



151st Church of Christ
Small Group Study Guide – 1 CORINTHIANS
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AN IMPERFECT LOCAL CHURCH
A Study in 1 Corinthians
CLASS – Lesson 7

GENERAL OUTLINE

1 Corinthians 1:18-4:21, Human vs. divine wisdom

OUTLINE: Lesson 7

1 Corinthians 4:6-21, Fools for Christ

- 4:6-7 Recipients of God's grace & blessings
- 4:8-13 Bursting the bubble of human pride
- 4:14-21 Potential face to face confrontation

In many of his letters Paul begins with a doctrinal foundation on which he will build his discussion of various practical matters. In 1 Corinthians, that foundation is presented in chapters 1-4 and states that all Christians are beneficiaries equally of the grace of God expressed in the crucifixion of Christ. While we may have different gifts, styles and personalities, we should praise and follow no one but Christ.

The crucifixion of Christ is the supreme demonstration of the immense difference between what the world calls wise and powerful, and the true wisdom and power of God. Our culture assumes the normalcy and necessity of achieving greatness by showing our superiority over others, by claiming glory and privilege over those we have surpassed, and by expressing our independence from them. This entire attitude, says Paul, is contrary to the example and message of Christ who was crucified to save us, unite us, and lead us in serving one another.

As he brings his opening statement to a close, Paul presents his most stinging rebuke yet in the form of a sarcastic "recognition" that the apostles of Jesus were "fools for Christ" when they compared their "achievements" with those of many Corinthian Christians. He concludes this section with a promise to confront them in person if necessary. He will then be ready to address, beginning in chapter 5, specific areas where the Corinthians were following the wisdom of the world while neglecting and living contrary to the wisdom of God.

DISCUSSION

1 Corinthians 4:6-7, Recipients of God's grace & blessings

- 1. What lesson did Paul present earlier (3:18-22) when he made a three-fold connection between the deceptive pride of the Corinthians, quotations from "what is written" in the Old Testament, and the efforts of himself, Apollos and Cephas?**

2. This is the first of several uses in this letter of the expression “puffed up” (cf. 4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4). What is the divisive outcome of being puffed up that Paul warns against? Note how it refers directly to the division first mentioned in 1:10-15.

3. The Greek word translated “puffed up” is used in the New Testament only in the above-mentioned verses of 1 Corinthians and in Colossians 2:18. What is the cause of being “puffed up” according to Colossians 2:18, and what is the cause identified in 1 Corinthians?

4. Answer the question posed by Paul in the first phrase of verse 7. In other words, every member of the church is unique and has particular talents just as a human body benefits from the unique capabilities of each body part (1 Corinthians 12). Who made us this way and gives us the abilities we have? What would Paul think of the concept of a “self-made man?”

5. In 1 Cor 4:7, every use of the pronoun “you” is singular. In verses 6 & 8, every “you” and “your” is plural. Why do you think Paul made this distinction in verse 7?

The King James Bible can be used to verify that second person pronouns are singular or plural.

- Singular: thou, thee, thy (or thine)
- Plural: ye, you, your

1 Corinthians 4:8-13, Bursting the bubble of human pride

6. Who is the “we” or “us” in verses 8-13?

- 7. What was the purpose and power of contrasting this particular group (us) against the members of the Corinthian church (you)?**

- 8. Paul presents this group (us) with a shocking list of descriptive terms. What are those terms? Who else in the New Testament is sometimes described in a similar way?**

- 9. Which standard of wisdom would deem the Corinthian's self-evaluation to be accurate, and which standard of wisdom would consider Paul's self-evaluation to be accurate?**

- 10. How does this passage build on or illustrate earlier statements such as 1:26-31; 2:14?**

- 11. Should we take verse 10 as literal truth or facetious irony?**

1 Corinthians 4:14-21, Potential face to face confrontation

In this paragraph, Paul wraps up his opening statement. Through the crucifixion of Jesus, God has demonstrated the radical differences between His wisdom and that of the world. This same difference between true spirituality and worldly thinking is the foundation for the distinctiveness of Christian thought and practice. When we accept the servanthood taught by the wisdom of God, we will find the solutions to the problems that were plaguing the Corinthian church. Paul will begin his treatment of those problems in the next chapter.

But first, Paul assures his readers of his genuine concern for their well-being. Just as a father with his children, Paul would warn them, send a trusted friend to encourage them, and, if necessary, visit them in person.

- 12. How would you compare the tone adopted by Paul in this paragraph (vv. 14-21) as compared to verses 8-13? Why do you think he chose to use both approaches, and why does he conclude this section with this tone?**

- 13. Words can sometimes be somewhat fluid in their meaning depending on the context. What is the difference here between shaming and warning (ESV: admonish)?**
- 14. Paul wrote “these things” (NIV: “this”) to warn rather than to shame. To what “things” is he referring?**
- 15. Paul has made it clear that he doesn’t want “followers” in the way the Corinthians were following Paul, Apollos or Cephas. Yet, he calls for them to imitate him (v. 16). What’s the difference between following and imitating? What actions or attitudes has Paul shown and taught that should be imitated?**