

The Ball is in Your Court!
Paul plans his third visit to Corinth

Introduction: Priming the pump for tonight's discussion.

- How would you summarize the central idea of this week's message in one sentence? Was there anything significant that stood out to you from the message that you would share with the group? (Hint: What was your personal “aha” moment?)
- Last time we talked about being confident in God, and not self-promoting, boastful, or proud in our accomplishments. Now that we've had a week to chew on it, what are some ways that we can brag about what God has done in our lives? How can Christ increase while we continue to decrease?

Exploration: Questions to guide our group discussion.

- Paul shared a genuine interest in the believers at Corinth. Paul wasn't involved with them because he was trying to get something from them....like wealth, possessions, or even prominence. Paul says that he poured into their lives because he genuinely cared for them, and because he desired to see them grow in the Lord. How might it change our Christian relationships if we had this same kind of heart for one another all the time? Who in your life are you pouring yourself out for? Who is pouring themselves out for you?
- Unfortunately, the more that Paul tried to love the Corinthian believers, the more they repaid his love with disparaging remarks and criticism. The Bible teaches us to be careful about our words and to use them for building others up, and not for tearing people down. What are some Biblical principles that address how believers should use our words? How would God challenge each of us as we reflect on these verses?
- Paul defended himself by pointing the Corinthians to his true motives, even when his detractors had worked so hard to attack his influence. Paul tells us two important things. First, all of his words to the Corinthians were given “before God.” This meant that Paul had carefully chosen his words in the sight of God. Second, Paul spoke as accountable to God for his words, but also with the kingdom authority afforded to him. How important are these two important principles when we are being attacked? What are the alternatives to this, and are they acceptable/desirable in a Christian's life?
- It's sad, but Paul didn't have much faith that the Corinthians were going to turn things around before he arrived. He said that the ball was in their court; he could come in gentleness, or in authority. Paul instructed them to examine/test themselves to see if

they were in the faith. If we put ourselves to the same test...how would we score? By the way, it's a pass/fail kind of test...lol.

Additional Scriptures for Deeper Study:

- Ephesians 4:29-32
- Proverbs 12:5-6
- Matthew 5:11-12
- John 8:44

Application: How can I apply this to my life this week?

- Let's take a moment to honestly ask the Lord to show us our true motives in Christian relationships. Do we value people because of what they can do for us, because of their possessions/wealth, or because we truly desire to see them walking more closely with the Lord? Are we in Christian relationships just for ourselves or for the growth and blessing that we can be to others too?
- How would we evaluate our speech as followers of Christ? If people heard your conversations throughout the day, would they find you using your words for building others up or for tearing them down? How would the Holy Spirit speak to you in this area?
- As we examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith, let's do some honest testing. Are we truly trusting by faith in Jesus, or just possessing some intellectual facts? Remember, head knowledge and heart knowledge are two different things. Are we believing in the real gospel of repentance and faith...and not a fraudulent gospel like good works, sacraments, or traditions? Is there fruit in our lives that would indicate a real and valid walk with Christ? If there's a root, then we should see some fruit.