

1 Corinthians When Faith & Life Collide

Study 3

The Gospel and the Nature of Church Growth

1 Corinthians 3:1-17

1 Corinthians 3:1-8

“1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; 3 for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? 4 For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not carnal?

5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

9 For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. 10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. 11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.”

Spiritual Immaturity (v. 1-4)

1. What are the underlying causes of disunity and division in church?

- Spiritual immaturity (v. 1-4)
- Misunderstanding the nature of church growth (v. 5-22)

1 Corinthians 3:1-3

“1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; 3 for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?”

2. a) Paul mentions that the Corinthian believers are babies/infants in Christ. He is referring to spiritual immaturity. What are the behaviours associated with spiritual immaturity?

- Jealousy/Envy
- Strife
- Divisions

b) As opposed to spiritual, Paul uses the term “of the flesh”. What does the flesh represent?

- Flesh is the aspect of our life that wants to be God
- It carries out the natural desires of the body and the mind

c) God has implanted normal desires in us. Fulfilling these desires is not wrong in itself. Where is the line drawn to say that it is wrong (that is to say, “of the flesh”)?

- When we achieve these normal desires on our own terms without God
- When we take unilateral action without being dependent as a creature of God and taking over the Creator’s role

3. Compare the flesh and spiritual.

| | Flesh | Spiritual |
|-------------------|---|---|
| Drive | Christians moved by entirely human drives | Christians moved by entirely spiritual drives |
| Interest | Christians moved by self interest | Christians moved by the needs of others |
| Dependence | Self sufficiency | Dependent on the Spirit |

4. a) How do we define spiritual “meat”?

- Gospel-Centred

b) Reflection question. In FBC, identify where spiritual meat is being provided.

Wrong focus in Church Growth - Focus on leaders (v. 5-22)

A. Leaders are servants with specific assignments

1 Corinthians 3:5

“5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? ”

5. Are leaders superior to members in church? Why or why not?

B. Leaders are rewarded by God

1 Corinthians 3:8

“8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.”

6. If a fellow Christian does something good for you (e.g. gets you chicken soup), it is natural for us to repay them in kind. Likewise, if a Christian leader cares for you, it is natural to reciprocate and try to repay them. However, what is the flaw in this way of thinking?

- Personal loyalty to a person, instead of God
- Nothing wrong with reciprocating
- But need to guard against having loyalty towards them for their goodness

C. The Church belongs to God and He gives the growth

1 Corinthians 3:6-7

“6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who **gives the increase.**”

7. What are the marks of a poor Christian leader?

- Personalised authority
- Takes power upon himself/herself
- Credits himself/herself for successes (not crediting God)
- Exclusive leadership
- Blind loyalty
- No accountability

8. What are the marks of good Christian leadership?

- Passion for God, His mission, and His transforming power on people
- Leads by example and values, rather than position

- Centrifugal influence, draws people in, sends people out
- Promotes the mission

9. What are the differences between a church that grows by God’s power vs. a church that grows by man’s strength?

| Aspect | If God causes the growth, then... | If man causes the growth, then... |
|-------------|--|--|
| Prayer | Prayerful dependence | Minimal prayer |
| Word of God | Word-based | Minimal teaching of God’s Word |
| Programs | Programs in line with His Word | Programs that attract people, entertainment only |
| Gospel | Gospel centred | No Gospel emphasis |
| Leadership | Leaders equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12) | Led by leaders only |
| Goals | Impossible goals | Achievable goals |

Wrong focus in Church Growth - Building on the wrong foundation (v. 5-22)

A. Build only on Christ

1 Corinthians 3:9-11

“9 For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. 10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. 11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

10. What are the wrong foundations to build a church upon?

- Experience
- Entertainment

B. Build using imperishables - Only imperishables will survive impending judgment

1 Corinthians 3:12-15

“12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

11. Fill in the blanks. What are the imperishables that we can build with?

| | |
|--------|----------|
| Motive | Love |
| Means | Faith |
| Method | His Will |

Wrong focus in Church Growth - Misunderstanding the vision of the church (v. 5-22)

- A. We have the presence of God - Our destination is holiness
- B. God protects the dignity and holiness of His church

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

“16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.”

12. The temple of God is holy. What are the implications of us being the temple of God?

Takeaway

- A. The 2 causes of disunity / division in a church are:**
 - a. Spiritual Immaturity (v. 1-4)**
 - b. Wrong focus in Church Growth (v. 5-22)**

- B. Wrong focus in Church Growth**
 - a. Focus on leaders**
 - i. Leaders are servants with specific assignments**
 - ii. Leaders are rewarded by God**
 - iii. The Church belongs to God and He gives the growth**
 - b. Building on the wrong foundation**
 - i. Build only on Christ**
 - ii. Build using imperishables - Only imperishables will survive impending judgment**
 - c. Misunderstanding the vision of the church**
 - i. We have the presence of God - Our destination is holiness**
 - ii. God protects the dignity and holiness of His church**

Case Study

Case 1 – Church Growth

Joseph King has been the elder of The Explosion Baptist Church for over 30 years. Under his guidance, the church has grown from 120 members to 5000 members.

The church began with a small weekly Bible study and prayer fellowship but the numbers did not grow in its first two decades. Seeing this stagnation, he decided to revamp the programmes of the church, saying that there is a need for revival.

He started new cell group meetings among different members and encouraged them to meet to have fellowship. During these cell group meetings, he encouraged everyone to worship together and to eat together for bonding with one another. However, he also decided to no longer have Bible study and prayer meetings as part of the church programme since they were not very

fruitful. Apparently, not many were interested in studying God's Word and he did not want to lose new members to boredom.

On Sundays, Joseph only chose sermon topics that would benefit the congregation, such as "How to Activate God's Blessings in Your Life", "Unlocking the Power of the Spirit in Your Relationships", "Faith to Heal - Only Believe!", etc. Previously, the sermons were based on chapters of the Bible but he thought it was not a good approach as his church members found it too dry.

Additionally, he made sure that the money collected every Sunday was spent renovating the church building to make it look as attractive as possible. He included new spotlights, integrated sound systems, and smoke generators with lasers to make the worship experience truly one of a kind.

When questioned about his decisions by his fellow elders, he said that he has been an elder for 30 years and has seen what is effective and what is not effective. He refuses to take advice from anyone who was not as experienced as him.

After all, now that the number of church members has grown to the 5000 mark under his leadership, he says that it is an achievement that very few church elders can ever make in their lifetime.

1. Was Joseph's work as an elder effective? What was his motive?
2. Is the number of church members a good metric to measure the growth of a church? If not, what is a good metric?
3. Has the focus of the church changed? If yes, what is the old focus and new focus?
4. What should Joseph be doing instead?
5. What can the fellow leaders do?