

Examples from Daily Life for a Stronger Church (1 Corinthians 3)

Expository Lessons from the Book of 1 Corinthians

I. Introduction

- a. A great thing about going through a book of the Bible is that it forces us to think about things that we might not ordinarily think about.
- b. Let's read **1 Corinthians chapter 3** and consider how the whole chapter fits together. (Read **1 Corinthians 3**)
- c. Paul uses four illustrations (pictures) to communicate his message:
 - i. Babies who drink milk versus the mature who eat solid food
 - ii. Farming
 - iii. Construction (the master builder, the foundation, the materials the building is made out of)
 - iv. The Temple of God

II. Milk versus Solid Food

- a. Babies drink milk, but the mature (adults) eat solid food.
 - i. Some churches teach the same basic lessons over and over to all Christians, whether new or mature.
 - ii. At one given point in time, not every Christian needs the same thing.
 1. Need to feed the young, or 'baby' Christians milk: the foundational teachings of the faith.
 2. However, it is profoundly unhealthy if mature 'adult' Christians are still being fed only milk. They need 'meat'; solid, more substantive food that is healthier for them, richer, and perhaps more difficult to digest.
- b. What is the spiritual 'milk' that God intends for his Church? What are the basic principles of the faith? (Paul uses the same analogy of milk and solid food in **Hebrews 5**.)
 - i. Read **Hebrews 5:12-6:3**. There are six "first principles" or elementary teachings of the faith listed here:
 1. Repentance.

- a. Jesus started his ministry with “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near...” (**Mark 1:14-15**)
- 2. Faith toward God
- 3. Baptisms
- 4. Laying on of hands
- 5. Resurrection of the dead
 - a. God made us to consist of both body and spirit. When Jesus returns there will be a bodily, physical resurrection of those who have died; their bodies will be reunited with their spirits prior to final judgment. (**John 5:28-29, 1 Corinthians 15**)
- 6. Eternal judgment.
 - ii. These are the things that we should be teaching young Christians.
 - iii. Is this what you were taught when you first came to faith, or what you would teach a new Christian today?
- c. In this passage, Paul also tackles the issue of sectarianism in the church.
 - i. Paul also hit this hard in **1 Corinthians chapter 1**.
 - ii. “... for you are still carnal. For where there is envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?” (**1 Corinthians 3:3-4**)
 - iii. The spirit of sectarianism is characterized by division, separation, and splitting; it results from envy and strife.
 - iv. Many conservative churches have great strengths (for example regarding authority of Scripture, separation from the world, worldly entertainment, nonresistance, role of women, etc.). However, in these same churches there can be extreme problems with divisions and lack of unity. Many times these divisions are not primarily rooted in differences in doctrine, *but instead reflect a lack of trust and a lack of commitment to working out conflict in a Godly, spiritual way*.
 - v. Paul and Jesus hate this sectarian spirit that causes division within the body of Christ. We need to look into our own hearts to root out any hint of a sectarian spirit, and strive to live at peace with all men to the extent possible (**Romans 12:18, Hebrews 12:14**), and to become that peacemakers that Jesus called his followers to be (**Matthew 5:9**).
 - vi. In **1 Corinthians chapter 1** and in **3:3-4**, Paul says that Christians are

not to be characterized by division, envy, and strife. Christians are to obtain their identity from Christ, not from a particular group or subset within Christ's church.

- vii. We should feel great about someone leaving our church group and joining another group if they continue to follow Christ! It's not about building up our own sub-group. Instead, we should strive to build up Christ's church, regardless of where that is.
- viii. Zac Poonen, a preacher in India, observed that many preachers will use the gospel to advance their own agenda. Some do it for money. Others use the gospel to advance their personal reputation. He decided that he would focus on calling people to Jesus, rather than trying to pull people after himself and trying to build up his own reputation.
- ix. One very popular and 'successful' preacher, Francis Chan, tells of how he came to the realization one day that if Jesus were living in his town, Jesus undoubtedly would have a smaller church than he (Francis) did! This troubled him and caused him to focus on preaching the gospel as Jesus did, calling people to repent of their sins, instead of focusing on a popular message that would add more members to his church.
- x. Let's be careful about the sectarianism spirit in our own hearts and squash it when we see it! Let's be peacemakers, like Jesus commands.

