

Intro:

We're in a series "Church: are you serious?," a series through the Bible book of 1 Corinthians that is trying to talk honestly about church and Jesus and how it can be a positive part of our spiritual journey. Last week we talked about the important issue of leadership in a church community. This week, our passage continues the conversation, focusing specifically on responding to leadership.

Two things to note before we begin:

1. All of us have qualms about spiritual/religious leadership.

- This week I was talking with someone who was searching for faith, and he mentioned that he was a little turned off by the church he recently visited because the pastor was trying to motivate people to attend an event, and made it seem like if you didn't go you were somehow less of a Christian. It bothered him, and I said it should!

Bad leaders that can ruin you- through manipulation, unspiritual pressure, deceptive teaching, and so on.

And yet not responding at all could ruin you as well.

Many of us- regardless of where we are in our journey- have been helped in our spiritual journey by spiritual leaders. It is essential to our personal and also corporate spiritual health.

And so I want to acknowledge the reality of our qualms, but also say that we need leadership.

2. It may be strange to you that I, as a spiritual leader here, am giving a talk on how to respond to spiritual leadership.

I recognize this, and want to invite you to listen to me with great scrutiny. What I am supposed to do during this time is help us understand the Bible and how it applies to us. If I do that, I pray you will listen. If I don't, then I have nothing to say.

How should we respond, then, to spiritual leadership? Two things I believe our passage will focus on.

(Note: for those just joining us, we're at the end of a long discussion in the book that began in chapter 1. It will seem a bit confusing at first, but we'll try and give enough background info so we can be on the same page)

Read Text: 1 Cor 4:1-21

How should we respond to spiritual leadership?

Assess them properly.

1. Beware of assessing leaders as if you knew as much as God. (v.1-5)

Text: Last week we talked about how leadership needs to be about God, not people, and that leaders need to take their work seriously because God is ultimately their judge. Paul, our author, is continuing that train of thought- Regard us as servants and stewards who need to be found faithful. Not that you get to assess us- in fact, I don't even assess myself. It's about God who assess.

Now, at first this seems a little strong/a little cult-like, and even in contradiction with other parts of the Bible. I mean, Paul pronounces a judgment on someone who is clearly doing something wrong in the next chapter (5:3), and Jesus himself told us we need to be careful of religious leader Luke 20:45-46. Assessing leaders is crucial- being misled is a bad thing!

So what's going on here? Well, context is key. We're in the middle of a discussion between Paul and the Corinthians, and remember that the Corinthians had gone overboard with judging their leaders, boasting in which one was better than the other, actually dismissing people who were actually good leaders (eg- v.6). Paul wants to speak some sense to them and say, hey, don't do this. First off, God is the ultimate judge, not you.

2. Assess Leaders with the right criteria: a life like Jesus, especially in suffering and sacrifice.

But secondly, use the right criteria if you are to judge. This is really what the second paragraph is about, it talks about one (not all) of the criteria we need to have.

Text: The Corinthians were influenced by their surrounding culture that good leadership involved a certain type of suave and style, and if you identified with the right leader you should advance socially- wealth and power would come. The concepts in v.8- having what you want, being rich, ruling- they were the terms from other religious and philosophical thoughts in that time; you should get these things if you follow the other spiritualities.

Paul is trying to get them to see that their criteria is wrong. Guess what, he says- leadership in the Christian community doesn't really work like that- it doesn't guarantee the sort of riches and power you seek. In fact, many times it involves the opposite- suffering and humiliation because of Jesus. If you do have good things, it is from God, not your grasping for it through these power games with each other.

Go through text, v.6-13.

v. 6- "Beyond what is written"- refers to the Scripture quotations in the previous 3 chapters, all having to do with boasting in people.

v.7- the "for" is to explain the above- why they shouldn't get caught up in judging between leaders in the way they do. Two things are noted: 1) aren't you like us- we have what we have because life is a gift? (v.8- "For who sees anything different in you?" - as compared to us- Paul and Apollos), isn't all we have a gift from God? 2) you're using the wrong criteria- you're thinking good leadership involves having good things now! (v.8ff)

v. 12- "working with our own hands" was seen, in philosophical circles, as a lowly thing to do. The criteria developed is essentially a life like Jesus: one that embraces suffering and sacrifice.

