

Core Study #1

Spiritual Maturity in the Church

Passage: 1 Corinthians 3:1 - 4:22

Themes: Servant leadership, Godly foundations, God's temple

Background and Summary:

This is for Core leaders and co-leaders only in order to provide you with some background information and is not meant to be read out loud in Core.

In chapter 3, Paul transitions from exposing the Corinthians inadequate understanding of the gospel, to their inadequate understanding of the nature and function of leadership in the church. The Corinthian's are dividing the church on the basis of its leaders. In 3:1-4, Paul recognizes that many of the Christians in Corinth are not spiritually mature. He urges them to smarten up, to stop quarreling over their preferred leaders, acting like those who do not have the Spirit when indeed they do have it. In 3:5-9, Paul emphasizes that these leaders are not lords to whom one belongs, as the Corinthian's seem to be making them, but are merely servants. Paul uses an analogy from agriculture to make two points about their servant status.

1. Both Paul and Apollos are one in a common cause, even though they have differing ministries. They are both God's co-workers. Paul plants, Apollos waters; and the Corinthian church is the field.
2. Everything and everyone belongs to God. God owns the field. Paul and Apollos belong to God, just as the Corinthian's do. Thus, no gifted speaker can in fact save someone. These leaders can act only as Christ's servants. In the end, it is Jesus alone who causes growth, who brings about salvation and new life.

At the end of verse 9 Paul shifts the metaphor from agriculture to architecture. Both metaphors are the same; Paul lays the foundation; Apollos builds on the foundation; the Corinthian church is the building; and God owns the building. Paul's point is that the Corinthians can build well or poorly, with differing results. Building the church with human wisdom or eloquent speech that circumvents the cross is building with wood, hay, and straw. It's important to note that Paul is referring to what is being built throughout in the church, not to how each individual Christian builds his or her life in Christ.

In 3:16-17, Paul uses the temple metaphor to refer to the Corinthian church as God's temple in Corinth. They are God's people because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in their midst, but their divisions are destroying God's temple. Again, Paul is not referring to one's own personal abuse of the body or to the neglect of one's spiritual life. He is referring to the body of believers here.

On the basis of 4: 1-21, Paul points out how in light of what he has said in the first 3 chapters, the Corinthians are wrong in their judgments and need to reevaluate their

Core Study #1

Spiritual Maturity in the Church

relationship to him. In verses 8-15, Paul rebukes the Corinthians for the way in which they are living their lives, but does so in a loving way. As the founder of the church, Paul has the right to do so.

Leader's Preparation

To prepare to lead this study you as the Core leader should read the suggested passages over a few times before Core, noting what you feel might be the main points of the passage and keeping in mind our main theme for all of these studies 'growing as a believer and as a UCM community' in line with John 15:8 'This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.'

Using your UCM Leader's Guide (pp. 22-23 or pp. 27-33), ask some observation questions.

- Ask the who, why, what, where questions if appropriate.
- What type of literature is it?
- What is going on in these verses?
- Key words or phrases: Are there any words, history or cultural issues that you don't understand but may be important to the overall understanding of the passage?

Core Study #1

Spiritual Maturity in the Church

Introductory Question:

- Can you think of a time when someone who really cared for you confronted you with a failure to live up to your values? What qualities of that encounter made it beneficial?

Passage: Feel free to read the whole text out loud in Core if you would like. If you are overwhelmed by the length of the text, then choose only a few passages that you feel are important to address.

Discussion Questions (Pick at least 3-4 questions from the selection below):

- (Review Question) What does Paul address as causes of division within the Corinthian church?
- What does Paul mean by "infants?" By "milk?" By "solid food (3:1-4)?"
- In 1 Cor 1:7, Paul says that the Corinthian's are "not lacking any gift". But since Paul calls the Corinthian's "infants in Christ," what relationship do you feel spiritual gifts have with spiritual maturity (3:1)?
- What is the role of a servant (3:5)?
- Explain Paul's use of the agriculture/architecture metaphor. What are the roles of each participant (3:6-12)?
- What kind of foundation were the Corinthians laying? What were they seeing as important elements of the church?
- In contrast to the hero worship in Corinth, how do Paul and his coworkers wish to be regarded (4:1-2)?
- What comparison is Paul making between the wealth of the Corinthians and the poverty of the Apostles? What do you feel Paul means by saying some Christians have become arrogant (4:8-18)?

Response Questions (choose 1)

- Paul tells us to be careful how we build on Christ's foundation. What kind of foundation are you building your life on? Wealth, security, success, fame?
- Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand that they were a unified assembly. How can we form better relationships with other Christians on campus? What actions could you take this week to strengthen your ties to fellow Christians in the church?

Core Study #1

Spiritual Maturity in the Church

- If all people were in a line, with Corinthians (prideful, self-centered, power-oriented) on one end and Paul (humble, persecuted, slandered) on the other end, where would you fit in? Would you like to be in a different place than you actually are?