



Community Group Discussion Guide

April 28, 2024

1 Corinthians 3:1-17 | Unified in the Faith

MOTIVATE

Starter Question:

- ⇒ *Can you give an example of someone who you believe is a great leader?*
- ⇒ *What characteristics make a great leader?*

DISCUSS

At Corinth, Paul faced a problem with what could be called “Christian celebrities” or “Christian personalities.” The Christians at Corinth were dividing the church by pledging their loyalties to different individuals such as these. Each group of followers claimed to be better than the others, and a divisive spirit began to grow in the church. One of the celebrities was considered to be Paul himself with some believers at Corinth actually claiming to be his followers.

One of the things that separates actual good leaders from celebrities is that celebrities often believe in their press. Because of their great popularity, they think more of themselves than they should. Leaders, however, know their limits and understand that they are not all that others think they are or want them to be. Paul was a good leader but he knew better than to believe those who wanted to make him a celebrity. He insisted that believers should follow only one person: Christ himself.

- ⇒ *Why does the general public tend to show alliance and admiration for celebrities?*
- ⇒ *What is it about celebrities that might cause division among the people they are trying to lead?*

In 1 Corinthians 3:1-17 Paul dealt with the ministry of the gospel and described what a minister of the gospel is and does, and how the church should look upon him and his work. Having shown that the gospel of Christ opposed the arrogant wisdom of his time, Paul warned against the celebrities whom worldly wisdom had created in Corinth. The apostle Paul pointed out that the Corinthian believers did not behave like people taught by the Holy Spirit. Although they were Christians, they acted like unbelievers by quarreling and being jealous.¹ They seem to have forgotten that through Christ they were called to unity and community.

1 Corinthians 3:1-3 *But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, 3 for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?*

¹ Pratt, R. L., Jr. (2000). [I & II Corinthians](#) (Vol. 7, p. 46). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Paul expected these young Christians to be more spiritually mature in their behavior. Their squabbling was inexcusable. Their immaturity resembled that of adults acting like infants by still eating only baby food.² Just as newborn infants choke on solid food, the Corinthians were unable to take the solid food of Christian teaching.

The Corinthians should have abandoned ungodly practices long ago, yet they remained immature. As a result, they were still worldly, acting like unbelievers. Paul offered as evidence the jealousy and quarreling that was dividing the Corinthians. They employed human arrogance and wisdom to fight one another. This behavior demonstrated that they lived by the principles of the world rather than by the teaching of the Spirit. They acted like “mere men,” not like people in Christ who were being led by the Holy Spirit to fulfill the goals of Christ and His gospel.

⇒ ***What are some of the characteristics of a human infant that demonstrate immaturity?***

⇒ ***How do Christians demonstrate immaturity?***

1 Corinthians 3:4-8 For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human? **5** What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. **6** I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. **7** So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. **8** He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor.

Paul quoted the claims of these divisive factions, “I follow Paul. I follow Apollos.” Paul asserted that both he and Apollos were only servants. Jesus taught that the greatest in His kingdom must be the least (Luke 22:26). Unlike worldly leaders who seek positions of power so they may be served, Christian leaders are to be the servants of all.

Paul used an agricultural metaphor to make his point. He explained that he had planted the seed by bringing the gospel to Corinth. Later, Apollos watered the seed that Paul had planted. Apollos taught the Corinthians after Paul did. Neither Paul nor Apollos was more important to the church at Corinth. Without a sower, there would have been nothing to water. Without someone to tend the growing seed, it may as well not have been planted.

Paul also designated God’s role in the process. Paul and Apollos simply served the Lord, who made it grow. Their human leadership accomplished nothing apart from the Spirit’s power. Further, they only planted and watered because God told them to do so. The blessings of salvation on the church at Corinth came through the power and will of God.³

² Blomberg, C. (1994). [1 Corinthians](#) (p. 72). Zondervan Publishing House.

³ Pratt, R. L., Jr. (2000). [I & II Corinthians](#) (Vol. 7, p. 48). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

- ⇒ ***Name someone in your past who planted a spiritual seed that resulted in your spiritual birth.***
- ⇒ ***When did you grow fastest in your spiritual journey?***

On the basis of the truth, “only God gives the growth,” Paul concluded that neither the sower nor the one watering was anything—both were secondary instruments used by God, who makes things grow. The importance that the Corinthians placed on human leaders proved their failure to understand that God deserves all the credit for the blessings believers receive.

- ⇒ ***Why do we have a tendency to place so much importance on human leaders?***
- ⇒ ***What happens when we understand that “only God gives the growth?”***

To carry the truth one step further, Paul argued that the one planting and the one watering have one purpose—seeing the church grow and bear fruit. The tasks of Paul and Apollos were not at odds, nor were Paul and Apollos themselves. They would never have argued over credit for the work done in Corinth because each expected to be rewarded “according to his labor.” Paul and Apollos were unified in growing God’s church.⁴

- ⇒ ***Why is unity vital to grow God’s church?***
- ⇒ ***How do we ensure we are not at odds with other believers?***

1 Corinthians 3:9-11 For we are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s field, God’s building. **10** According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. **11** For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Paul and Apollos were “God’s fellow workers.” They formed a team, working together in God’s service. Each one needed the other to fulfill the goal, and the goal was God’s design. The Corinthian church, therefore, was God’s, not theirs. God is the church’s ultimate leader and its allegiance belongs to Him alone.

