they must stop boasting in human leaders, whether Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or anyone else (**v 21–22**). These two are obviously connected. Boasting in leaders is something you only do if you have a worldly concept of wisdom; if your view of wisdom is godly, spiritual and cross-shaped, as Paul laid it out in chapters 1 and 2, it will lead you towards humble unity rather than haughty infighting.

Boastfulness, factionalism and pride are destructive to everybody. They destroy the individuals who participate in them, and, left unchecked, they destroy the church as a whole. The good news, Paul says, is that they are also completely unnecessary. There is no need to insist that Paul is “yours” or Apollos is “mine” (**3:21**). If you are in Christ, then everything belongs to you already: human leaders, life and death, the present and the future, and the entire world (**v 22**). When we think our inheritance is small and insignificant, we squabble like toddlers over every last bit of it. When we lift up our eyes and see how much is ours in Christ, our tribal allegiances fade into the background, as when Abraham gave Lot the best bit of land because he knew that God would give him everything else (Genesis 13). That is why Paul ends a fairly heavy chapter with such an uplifting conclusion: “All [things] are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God” (1 Corinthians **3:22–23**).”¹

This community of faith had devolved into quarrelling and strife because immaturity and sin were tolerated. The tragedy of this was not just that individual members were being hurt, but that it also compromised the gospel work in their city. They had everything that they needed in Christ. Even Paul couldn’t lay a more perfect foundation than what Jesus had already laid! Their call was not to try to build a different foundation, but to build on the foundation of Christ by growing into conformity with Jesus and keeping Jesus at the center of their lives. After all, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and set apart for a unique purpose, that is, the glorification of God and the spread of the gospel. The question that stands out for you and me is, Do I consider the work of the gospel (becoming like Christ) precious work? Or, do I see it as something secondary to other pressing matters?

Paul answers this for us by teaching us that **mature believers declare God’s goodness in word and deed**. It is to flow from our lives, demonstrating that we are distinctively different because of Christ. And that our lives demonstrate that there is unfailing hope in Jesus. This is precious work that we should be eagerly anticipating and engaged in. This is to be the main thing of our lives.

¹ Andrew Wilson, *1 Corinthians for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God’s Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2021), 36–38.

GETTING STARTED – As you begin your group time, take time to answer this question together: What is the main thing of your life right now? How might Paul give you some gentle advice in this area?

IN THE WORD – Let's dig back into the passage. It is important to strengthen our muscles in reading God's Word. On Sunday, we walked through the passage in the sermon. Hopefully, that helped you to see the landmarks of the passage with fresh eyes. Now, with your group, go back through it and see what God is saying to you specifically.

First, before you read the passage, take a moment to ask God's Spirit to quiet your mind and heart and to illuminate the text to you. Second, read the passage aloud to the group. Then, follow the simple method below. (O.P.A)

Observe: Make 8-10 observations from the passage. Pay close attention to observe and note repeated words and phrases, names, places, and themes.

Principles: From your list of observations, what patterns or big ideas do you see emerging? Can you distill it down into 2-4 big idea truths?

Apply: Moving from your list of principles, it is time to apply God's Word. Remember, we believe that God's Word is living and active and that it can change the way we live Monday-Friday. What is one tangible way to apply a truth from your list above?

Note: Another way to approach your time together is to talk through the following questions about the article of faith we are studying that week.

1. What did you hear God's Spirit say to you through the passage this week? How does it encourage you? How does it sharpen you?
2. How have you seen God at work in your life this week? Have you enjoyed him? Have you heard his voice and the leading of his Spirit? Big ways or small ways.
3. When you think about spiritual maturity, what are the defining characteristics? I.e., How do you know that you are growing into maturity?
4. Here at CCC, we have six "Life Questions" to help us measure how we are doing in following Jesus in a life-defining way. Consider these three questions – How do they encourage you? How do they spur you to growth?
 - a. Did God make my day? – Do I enjoy God's presence in his Word and prayer?
 - b. Is the Spirit flowing through me? – Do I depend on the Holy Spirit throughout my day?
 - c. How are my investments doing? – Am I investing my time, talents, and treasure into the work of the kingdom?