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exception

Small Group Notes - 1 Corinthians 1-5 In Overview

Having finished our current series in 1 Corinthians this week we are going to try to bring together the main things we have learned from the first five chapters. Next week we will begin our new series "How Long Oh Lord" thinking about suffering and pain.

The following questions pick up some of the major themes of these chapters. Look at those issues/questions which you think will most benefit the group.

How we view ourselves

The church in Corinth was thoroughly dysfunctional with wrong values, practices, and relationships. They were still excessively influenced by their surrounding culture. Yet note both the tone and language of how Paul addresses them in 1:1-10.

What does the contrast between what they should have been and what they were reveal about

(1) the way God sees them

(2) the way we should handle un-Christian behaviour in the church.

1:26-31 speaks about the kind of people God chooses – neither wise nor powerful in the eyes of the world. How might we be in danger of ignoring this and reverting to using the world's criteria, disqualifying either ourselves or others in the church?

Wisdom and power

"Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1:22-23). Note that Paul is not suggesting that Christianity is not about either power or wisdom, but that it is about a different kind of power (see 1:17, 18, 23, 2:4-5, 4:20) and a different kind of wisdom (1:24, 30, 2:6, 13, 3:18), power and wisdom that turn the world's values upside down.

How does the message of Christ crucified constitute both true power and wisdom (1:24)?

Who are today's "Jews and Greeks" and today's "rulers of this age" (2:6)?

In what way is the message of the cross today either a stumbling block or foolishness?

In these early chapters of 1 Corinthians Paul gives a few examples of ways in which the wisdom of contemporary culture is at odds with the wisdom of God, and elsewhere there are numerous examples.

How do the two kinds of wisdom differ in these areas:

- *Christian character attributes like humility, forgiveness, forbearance, self control, self denial, gentleness of speech that always seeks to build others up*
- *How to respond to those who mistreat you (see Matt.5:38-42, 1 Cor.6:1-8, Rom.12:19-21)*
- *How to think about suffering in this life (see Rom.8:18, 2 Cor.4:17, Jas.1:2-4, 1 Pet.1:5-6)*
- *The use of our time, talents and money in the light of eternity (see Lk.9:25, 2 Cor.4:18-5:10)*

Leadership in the church and how to relate to it

A major source of division in the church in Corinth was jealousy and strife over the relative merits of different leaders (1:12). Paul argues that it is what people build, whether as church leaders or as members, that really counts, but he still views leadership in the local church as a high calling and sets high standards.

What qualities is it important to look for in church leaders and how might this differ from those qualities that would be sought in a leader in the world's sphere? (see 1 Cor.4:1-2, 9-13, 1 Tim. 3:1-13, Tit.1:5-9)

How should church members view and respond to their leaders (see 1 Cor.4:1, 1 Thes.5:12-13, 1 Tim.5:17, Heb.13:17)

In the New Testament Christians are frequently invited to imitate not just Christ but other Christians, notably church leaders (see 1 Cor.4:16, 11:1, Phil.3:17, 1 Thes.1:6, 2:14, 2 Thes.3:7, 9, Heb.6:12, 13:7).

In what areas are leaders to set an example to be imitated? What would imitation of others look like in practice?

Spiritual maturity

In 2:14, 2:15 and 3:1 Paul mentions people in three different spiritual conditions.

What are the three conditions? From these early chapters of 1 Corinthians make a list of the pointers to what kind of thinking/values/behaviours characterises each condition?

For personal reflection: In which category would you place yourself and for what reason?

In 3:10-15 one aspect of spiritual maturity concerns the kind of materials used in building on the one foundation of Christ and him crucified.

If "building" here refers both to our individual spiritual lives and our lives together as a church community, what motivations (beliefs and values) and actions would constitute the two different kinds of materials?

In 2:16 Paul says "we have the mind of Christ"; not "working towards having" or "will have in the future" but "have" now. But in Rom.12:2 he calls for our minds to be renewed. Both are true.

What does it mean for us to have the mind of Christ now whilst also working to have our minds renewed? How might we be in danger of not holding firmly to both of these ideas whilst still keeping them in balance?