Paul also called the Corinthians “God’s building.” Both metaphors, agriculture and building, illustrate that God was constructing a unified church—one building, one field—not a fragmented, divided church. By quarreling and dividing, the Corinthians were destroying what God was building and were attempting to replace the church’s true foundation.

Paul presented himself as a “skilled master builder” who had “laid a foundation.” Others were building on it. Paul demonstrated humility by reminding the Corinthians that he served to lay a foundation through the grace God had given to him. Anyone building on Paul’s foundation was to likewise do so humbly and by God’s grace.

⁴ Pratt, R. L., Jr. (2000). [*I & II Corinthians*](#) (Vol. 7, p. 48). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

- ⇒ ***Why is having a solid foundation necessary for building a strong building?***
- ⇒ ***Why are humility and unity imperative for the leader building on the foundation of Jesus Christ?***
- ⇒ ***Discuss this quote: Any church leader who substitutes human imaginations for the true gospel of Christ has set aside the only acceptable foundation for the church.***

1 Corinthians 3:12-15 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— **13** each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. **14** If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. **15** If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Builders must also show caution because God will reward church leaders according to the work they accomplish. Paul's words apply to every believer but are a direct warning to church leadership.

Paul identified how church leaders can build upon the foundation of Christ's gospel in two different ways.

1. Leaders can use precious building materials like silver and gold that will withstand God's scrutiny.
2. Leaders can build with common building materials like wood or straw that will not withstand divine judgment.

Gold, silver, and costly stones reflect valuable materials that do not easily burn. Wood, hay, and stubble cost less and are quickly consumed by fire.⁵

- ⇒ ***How can we determine what kind of "materials" we are using?***
- ⇒ ***What kind of church leadership will withstand the fire of God's scrutiny?***

Paul stated that the day of final judgment will bring to light the nature of each leader's work. As such, Christian leaders should pay careful attention to what they bring to the church. Although the true nature of their work may remain hidden for a while, it will be revealed one day for all to see. Paul explained the two possible outcomes for a church leader.

1. If a leader's work survives the fire of God's judgment, he will receive the great reward God promises to those who faithfully serve Him. (Matthew 10:41-42; Revelation 11:18).
2. If a leader's work is burned up by divine judgment, the true believer himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames of a burning house.

Judgment on church leaders is more severe than on ordinary believers (James. 3:1). For this reason, leaders must lead the people of God very carefully.⁶

⁵ Blomberg, C. (1994). [1 Corinthians](#) (p. 74). Zondervan Publishing House.

⁶ Pratt, R. L., Jr. (2000). [I & II Corinthians](#) (Vol. 7, pp. 48–50). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

- ⇒ ***How can we pray for our leaders who are building on the foundation of Jesus Christ?***
- ⇒ ***What can we do to support and encourage our church leaders?***

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 *Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.*

Paul expressed the truth that the church of Christ is too wonderful to be caught up in divisive human loyalties. Paul emphasized his directive with a rhetorical question, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" He expected an affirmative answer to his question: "Do you not know?" Believers should recognize that we "are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells" in us.

In the Old Testament tabernacle and temple God's glorious presence was well documented (Exodus 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:29; 2 Chronicles 6:2). In these verses, Paul described how the Holy Spirit lives in the New Testament temple which is the body of believers gathering in the name of Jesus (Matthew 18:20).

Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand how special they were in God's eyes, and how their status as the temple of God required a particular kind of leadership. Leaders must not serve the church with human cunning, but with divine wisdom from the Spirit, because the church is holy before God. The sacredness of the Holy Spirit's dwelling requires that church leaders be very careful. Harming the church by leading through arrogance and human pretense will be severely judged. The Corinthian leaders needed to preserve the unity of the temple, not destroy it with divisions. If they divided the fellowship, they attacked God's holy temple, His body (Colossians 1:18, 24), and His bride (Ephesians 5:23-27), consequently provoking God's wrath.⁷

- ⇒ ***What are some ways that the New Testament "temple" of God can be destroyed?***
- ⇒ ***What are some ways that the temple's holiness can be preserved and nurtured?***
- ⇒ ***What does this passage say about the current social media trend dubbed "church hurt?" (#churchhurt)***

TRANSFORM

1. Make personal application: The church will overcome divisiveness when Christians recognize our fundamental equality and humble position when compared to God's infinitely holy and perfect standards.⁸ The church of today needs to recover the emphasis on gratitude as the primary motivation for living the Christian life. Christ's death for us on the cross should provide all the motivation we need to serve Him in the church with humility and unity.

⁷ Pratt, R. L., Jr. (2000). [I & II Corinthians](#) (Vol. 7, p. 50). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁸ Blomberg, C. (1994). [1 Corinthians](#) (p. 76). Zondervan Publishing House.

- ⇒ *Will you make a public commitment to promote unity in the church today?*
- ⇒ *Will you choose to repent from gossip and divisiveness?*
- ⇒ *Will you thank God for His infinite and holy standards and commit to thanksgiving for His church?*

2. Pray: Thank God for His leaders who built His church with humility and unity. Pray that Henderson Hills will experience God's sacredness through accomplishing His vision and mission. Ask God to encourage our leaders as they seek to serve our church.

STUDY

Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

- *ESV Bible.*
- *NIV Application Commentary – 1 & 2 Corinthians, Dr. Craig Blomberg.*
- *Holman New Testament Commentary 1 & 2 Corinthians, pages 43-55.*