

We Learn by Living Together

Sunday, July 27, 2025

Start with Application Testimony

- **Last week's exhortation:** Press in to church relationships and ministry. Determine to get uncomfortable and intentional in your church relationships.

INTRO

- **We are going verse-by-verse, in a topical study through I & II Corinthians**
 - **Current Topic:** Church Relationship – The holy work of being the Body of Christ.
 - In the last lesson, we learned that there is only one church and we are all tasked with building it together. Our ability to unify around that work reveals our level of maturity and our true submission to God.
 - In this lesson, we are going to see the irreplaceable role that mentorship & discipleship plays in our lives, but first we'll have to challenge our pride and our own capacity to evaluate things.
 - **Here are some definitions that will be helpful for today's lesson:**
 - **A student** learns about a subject – often in a classroom (or Sunday morning sermon) setting – primarily through instruction, reading, and observation. The relationship is typically informational and formal, focused on absorbing knowledge.
 - **An apprentice**, learns by walking with a master through hands-on experience, imitation, and shared work. The relationship is

relational and immersive. An apprentice is expected not just to understand, but to eventually embody and replicate the skills and character of their teacher.

READ

1 Corinthians 4 CSB

¹ A person should think of us in this way: as servants of Christ and managers of the mysteries of God. ² In this regard, it is required that managers be found faithful. ³ It is of little importance to me that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I don't even judge myself. ⁴ For I am not conscious of anything against myself, but I am not justified by this. It is the Lord who judges me. ⁵ So don't judge anything prematurely, before the Lord comes, who will both bring to light what is hidden in darkness and reveal the intentions of the hearts. And then praise will come to each one from God. ⁶ Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying: "Nothing beyond what is written." The purpose is that none of you will be arrogant, favoring one person over another. ⁷ For who makes you so superior? What do you have that you didn't receive? If, in fact, you did receive it, why do you boast as if you hadn't received it? ⁸ You are already full! You are already rich! You have begun to reign as kings without us—and I wish you did reign, so that we could also reign with you! ⁹ For I think God has displayed us, the apostles, in last place, like men condemned to die: We have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to people. ¹⁰ We are fools for Christ, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! ¹¹ Up to the present hour we are both hungry and thirsty; we are poorly clothed, roughly treated, homeless; ¹² we labor, working with our own

hands. When we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it;
¹³ when we are slandered, we respond graciously. Even now, we are like the
scum of the earth, like everyone's garbage. ¹⁴ I'm not writing this to shame
you, but to warn you as my dear children. ¹⁵ For you may have countless
instructors in Christ, but you don't have many fathers. For I became your
father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. ¹⁶ Therefore I urge you to imitate me.
¹⁷ This is why I have sent Timothy to you. He is my dearly loved and faithful
child in the Lord. He will remind you about my ways in Christ Jesus, just as I
teach everywhere in every church. ¹⁸ Now some are arrogant, as though I
were not coming to you. ¹⁹ But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will
find out not the talk, but the power of those who are arrogant. ²⁰ For the
kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. ²¹ What do you want?
Should I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?

EXAMINE

#1 | We must concern ourselves with God's evaluation – not ours or others'.

1. **Both our calling and our ability to perform is from God – we are stewarding His gifts to us (time, talent, treasure).**
 - a. 1 Corinthians 4:1–2 “A person should think of us in this way: as servants of Christ and managers of the mysteries of God. In this regard, it is required that managers be found faithful.”
 - i. God evaluates us based on our faithfulness – not our results, because the results belong to Him. (1 Sam 16:7)
 - ii. We shouldn't waste time on how we – or others – see our performance; our concern should be how God sees it. (1 Cor 4:3–4)

2. We shouldn't be too quick to evaluate things – but leave them to God to evaluate.

- a. 1 Corinthians 4:5 *“So don't judge anything prematurely, before the Lord comes, who will both bring to light what is hidden in darkness and reveal the intentions of the hearts...”*
 - i. Only God has the facts at hand to properly evaluate us – He sees motives, intentions, and eternal effects.
 - ii. An important step in becoming humble is realizing we aren't qualified to evaluate everything we think we are.

#2 | The Christian life is about lowering ourselves, not exalting ourselves

1. Everything we have is a grant from God – forgetting or denying this, leads to pride.

- a. 1 Corinthians 4:7 *“For who makes you so superior? What do you have that you didn't receive? If, in fact, you did receive it, why do you boast as if you hadn't received it?”*

2. Pride distorts our perception of reality, ourselves, and others.

- a. 1 Corinthians 4:8,10 *“You are already full! You are already rich! You have begun to reign as kings without us... we are fools for Christ, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored!”*
 - i. Paul uses sarcasm here to shock the Corinthians into seeing the growing errors in their own perspective – a direct result of not appreciating why they had what they had.

1. The Corinthians had benefited from the sacrifice and service of the Apostles, yet had begun to view the Apostles' suffering as a sign that those same Apostles were beneath them.

