

Bible Study # 6

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1st Corinthians

1st Corinthians 3

- **1st Cor 3:1- 3** *“But I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food;... for **you are still in the flesh.**”*
 - Here, Paul is returning to the actual situation of the Corinthians who are far from wisdom and spiritual maturity
 - When he first arrived he treated them like fat-cheeked infants by feeding them with milk and not solid food
 - It is now three years later and by now they should have become mature spiritual people
 - But instead they are “in the flesh” behaving in an ordinary human way
 - For Paul “the flesh” is the human tendency to sin, act selfishly, and resist God

1st Corinthians 3 (Cont)

- This is no longer about Gnosticism
- Paul is returning to Baptismal imagery where a man becomes a “spiritual man” while still walking in “the flesh”
- After Baptism one still has a fleshy body because the body has not as yet been redeemed
- The body will die and be raised from the dead at the Second Coming
- But the soul, the spirit, has already died and been raised from the dead in Baptism
- So Paul is speaking to the Baptized who are still walking around “in the flesh”

1st Corinthians 3 (Cont)

- **1st Cor 3:3-4** *“For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving like ordinary men? For when one says, I belong to Paul, and another, I belong to Apollos, are you not merely men?”*
 - He is reminding them that they are acting like those who have never been baptized
 - He is asking how could men of the spirit be fighting with each other?
 - To him they are walking in the spirit according to the flesh, that is to say they are acting just like they did before they were baptized

1st Corinthians 3 (Cont)

- **1st Cor 3:5-10** *“What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.... Let each man take care how he builds upon it.*
 - After using an agricultural image, Paul develops the image of the Church as God’s building
 - He asks them what sort of foundation they were building their faith on?
 - He is reminding them that he and *Apollos* are simply ministers or instruments used by God to bring the Corinthians to faith

1st Corinthians 3 (Cont)

• **1st Cor 3:11-17** *“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ....For God’s temple is holy, and that temple you are.”*

- Paul is pointing out that the other guys who have come to Corinth are playing with them and are not building the Church on the foundation that he (Paul) laid
- He warns against any builder who would lay a different foundation
- He uses the image of a builder who uses precious materials and whose work stands vs those who build with inferior substances and shoddy workmanship
- He warns them that they are going to end up in big trouble

1st Corinthians 3 (Cont)

- Next, he introduces the concept that the people will become the Temple of God
 - This must have shocked the Jewish converts as the Temple in Jerusalem was still standing
 - It must have struck the Corinthians as a new concept when he called them to see themselves as the temple of God
- But that is exactly what they had become after baptism as the Spirit of God dwelled in them

1st Corinthians 3 (Cont)

- **1st Cor 3:18-19** *“Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool and he may become wise....He catches the wise in their craftiness”*
 - At this point Paul returns to the “wisdom theme” by quoting from the **Book of Job** where God sets up the lowly
 - He concludes with the idea that the key to owning everything is, ironically, being possessed by another (Jesus Christ)
 - Paul reminds them that the Lord knows the thoughts of the wise and the futile

1st Corinthians 3 (Cont)

- It is obvious that some of the people had aligned themselves with *Paul, Apollos or Cephas (Peter)*
- Most likely those who were affiliating themselves with *Cephas* were some of the false apostles from Palestine who were implying that they had been taught the faith by *Cephas*
- This is similar to the false apostles who came to Galatia claiming authority from Jerusalem
- In reality *Cephas* had not sent them and they were making up the entire relationship

1st Corinthians 4

- Visualize the Corinthians sitting in the middle of a room with Paul on one side and the false apostles on the other
 - Paul is trying to get the Corinthians to come to his side of the room in this debate
 - Unfortunately, Paul is at a disadvantage as he was in **Ephesus** writing this letter while the false apostles were present **Corinth**
 - The false apostles are trying to influence the people, and they may have taken over the local clergy
 - Paul has to figure a way to convince the Corinthians to listen to him and not to the false apostles – so he says:

1st Corinthians 4 (Cont)

- **1st Cor 4:1** *“This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.”*
- Paul is saying that this is who he and Apollos are and that they are doing what Christ had called them to do
- Then he tells them that he and his followers possess the mysteries of the kingdom of God
 - The Greek word for “mystery” is *musterion*
 - Many Eastern Churches today still refer to the sacraments as the *musterion*, the Holy Mysteries

1st Corinthians 4 (Cont)

