

Please open your Bibles up to I Corinthians 3. We'll be looking at three chapters today exploring the infancy of this new congregation.

Take 15 minutes....

1. Share a story that you remember from your early childhood (age 4-11). Describe the event. Share how you felt or what you thought about the experience.
2. In the last meeting, I asked you observe a group where you have seen unity and resisting division. It is always easy to find division. I hope there is more than silence. We do live in a conflicted world.

Remember as we walk through I Corinthians we are looking at community (with unity). It is easy to get caught in the details and forget the overall theme.

Paul starts with this comment:

“Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly— _____ in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.”

Notice the comparison of infancy and maturity. We demonstrate immaturity by the amount of _____ in the community. I do find this quite striking. I've seen a lot of congregations in conflict which, by Paul's standard, says something about spiritual maturity.

William Barclay, a noted British theologian, writes, **“You can tell what a person's relationship with God is by looking at the way that person relates to others.”**

Pause the video: Yup, I want you to talk to each other for a few minutes.

Do you agree with the statement? It seems a bit strong. What does “relate to others” actually mean? What do you think about Paul's comment on being worldly and dissension? How does that change your observation as you look at congregations?

Look at vs. 12-13, Paul compares gold, silver, and costly stones with _____,
_____, _____.

Pause the video and read I Corinthians 4:8-13.

Vs. 9 speaks of a Roman victory procession. At the end of the victory parade were the losers.

The defeated enemy now going to the arena to die. Paul is pointed that the Corinthians are treating Paul, as a leader, as the least, as the enemy going to the arena.

Vs. 14, Paul is the _____ of the congregation and he wishes that they would _____ him.

Ultimately, the foundation is Christ Jesus, and Paul or Apollos or Cephas (Peter) are building upon that foundation. Stop the division.

Chapter 5

Paul is now going confronting a very divisive issue in the congregation. What is it?

Of course, this is horrible, and people tolerated the behavior. My conjecture, maybe, the guy and his stop mom had money or some kind of influence or, maybe, the city was so immoral, people lost common sense of what is right and good. Paul even notes that the secular community would not tolerate such a thing.

A story from my early ministry (yes, 1978-1980)

For conversation:

1. What is your measurement of gold, silver, costly stones vs. hay, wood, stubble? We all want to say something precious. According to Paul, what makes it distinctive from hay, wood, stubble? (3:12)
2. How do people typically respond to authority? What does it mean to be arrogant? (4:14-21) When I've had to deal with folks who don't want to honor authority, how do you bring them into community? Most often, they leave.

Of course, as you watch this video, and I expect, agree with me on authority, what if you are the problem? Looking in the mirror and being honest is really hard.

One thing I didn't talk about is found in 3:16-17. Paul calls his readers "God's Temple." This language was simply new. Temple language was always applied to gods, and for the Jews found in Jerusalem. Now, Paul says, by the power of the Holy Spirit and you're redemption, "You are a Temple." This language is common to us today but foreign in that day. If you are a Temple, how can you accept division or have an immoral lifestyle? What does this do to the Temple.

Next Meeting:

Please read **I Corinthians 6-7.**