III. Farming

- a. "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor." (**1 Corinthians 3:5-8**)
- b. The picture here is of farming. Farming is hard work. Till the soil, plant, water, weed, lots of different jobs and much effort required. But it is amazing to watch the crop come up. It's miraculous. While we may do lots of work, we have no power to make the plants grow. It just happens! God is the one who makes things grow.
- c. What can we learn from this?
 - i. Neither those who plant (start churches) nor those who water (feed/nourish the churches) are anything. Church leaders work hard, but should do so with great humility, grasping what they are and what they are not.

- ii. God is the one who makes things grow, who gives the increase. That is true regardless of whether we look at spiritual fruit in the hearts and lives of the Christians, or if we view it in terms new converts being added to the Lord's church.
- iii. Those who plant and those who water God's church are one. No one is better than another. We are working together in God's field, to see God produce his own crop.
- iv. Each one who engages in this work of planting and watering will receive a reward based on the work that he or she does.

IV. Construction

- a. "... I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it... For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (**1 Corinthians 3:9-11**)
 - i. Jesus is the foundation.
 - ii. Now, a construction story about a foundation.
 1. Chuck is an engineer. He was working on a project where a large structure was resting on sinking land, causing the structure to be taken out of service. To remedy the problem, the Contractor had to design and create special concrete pilings (supporting foundation) to support the structure.
 2. Chuck was working with another construction company that exclusively did foundation-related work. The guy he was working with was using a machine that tests the strength of the pilings by putting significant pressure on them until they finally fail, or break.
 3. The guy who was doing this testing work was wearing a t-shirt with his company's logo on it, "Ajax Foundations" (*name changed here*). Chuck said to the worker, "Last night I went to a Bible study where I asked a question that I'll bet you could answer correctly." The worker, who was not familiar with the Bible, was surprised and replied, "What was the question you asked?" Chuck responded, "What do you think is the most important part of a building?" The worker thought about it for a few seconds and then announced with enthusiasm, "The foundation!"
 4. The apostle Paul also understood this. Paul's focus was preaching the gospel of the Kingdom and laying the foundation of Jesus Christ.

5. Paul says there will come a time of testing, when all that is built from cheaper, combustible materials (wood, hay, and straw) will be burned up. We need to imitate Paul by laying a solid foundation that will last: the foundation of Jesus Christ.
- iii. Another construction story.
1. Chuck was working on upgrading an existing water treatment plant. However, during construction it became obvious that in the past, someone decided to make modifications to the plant that were not Code-compliant. Someone years before had installed a nice little wood-frame kitchen area in the middle of this concrete structure. The kitchen was built out of combustible wood, in this situation violating the local Fire Code. When the problem was uncovered, it became obvious that they would have to rip out that makeshift kitchen and then rebuilt it from scratch, using steel and concrete. Lesson learned: don't take short-cuts by building with materials that can burn.
 2. When we are building the church of God, we need to use things that will not burn up. We need to build with costly things: righteousness, holiness, and the Word of God.
 3. Jesus used the language of construction to make his point in **Luke 6:46-49**, "Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you what he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock."
- b. "If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." (**1 Corinthians 3:14-15**)
- i. What does this mean? Will all Christians receive the same reward when they die?
 - ii. No. **Matthew 13** says the Kingdom of God will be like a dragnet: there will be good and bad fish in the Kingdom on the Day of Judgment. The gathered fish will be sorted: some saved, some not. (We need to strive to be good fish and bring others in with us!)
 - iii. If we build well, on Jesus and his teachings as our foundation, what we build will last and we will receive a reward.
 - iv. If we don't build on Jesus and his teachings, what we build will be burned up and we will suffer loss, although we can be saved (although escaping through the fire).

- v. Some churches are being built on the foundation of Christ, some are not.
- vi. For those who are building on the foundation of Jesus Christ, it seems that there is a reward that will be given, beyond being saved!
- vii. Ultimately, we need to be building for the Day of Judgment.