- In this section Paul returns to the subordinate role of ministers who are servants of Christ and servants of the community in Christ
- Even though they serve the community, it does not mean that they take orders from the community for as stewards – they have authority from the owner (Christ) to manage the estate

1st Corinthians 4 (Cont)

- **1st Cor 4:2-6** *“Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. But with me it is a very small thing can I should be judged by you or by any human court....I have applied all this to myself and Apollos for your benefit,...”*
 - Paul and Apollos are good friends and Paul sees Apollos as a team player
 - Paul is putting himself and Apollos out there for judgment in contrast to the false apostles
 - If Paul simply attacked the false apostles, then he would be doing the same thing they are doing to him

1st Corinthians 4 (Cont)

- But what Paul does is to ask the Corinthians to judge and contrast him, Apollos and Cephas with the false apostles to determine which ones are real
- He is asking them to determine who they should be listening to
- He tells them not to say that they “belong” to or were baptized by one individual or another
- The question is: who is on Christ’s side in this question?
- Again, he is using a pretty fancy argument with some pretty good rhetoric and philosophy

1st Corinthians 4 (Cont)

- **1st Cor 4:6** *“I have applied all this to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brethren, that you may learn by us not to go beyond **what is written**, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.”*
 - This is one of the most confusing phrases in all of Paul’s epistles
 - But after reading the entire paragraph it appears that Paul is telling the Corinthians not to be puffed up or to think too much of themselves

1st Corinthians 4 (Cont)

- **1st Cor 4:7-9** *“For who sees anything different in you? What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why did you boast as if it were not a gift?...us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death”*
 - Remember that **Corinth** is one of the wealthiest cities in the region
 - The Corinthians are sitting high and mighty
 - To anyone in Palestine the average member of the Church in **Corinth** would be considered wealthy
 - Paul is telling them that even though they believe that they have it all he is hoping that ever greater gifts can be attained so that he could share in some of that greatness

1st Corinthians 4 (Cont)

- Paul is thinking of the gifts with which the Corinthians have been endowed to include the:
 - Gift of faith
 - Charismatic gifts
 - Gifts of a series of preachers and teachers they have received

1st Corinthians 4 (Cont)

- **1st Cor 4:9-18** *“For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, to Angels and two men.... Some arrogant, as though I were not coming to you.”*
 - In both 1st and 2nd Corinthians we hear some say that Paul is not coming back to **Corinth**
 - Paul has even heard from Cleo’s people that some in the Church in Corinth believe that he will never return
 - Sentenced to death means that the Apostles will follow the way Jesus walked – condemned, sentenced, ridiculed and crucified
 - Paul sees himself in a furrow plowed by Jesus in the Beatitudes

1st Corinthians 4 (Cont)

- Next he lists six characteristic experiences of the Apostles
 - This entire section is similar to 2 Cor 4:7-12 where Paul describes ministry as a treasure held in “earthen vessels” so, “that surpassing power may be of God and not from us”
 - He goes on to point out how anyone who has had to discipline a child knows the kind of anguish Paul is expressing here as he wants to correct rather than shame the Corinthians

1st Corinthians 4 (Cont)

- **1st Cor 4:19** *But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power.”*
 - Look at the language here
 - He really is not that far away
 - All he has to do is get in a boat and cross the Aegean Sea

1st Corinthians 4 (Cont)

- **1st Cor 4: 20 –21** *“For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk put in power. What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in the spirit of gentleness?”*
 - In this letter Paul is telling them to make a choice for he is coming to them unless he dies tomorrow
 - He is telling the people that they can make a choice concerning how they want him to come: in the spirit of gentleness or with a rod
 - Paul is going to arrive at the Church in Corinth and then face off with the false apostles (if they are still around)

1st Corinthians 4 (Cont)

- Remember how he had the courage to stand up to Peter in Antioch?
- Can you imagine what he is going to do when he arrives in Corinth?
- He certainly is not afraid of the false apostles
- He will most likely kick open the door and start yelling at them

1st Corinthians 5

- **1st Cor 5:1** *“It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans;”*
 - Paul is defending himself by presenting the Corinthians a mirror of themselves
 - He is saying to them that for all their attacks on him they should look at themselves in a mirror
 - He understands that there is some serious immorality (sin) among them that is infecting some in the Church of Corinth
 - A man living with his father’s wife (concubine or 2nd or 3rd wife)
 - Sins against **consanguinity**
 - These are some of the sins of **Pornea** (Greek for immorality) in Acts 15
 - He is using hyperbole in declaring them worse than the pagans