

THE LOOKOUT

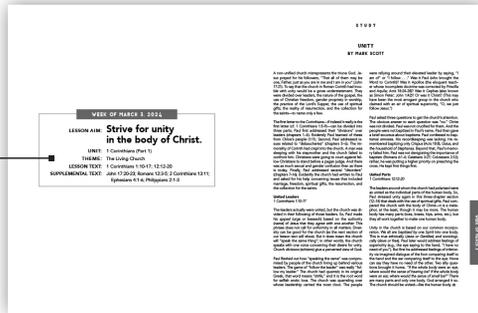
MARCH 2024

Unit: 1 Corinthians (Part 1) Theme: The Living Church

Overview: The church at Corinth had problems, as most churches do... even those that are vibrant and growing. Life was not easy in the pagan Roman culture. Life in the church was not much different. The Corinthian church had problems with unity, leaders, morality, marriage, freedoms, idolatry, spiritual gifts, love, the resurrection, and the collection for the saints. But the church of today can learn to be united from a divided church like Corinth. In this study, we highlight what constitutes unity, the nature of servant leadership, the constraints of freedom, the unifying significance of Communion, and the functioning of the body of Christ.

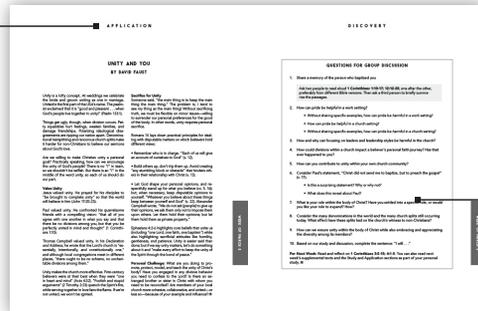
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF MARCH 10, 2024

LESSON AIM: **Lead by being a good servant of Christ and a faithful steward of the opportunities God has given you.**

UNIT: 1 Corinthians (Part 1)

THEME: The Living Church

LESSON TEXT: 1 Corinthians 3:5-15; 4:1-5

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 1 Kings 12:1-16; Matthew 20:20-28;
1 Corinthians 3:1-4, 16-23

STUDY

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY MARK SCOTT

Servant leadership is always admired. The boss who gets in the ditch and digs with the workers, the teacher who stays late to help the student with the science project, and the running back who lets the lineman spike the football after a touchdown all give evidence of servant leadership.

The divisions in the church at Corinth were mostly caused by pride, which ran counter to servant leadership. After acknowledging the church's divisions (1 Corinthians 1:10-17), Paul led the Corinthians back to the gospel which united them in the first place (1:18-2:16). In chapters 3-4, Paul returned to the church's divisions based on how the church was lining up behind their chosen leaders. The problem was not with the servant leaders, but with how divided the people had become based on their undue loyalty to certain leaders. Paul reminded the church the correct way to think about leadership.

Servants Who Lead

1 Corinthians 3:5-15

Paul did not want the church to have an inflated view of Apollos or himself. He said the two of them were just *servants through whom you came to believe*. The word for servants is the normal word for "slave." God gave Apollos and Paul jobs to do. God *assigned to each his task*, so boasting was pointless.

Paul used the analogies of gardening (or farming) and building to drive home his point.

In the first analogy, Paul said he *planted the seed*, meaning the church at Corinth (Acts 18:1-11). Apollos came along later and *watered* the seed that Paul planted (Acts 18:27-28). But God is really who made *it grow*. Think of this as parents who give their children money to purchase birthday gifts for the parents. Paul and Apollos were simply discharging their duties as *co-workers* in the gospel. The church is God's field, and God is the real gardener. The best servant leadership conveys humility and "self-forgetfulness." Paul referred to the church in Corinth metaphorically as *God's building*.

In the second analogy, Paul underlined God's grace as the power source for his building of the church. Paul laid the *foundation* (which the apostle said is Christ himself) and Apollos built upon it. Builders in God's kingdom must build with care though. The church is built upon

the foundation of the apostles and prophets, but Christ alone is the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20).

The strength of a structure is contingent upon the materials the builders use. Paul acknowledged there are materials such as *gold, silver, and costly stones*. Then there are other, less durable materials such as *wood, hay or straw*. Not all materials (i.e., works) are created equal. When the *Day of Judgment* takes place, works will be judged (purified) through *fire*. The servant leader's salvation is not in jeopardy, but his or her works will be short-lived or long-lasting. This emphasis is advanced in the next section.

God Who Judges

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

All people will appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10). But teachers and leaders will be judged more stringently (James 3:1). The Corinthian correspondence includes what is referred to as the "apostolic we/us." Context reveals when Paul was addressing himself and the other apostles and when the "we/us" referred to the church at large. In chapter 4, it seems the "we/us" referred to the apostles. The Corinthians must think properly about the apostles or they would be in danger of dividing over those same leaders.

The apostles were *servants of Christ* and stewards of *the mysteries God revealed*. The key quality of a leader in the church is servanthood. But the key quality of stewards in the church is faithfulness. They must be faithful to the God who *entrusted* to them his revealed secrets.