V. The Temple of God

- a. “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.” (**1 Corinthians 3:16-17**)
- b. A very important concept: you are the temple of God and the Spirit dwells in you. Consider the following:
 - i. **The tabernacle.** We read in the last ten chapters of the book of Exodus that God gave his people very specific instructions as to how to build the tabernacle and they do it just as he commanded.
 - 1. “So Moses finished all the work. Then the cloud covered the tabernacle... and the tabernacle was filled with the Lord’s glory.” (**Exodus 40:27-28**)
 - 2. The Holy Spirit comes down and fills the tabernacle, and then leads God’s people forward.
 - ii. **The temple** that was built by Solomon. Read **2 Chronicles 6:12-13, 7:1-3**.
 - 1. Paul is saying the same thing: “You are the temple of God and the Spirit of God lives in you.”
 - iii. Jesus’ teaching in **John 2**. Read **John 2:13-22**.
 - 1. Jesus drives out the money changers from the temple. He was essentially saying: “You do not desecrate the temple with selfish, self-serving activity. Instead, the temple is to be a holy place.”
 - 2. “Zeal for Your house will consume me.” (**John 2:17**)
 - 3. “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” (**John 2:19**)
 - 4. “”But He was speaking of the temple of His body.” (**John 2:21**)

c. Lessons for us:

i. Implications for us when we grasp that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit:

1. There are many places in Scripture where we are called to obey Jesus' or the apostles' commands. We are to do this and not do that. And we need to obey these commands. Jesus is the king over the Kingdom. To love God is to obey His commands. **(1 John 5:3)**
2. However, the Christian life is not simply a list of commands. The picture Paul gives here is that every Christian is a temple, in which the Holy Spirit dwells.
3. This should transform the way we look at our physical bodies and what we do with them. Our bodies are holding something very precious and valuable inside.
4. It's easy to follow a list of rules and regulations! Yet, what are the implications of my body being a temple of the Holy Spirit?
 - a. What do I let into my temple through my eyes?
 - b. Through my ears?
 - c. Through my mouth?
 - d. Am I turning my temple into a market place? Am I doing anything that is desecrating the temple of God?
5. Some of the toughest commands are ones that can't be reduced to rules and regulations. For example, "Be holy as I am holy." **(1 Peter 1:16)** This has far-reaching implications that simply cannot be reduced to a checklist of requirements.
6. It's the same thing if you grasp that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. This understanding will tell you more about what you can or can't let into your eyes and heart; and what your attitude should be about television, the internet and all types of pornography so readily available, more than any rule or regulation.
7. Paul makes this very point again in **1 Corinthians 6** about sexual immorality.
 - a. Paul does not say the reason to avoid sexual sin is that such sin will damage your life: lead to you being

broken-hearted; you'll get someone pregnant; you won't truly be fulfilled; etc.

- b. His reason for calling them to repent and live holy lives is that the Holy Spirit lives inside their bodies. (1 Corinthians 6:19). They were in effect desecrating the temple of God by getting involved in sexual sin.

ii. Greater understanding of the Holy Spirit

1. In the 1920s there was an internal struggle going on within the Churches of Christ. Pentecostalism was sweeping across the nation and influencing people in Restoration Movement churches.
2. In a desire to avoid the excesses of Pentecostalism, many of the Churches of Christ went to the other extreme, even to teach that the Holy Spirit does not dwell inside of Christians! This directly contradicts what Jesus said in **John 14**, what Paul says in **1 Corinthians 3:16**, and what is taught in many other places in Scripture.
3. Much of the teaching in many Restoration Movement today regarding the Holy Spirit is focused on what the Holy Spirit no longer does: no longer performing miracles, no longer imparting spiritual gifts, etc. This legacy is largely a carryover from past overreaction against Pentecostalism.
4. Yet Jesus said He would not leave the apostles as orphans (**John 14:18**); that the Holy Spirit would guide the apostles into all truth (**John 16:13**); that the Holy Spirit would dwell in us (**Acts 2:38, 1 Corinthians 3:16**); and our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (**1 Corinthians 3:17**).
5. We have much to learn about the Holy Spirit. May God give us insight and wisdom to grasp more fully the importance and the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in the church.