3. The path of Christ is the path of humility, service, and sacrifice.

- a. 1 Corinthians 4:11–13 *“Up to the present hour we are both hungry and thirsty; we are poorly clothed, roughly treated, homeless; we labor, working with our own hands. When we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we respond graciously. Even now, we are like the scum of the earth, like everyone’s garbage.”*
- i. Paul’s examples closely reflect the life of Jesus – embracing poverty, rejection, and suffering, not with resentment, but with grace, blessing, and patient endurance. (1 Pet. 2:23; Phil. 2:5–8; Isa. 53:3).
1. Being exalted with Christ comes after following His example – not before – and this is what the Corinthians weren’t seeing. (Rom 8:16–17)

#3 | The things of God are learned by imitation and immersion – not just by talking and listening.

1. Christianity is not an academic or intellectual endeavor – it is a lived reality.

- a. 1 Corinthians 4:20 *“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.”*
- i. The power that Paul is talking about is the inward, transformative power of the Holy Spirit.

1. In other words, Paul is challenging them to live a life that shows the Holy Spirit is at work in them and through them – not just to “talk a good game”. (*Think back to 1 Cor 2:4-5*)

ii. This isn't learned from listening to sermons – it's learned by doing.

1. If we are not growing, it is probably because we're living like a student and not like an apprentice.

2. Mature believers are God's gifts to us, bringing the relational element that is needed to disciple us in the way of Christ.

a. 1 Corinthians 4:15-16 “*For you may have countless instructors in Christ, but you don't have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me.*”

i. Paul had a lot of wisdom to share, but the Corinthians would never benefit from it until they humbled themselves and their perceptions.

ii. In shaping us into the image of Christ, God gives us people to apprentice with – this means we have to receive them as having some authority in our lives. (1 Cor 4:21; Heb 13:17)

iii. Stepping into this actually requires more trust in God, than in the person. The mentor/pastor/teacher may fail – but you must trust God that He will grow and mature you through the process of discipleship. (Phil 2:12-13)

REFLECT

Let's take a moment to pray

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide our attention and lead our conversation, helping us see and understand what He wants us to apply in our lives.

APPLY

Process the passage together with these questions:

- When we measure spiritual success incorrectly, how does it impact our relationships within the church?
- What characteristics would you look for in a spiritual mentor or someone you could imitate?
- Paul mentions in verse 21 he can come with either a rod or a gentle spirit. What role do you think church discipline has in our spiritual growth? How can we practice this well in our church?

Where we want to “land the plane”

- God isn't looking for polish or impressive results – He's looking for steady, humble faithfulness. Growth in Christ doesn't come from mastering information, but from walking closely with people who are actually living it. We're meant to be apprentices, not just students – learning the way of Jesus through imitation, relationship, and trust. That's why growth in Christ is a relational journey, not a solo pursuit – and why the fellowship of the Church is essential to the health of every believer.

Exhortation for the Week

- Embrace God's design for growth – find someone to spiritually apprentice with.

FOOTNOTES

1. Social Background of Corinth

- a. Corinth in the first century was a prosperous, cosmopolitan city in the Roman province of Achaia (southern Greece). It was:
 - i. A major trade hub due to its location on the Isthmus of Corinth, connecting mainland Greece with the Peloponnese.
 - ii. Known for its economic diversity and wealth stratification. Wealthy elites and freedmen (former slaves) both sought status and influence.
 - iii. Infamous for its moral laxity. The city had a reputation for sexual immorality, partly due to its association with the temple of Aphrodite and a population accustomed to Roman cultural values.
- b. “Corinth was at once the New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas of the ancient world.” — Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (1987)

2. Cultural Background

- a. Corinth was marked by:
 - i. Greek philosophical influence, especially Stoicism and Sophism, which prized rhetorical skill and public honor.
 - ii. A strong patron-client culture, where people gained social advancement through aligning with wealthy or influential figures.
 - iii. A culture obsessed with status, honor, and public recognition— influencing how some Corinthian Christians viewed spiritual gifts, leadership, and social roles in the church.
- b. This cultural obsession with self-promotion likely influenced divisions in the church (e.g., “I follow Paul... Apollos... Cephas...” — 1 Cor. 1:12), and

explains Paul's repeated emphasis on humility, suffering, and servanthood in 1 Corinthians 1–4.

- c. “The Corinthian Christians had not abandoned the values of the world; they had simply transferred them into the church.” — Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth* (1995)

3. **Paul's Personal Relationship with the Corinthian Church**

- a. Paul founded the church in Corinth during his second missionary journey (around AD 50–52), staying there for 18 months (Acts 18:1–18).
- b. He developed a deep and fatherly connection with the believers there, but also experienced great tension and disappointment due to:
 - i. Divisions and rivalries (1 Cor. 1:10–17)
 - ii. Sexual immorality (1 Cor. 5, 6)
 - iii. Disputes over spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12–14)
 - iv. Disrespect for Paul's apostolic authority and preference for flashier leaders (1 Cor. 4; 2 Cor. 10–13)
- c. Paul had previously written a now-lost letter (1 Cor. 5:9) and was responding to both reports from Chloe's household (1 Cor. 1:11) and a letter from the church asking questions (1 Cor. 7:1).
- d. “The Corinthians were questioning Paul's wisdom, his authority, and his personal example... His apostolic leadership was under fire.” — Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (2000)