The Corinthians were making judgments based on who they elevated as leaders (i.e., Paul, Cephas, Apollos, etc.). Paul refused to allow those judgments from the church to have emotional ownership over him. Paul sided with the apostle John who wrote that even when his heart condemned him God did not condemn him (1 John 3:20). God is the ultimate judge—not the Corinthians or some *human court* or even Paul's self-condemnation. Paul's *conscience* (his moral umpire) was clear. When Christ, our coming judge, returns then what is *hidden in darkness* will be revealed and *motives of the heart* will be exposed. Since God will punish or reward at the Judgment, humble servant leadership is the best posture for leading the church. ■

APPLICATION

LOWERCASE LEADERS

BY DAVID FAUST

Do you know why we refer to capital letters and smaller letters as uppercase and lowercase? When Johannes Gutenberg and other publishers began using the printing press in the 1400s, typesetters stored individual letters in wooden cases or cabinets. The smaller, more common letters were kept in the lower chambers.

Large letters grab attention in posters and ads promoting movies and concerts, but in daily communication, lowercase letters do most of the work. Uppercase letters can be annoying. A text message written in all caps makes it look like YOU ARE SHOUTING.

Don't Try to Look Big

Jesus warned about the danger of pursuing impressive religious labels like rabbi and father (Matthew 23:8-10). Highfalutin titles may massage a leader's ego, but the goal is to serve, not to elevate ourselves above others.

Uppercase leaders demand attention; lowercase leaders quietly do God's work. Online worship services do a lot of good, but if we're not careful, they turn Christians into viewers rather than participants and preachers into uppercase personalities instead of lowercase servants.

In the church, a title isn't a badge of honor; it's a job description—a call to action. If you are called pastor, you had better be shepherding God's sheep. A business card containing the word *minister* reminds its holder to serve the Lord and love his people. Professors should profess Christ, evangelists should proclaim good news, and those called sister or brother should treat other believers like family.

The Unglamorous Side of Ministry

For most of us, serving God doesn't mean a lot of time onstage in front of TV cameras. The majority of ministry consists of unglamorous but necessary tasks.

Meet with others to plan and solve problems. Pray for and counsel the discouraged. Visit the sick and comfort

the dying. Raise funds and manage budgets. Respond to e-mails and phone calls. Answer the questions of seekers and doubters. Recruit and equip volunteers. Care for widows and orphans. Build relationships with neighbors. Practice hospitality. Study God's Word so you can connect eternal truth with distracted souls who live in a constantly shifting culture. Most of this work is not glamorous—although it could be described as glorious.

Lowercase leaders are in good company, for the King of kings "made himself nothing" (Philippians 2:7) to fulfill his mission. In his kingdom, lowercase doesn't mean lower class. Yes, Jesus addressed big crowds. But out of public view he cared for the sick, trained leaders, and washed his disciples' feet.

The apostle Paul saw himself as a caretaker entrusted with the job of planting and watering gospel seeds in God's field (1 Corinthians 3:5-6). In addition to preaching, teaching, and writing letters, Paul did unglamorous things. He mentored next-generation leaders like Timothy and Titus and helped discordant believers like Euodia and Syntyche untangle their interpersonal conflicts (Philippians 4:2). He made sure the church's offerings were properly administered (2 Corinthians 8:19-21). He weathered the attacks of critics who questioned his leadership qualifications and disparaged his speaking ability (2 Corinthians 10:7-11). And he did all this while bearing "concern for all the churches" and enduring his own thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 11:28; 12:7-10).

Lowercase leaders don't aspire to make headlines. They are willing to be footnotes. They realize the titles that matter most are ones like follower, foot washer, cup of water giver, and servant of Christ.

Personal Challenge: What lowercase leaders do you know who serve the Lord humbly without much recognition and fanfare? Pray for them and thank God for them. Write them a note or tell them in person how much you appreciate their leadership and service for the Lord. ■

DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Rate your level of experience with gardening or construction, both of which are referred to metaphorically in this week's lesson.

Ask two people to read aloud **1 Corinthians 3:5-15; 4:1-5**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passages.

2. Paul and Apollos both played key roles in the early church at Corinth. There is no evidence they clashed with one another or did not work well together. How then is it possible a schism developed among people of the church who had been taught by these men?
3. Paul described himself and Apollos as "servants, through whom you came to believe" (v. 5). Did you ever consider that the leaders in your church are merely servants?
 - How might this cause you to treat your church leaders better?
 - How might this cause some misguided church folks to treat their leaders poorly?
4. If your church leaders are servants, then so are you. In what ways do you seek to carry out your role as a servant in the church?
5. Mark Scott writes in his lesson treatment, "The church is God's field, and God is the real gardener." In what specific ways are you helping to "water" God's field?
6. Paul metaphorically refers to building materials such as "gold, silver, [and] costly stones" used to build God's church. He says these materials ultimately will be tested with fire. Share some examples of what Paul perhaps means when he says "gold, silver, [and] costly stones."
 - Likewise, Paul mentions building materials such as "wood, hay or straw" that are used to build the church. Share some examples of what Paul might mean when he refers to these less substantial building materials.
7. In 1 Corinthians 4:3-4, Paul writes, "I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court . . . [m]y conscience is clear."
 - How was Paul able to have a clear conscience about how he was living his life?
 - What steps can you take toward living life with a clearer conscience?
8. In his Application column this week, David Faust writes of "lowercase leaders" who quietly and faithfully do God's work with little or no attention. Share an example of such a person from your life or experience.
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **1 Corinthians 8:9-13; 9:19-23; 10:23-33**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■