

1 Corinthians 4: 1-21
Session 5– Study Notes
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1. **Paul** reintroduces the servant metaphor here (3:5), but now with a different purpose.
2. In 3:5-9, his point was that God’s servants are all serving a single common purpose;
3. In 4:1-5, however, Paul argues that he and the other apostles, as God’s servants, are accountable to no one but God. This may seem paradoxical to us, but his point was perfectly understandable within the social world of Paul’s time.
4. Servants or slaves of powerful masters often enjoyed positions of considerable delegated authority, being charged with major administrative responsibility for household affairs (remember Joseph and Daniel?).
5. Paul’s image of the steward evokes this picture of the slave in charge. (Today, the foreman or chief of staff)
6. The secret wisdom of God has decreed salvation for the world through the death and resurrection of Jesus.
7. Seneca believed self-examination was a way to hold oneself accountable for one's actions and lead by example. He also believed that self-awareness and self-reflection were essential for success and happiness. Paul, by contrast, would regard such detailed self-assessment as fruitless naval gazing;
8. Having developed a series of metaphors for understanding the identity of the church (field, building, temple) and its relation to Paul and other leaders. Paul now shifts into a mode of literal explanation.
9. Paul reminds the Corinthians that he has been speaking metaphorically about himself and Apollos to drive towards something else entirely.
10. We will utterly misunderstand Paul’s arguments if we think the real problem at Corinth was a power struggle between Apollos and Paul.
11. Scholars agree that the phrase “*Nothing beyond what is written*” is some slogan or maxim that Paul assumes his readers will recognize, but there is no consensus about what the slogan means.
12. The witness of Scripture places a strict limit on human pride and calls for trust in God alone.
13. What would it mean to go “beyond” this witness of Scripture? It would mean, quite simply, to boast in human wisdom by supposing that we are smarter than God.
14. The problem at Corinth is internal rivalry within the community, fostered by prideful claims about the possession of wisdom and rhetorical skill.
15. Where did they get the idea that they were already rich and that they reigned as kings? Many ancient sources indicate that precisely these claims were made by Cynic and Stoic philosophers. Their wisdom set them free from attachment to things and, therefore, made them rulers of all things.

Modern-Day Practices that Raise the Same Issues that Paul Was Working to Overcome.

- The basic premise of the Law of Attraction
 - The prosperity gospel
 - 21st Century New Religion:
16. The Corinthian difficulties are not so much theological as they uncritically perpetuate the norms and values of the pagan culture around them.
 17. The alternative that Paul offers the Corinthians is his own way of life.
 18. In contrast to the Corinthian self-description as conquering kings, Paul offers the image of himself and the other apostles as prisoners sentenced to death.
 19. The description of apostolic suffering is one of several such lists in the Corinthian correspondence.
 20. Paul regards these experiences not merely as misfortunes or trials to be surmounted but as identifying marks of the authenticity of his apostleship because they manifest his conformity to Christ's sufferings.
 21. The strong language of vs. 13 (rubbish of the world) should not be underplayed. Paul is saying in the strongest possible terms that to be a follower of Christ is to share his destiny of being scorned and rejected by the world.
 22. This is a strong message for the church today. To belong to Christ is not a way of assuring success or a trouble-free life: quite the opposite.
 23. Paul's tone changes abruptly in verse 14. Having scolded his readers devastatingly, he reaches out to embrace them as his "beloved children." At this point in their community's life, the Corinthians urgently need a role model.
 24. Paul characteristically insists that the meaning of the gospel must be embodied: The obedience of faith comes into focus only as we see it lived.
 25. Because of the mess the Corinthian church is in, Paul cannot end this section of the letter on a kind and encouraging note. He places the choice back into the hands of the Corinthians.
 26. Paul has exhorted the Corinthians in numerous ways to turn away from their boasting in human wisdom and seek to be reunified in the service of the one God to whom they all belong, ultimately their judge.

REFLECTIONS

1. In what ways do you see our church adopting the behaviors of the culture around us? Is this a bad thing? If so, why? Is this a good thing? If so, why?
2. **We are encouraged to hold** the image of the suffering apostle clearly before our eyes and ask ourselves: Are we sure we want to belong to Christ and share his way? What is Paul asking of the Corinthians? Discuss how being the kind of Christian Paul asks the Corinthians to be may concern or worry you.
3. Share any experiences with any Modern-Day Religions listed on this study sheet. In what way do they speak to you? In what way do they cause you concern?

Modern Day Beliefs Reflecting Issues in the Corinthian Church

The Basic Premise of The Law Of Attraction is that your thoughts and feelings create a vibrational energy that attracts similar experiences into your life, meaning that by focusing on positive thoughts, you will attract positive outcomes, while negative thoughts will attract negative outcomes; essentially, "like attracts like."

Key points about the Law of Attraction:

- Positive mindset:

A positive attitude and focus on desired outcomes are key to attracting positive experiences.

- Energy vibration:

Thoughts are considered to be energy vibrations that can be transmitted outwards.

- Manifestation:

By actively visualizing and feeling the desired outcome, you can "manifest" it into your reality.

Robert Schuller built an empire with his church *The Crystal Cathedral*, based on the power of positive thinking.

The Prosperity Gospel is a Christian belief that God rewards those who think and act positively with wealth, health, and other blessings. It's also known as the "health and wealth gospel," "Word of Faith," or "Name It and Claim It" gospel.

The prosperity gospel's central tenets include:

- Faith

Believers express their faith through positive thoughts, declarations, and donations to the church.

- Wealth and health

Believers believe that God wants them to be wealthy and healthy in this life, and that material success is a sign of God's favor.

- Salvation

Believers believe that salvation through Jesus Christ includes liberation from poverty, sickness, and other ills.

- Positive thinking

Believers believe that positive thoughts manifest positive outcomes, while negative thoughts bring about negative circumstances.

- Law of attraction

Believers believe that visualizing and focusing on desired outcomes will attract those circumstances into one's life.

The prosperity gospel has been influential in Christianity since the early 20th century.

It's associated with Pentecostalism, evangelicalism, and charismatic Christianity.

While it can be popular among impoverished communities, it can also be criticized as predatory and manipulative.

21st Century New Religion:

This emerging new religion blends elements of modern and postmodern philosophies to form a belief system focused on identity, equity, and societal critique.

It encourages

- self-discovery,
- introspective growth, and
- activism for systemic change.

With rituals and mythology adapted for the digital age, the faith supports a non-falsifiable metaphysical worldview and champions

- inclusivity,
- diversity, and
- individual expression,

all in pursuit of an envisioned utopian future.

As traditional religions decline and “spiritual but not religious” numbers rise, it seems people aren't leaving faith but transitioning to a still-forming one.

Belief About Deities

This new faith accommodates varying beliefs about gods from previous traditions, a flexibility common in emerging religions.

Many followers incorporate views about deities from their previous religions.

Resources

1. First Corinthians, Interpretation, Richard B. Hays
2. First Corinthians, New Covenant Commentary, B. J. Oropeza
3. First Letter to the Corinthians, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, Roy E. Ciampa and Brian Rosner
4. Feasting on the Word, David Bartlett, Barbara Brown Taylor Editors