This is not to say that God does not make Christians successful as defined by the surrounding culture. This passage is pointing to the reality, though, that beneath that, following Jesus, especially in the area of suffering and sacrifice, is the measuring stick of good leadership. A good leader needs to be like Jesus, specifically Jesus as he suffered.

Jesus put it like this: Matt 5:44, John 15:20, Luke 9:23-25.

- Yes, the Christian leader can make money, but do they know how to bless and not curse God, to stay faithful to him, when the financial good times are gone?

- Yes, the Christian leader can have good status at work or in the community, but is she willing to face dishonor if following Jesus requires her to take an unpopular stance?

- Are we assessing leaders based on things like their wealth or social power, on their following Jesus, especially in the area of suffering and sacrifice?

Our context:

For leaders- how well do we embrace the suffering of Jesus?

For the rest of us- God help us have the right sort of assessments, because honestly it's easier to follow people that seem successful, or good looking, or etc. (Journal of Economic Studies- beautiful people earn 12% more than "ugly people"). But Jesus and his followers... well, they're not all like that.

So its key to assess properly. But from there, it's key to follow.

Follow good leaders.

This is what the last paragraph is about. A few things:

- Follow good leaders, specifically their lifestyle. (v.16) Paul only says this because he is following Jesus' lifestyle (1 Cor 11:1)

- Follow good leaders and their teams. (v.17)

- Beware the biggest roadblock: pride. (v.18)

Side note: you might think v.18-20 is Paul getting personally offended and getting riled up (especially if you interpret "talk" as "talk about Paul.") Paul is not taking it personally- the word for "talk" is "logos," or "word" as used in chapter 1 to discuss the difference between the content and style of the teaching of Corinth, versus the way of Jesus. "Power" was used there as well, and referred if you remember, not to sheer power like "I'm stronger than you," but "effective power" meaning this has results. So Paul is not getting offended and picking a fight on who is stronger. He's asking the question of if their message and style of leadership is really effective- does God actually change lives through that, through leadership based on human personality? Or does it not? Do I need to come as a disciplinary parent (that's what the rod is about)? Or can come in a different manner?

The point is: beware of pride in all this.

Follow good leaders. Good leaders who live out the life of Jesus. Good leaders who are about God and not themselves.

Follow these leaders.

Challenge:

For those who call Ethnos their home: We have overall done very well. I pray we can continue, especially if we are to grow. Growth is never easy- it brings changes that can make many of us uncomfortable, and can cause unresponsiveness to leadership and conflict. Some of it may be justified- leaders can lose there grounding in Jesus when growth happens. But the problem can lie in those of us who follow as well.

For those who don't yet:

I hope you are encouraged by what you see. Your first challenge is to follow Jesus.

Extra Study Notes:

v.1- mysteries of God- in Paul's usage, this refers to the aspects of how all people (Gentiles included) are saved through Jesus. These things were not understood before, and so were "hidden" and a mystery. See Col 1:26-27, 2:2, 4:3; Eph. 1:9; 3:3-4, 9; 6:19.

v.9- The image of the apostles being exhibited as men sentenced to death is from the imagery of either a Roman gladiator show, or victory procession/triumph of a Roman army. The latter seems more likely, given Paul's imagery in 2 Cor 2:14.

v.9- The apostles- while usually referring the inner twelve of Jesus (eg. Matt. 10:2, Acts 1:26), the term was used to apply to others as well. Paul (1 Cor 15:7-9), Barnabus (Acts 14:14), perhaps James (Gal. 1:19), Andronicus and Junias (Rom 16:7). Beyond that, the term was used to signify a messenger (Phil. 2:25, 2 Cor. 8:23, John 13:16). The qualifications of an apostle seem to have been 1) having seen Jesus physically after the resurrection (Acts 1:22), 2) having been commissioned by Jesus himself (Acts 1:24-26, Rom. 1:1). The term is used loosely today in some circles as one who is a pioneer. However, in passages like 1 Cor. 4 it is a very specific reference.

v.15- Paul uses father/mother language in all his letters except for Romans.

v.17- Timothy was one of Paul's closest coworkers. See 1 and 2 Timothy.

v.18- Paul's plan for coming is outlined in 16:1-9.