

## **Contemporary Presentation: Devotional for Leaders**

Alphacrucis College  
Hillsong Campus

BIB353- I and II Corinthians – Contemporary Presentation

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### **Declaration of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgment is made in the acknowledgments.

Signed:

Date:

## 3-Day Devotional for leaders in the church

Hi! Welcome to this 3-day devotional for leaders! I will be highlighting three major themes found in the passage of 1 Corinthians 3:5-9. I pray that as you read these devotionals you will reflect on areas in your leadership where change may be needed, and that God will bring about a change of perspective in our hearts for the sake of those we are leading,

### Day 1:

#### **We are only Servants**

*What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe— 1 Corinthians 3:5a*

This verse, in its broader context, is part of a letter written by Paul to the church in Corinth in which many issues were addressed, one of which was the fact that the people were favoring one teacher over another, leading to divisions amongst the congregation.<sup>1</sup>

Paul is making the point that those who have been given authority to be leaders in the church are merely fellow servants in the kingdom of God. The Greek equivalent to *servant* used here is a ‘table waiter’. This would have been a highly offensive image for the elite in Corinth because they placed immense value on status and rank. A table waiter is not a person of importance, for their sole purpose is the lowest position, to serve. The way you gained status in this culture at the time was through the people you were associated with.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 130.

<sup>2</sup> Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), 145–146.

Paul was not just trying to put human leaders down, but rather he was putting God at the top and center, and emphasizing that servants get to be vessels through whom He can move.<sup>3</sup> God alone should receive the praise, not man.

So as leaders in churches today, how can we apply this verse to our context? In a lot of ways we are not very different from the Corinthians in the issues that present themselves in our churches. For example, it would be shocking if we knew how many people base the decision of serving in church on the *person* they are serving under, or have selective hearing when it comes to sermons because of the *person* through whom the word is being spoken. It is said that Apollos's spoken rhetoric was better than Paul's, which was a reason some of the Corinthians preferred him.<sup>4</sup>

I think it is important for us to remember that as leaders, in whatever capacity that may be, we are just servants, instruments through whom God can speak, move, and bring about change. We must not get into the habit of comparing ourselves to others or playing the power game. This can be detrimental to the health of our churches—those leading and those being lead. Let's be the kind of leaders that don't mind becoming the lesser and serving so that others may be built up. Let's serve God and one another and build the church of God together!

**Reflection:** *What is something you can do today as a leader to genuinely serve and bless someone in your sphere of influence? Take time to pray and allow God to reveal areas that need change in the way you perceive leadership and what it looks like.*

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<sup>3</sup> Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 132.

<sup>4</sup> Craig S. Keener, *First--Second Corinthians* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 9.

## Day 2:

### We all have different parts to play

*-- As the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 1 Corinthians 3:5b-7*

In this verse, Paul is now comparing himself and Apollos, leaders in the ministry, to farmworkers. In the previous verse the comparison was made to table waiters, and now he has moved to an agricultural imagery. A couple of points can be drawn from this analogy. “*Paul planted and Apollos watered*”. Each has a special and unique calling and ministry, but for the same purpose—to build God’s kingdom.

Paul is possibly drawing on Jewish theology of creation. God brings the rain and enriches the field. Our part is still important but ultimately it’s *God* who causes growth.<sup>5</sup>

Paul then goes to point out that there is unity between the planter and the waterer. Paul planted and Apollos watered, *but neither made the plants grow*. Only God can do that. In other words, they are one in status, both servants but with different assignments.<sup>6</sup> Both are making unique contributions to the building of the church, yet the focus should not be on them, but on the One who gave them the wisdom and authority, the One who ultimately causes the change and the growth!<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians* (SPCK, 2012), 125.

<sup>6</sup> Raymond F. Collins and Daniel J. Harrington, *First Corinthians* (Liturgical Press, 1999), 146.

<sup>7</sup> Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1985), 63.

Paul is not, however, saying that believers should not show loyalty or give respect to those who lead and nurture them in their faith, but that respect should not lead to exclusive loyalty that could ultimately lead to divisions within the church.

As leaders we must remember that we all have unique callings and various skill sets that can be used for building the church. This is a good thing! But we must never compare ourselves to other leaders who may have a different anointing and gift on their life. It is similar to the the metaphor of the body, which Paul uses later in the same letter to Corinth, meaning they are all there for the edification of the church. Every member has an equal part in the church.<sup>8</sup> God values and loves all the same. Yet we have a responsibility to take care of what God has entrusted to us. It is our choice whether we tend to it well or not. God sees the things that are accomplished in the unseen and he will honor it.

Without your part, the church is not what it is! This is a vision that needs to be communicated more regularly. Let's make sure that we are placing equal value on those we are teaching and leading, so that they understand we are all together in this even though positions may look different and tasks may vary. But more than just teaching this, we should make sure to live it out by example!

**Reflection:** *How can you be an example to those you are leading, showing them a different perspective and encouraging inclusiveness and unity in the body of Christ?*

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<sup>8</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians* (Harper Collins, 2009), 84.

## Day 3:

### We are God's church

*The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.*

*1 Corinthians 3:8-9*

*Each will be rewarded according to their own labor.* – “Those who serve in ministry must constantly be caring for the ‘soil’ of the church. It takes hard and consistent work. If the heart of your ministry is genuine, it should produce fruit, in other words it should grow in one capacity or another, yet the reward will be for the work you have done, not the success of it.<sup>9</sup> On a human level, those who do the hard yards, so to speak, of plowing and preparing the field (church of God), and caring for it should be honored and respected. This does not, however, mean that they should think more highly of themselves or look down on those who may only reap the benefits of it.

At the end of verse 9 Paul makes the shift from a farming metaphor to a construction one. He is emphasizing that the Corinthian church is God's church.<sup>10</sup> Paul completely turned the people's worldview on its head. In their culture a person's identity was found in *whose you were*.<sup>11</sup> From the normality of slavery to the conception of sexual ethics, everyone belonged to someone.<sup>12</sup> Paul is saying here that cultural rank is not important, because we are all low in rank when it comes to the kingdom; God is the one to whom the church belongs, and He is the one who will do the work in us!

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<sup>9</sup> David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)* (Baker Academic, 2003), 112.

<sup>10</sup> Collins and Harrington, *First Corinthians*, 147.

<sup>11</sup> Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 149.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

As leaders, we must not present ourselves as though we have the ultimate revelations of truth. This can cause unhealthy attachment from those following our lead.<sup>13</sup> It is vital to keep a humble spirit, not forgetting that it is God's spirit that causes change and growth in people. We can learn this from the Corinthians. They were proud of their church and their leaders and became puffed up, which was slowly leading to division.<sup>14</sup> God desires for us to be united as one for the cause of Christ.

We are not so different to the culture of the ancient world. How many times do we associate our value according to who we are working for, or even take the glory as leaders when our churches are 'successful'? Paul sums up his argument at the end of verse 9 by saying that yes, we are just servants who hold the same status, each with different tasks to perform, but more important than that is that the church is *God's field, God's building*. The church belongs to Him! It is out of this status, belonging to God and being co-workers with Him, that we lead and use our skills and abilities to build the church of God.

**Reflection:** I pray that our desire as leaders is to have humble hearts before God, for it is He alone who deserves all the glory. We are His church; so let's submit ourselves to Him, and watch Him do the miraculous change and growth in people's lives!

## **Bibliography**

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<sup>14</sup> *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (David C Cook, n.d.), 463.

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