

## **1 Corinthians Session 3: Dealing with sin in the church (1 Cor 4:1-5:13)**

(Scripture references based on NIV)

### **1. Key Learning Objectives**

*Key pointers to keep in mind as you prepare and lead the session.*

To understand that:

- It is the Lord who judges us. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and expose the motives of the heart.
- We are not to ignore, but to address unrepented sin in each other to maintain purity within the church body.

### **2. Warm-up activity / Starter Question**

*These questions are meant to establish a baseline level of understanding and/or tease the themes of today's passage. You may pick one of the two. There is no need to hear from everyone or correct any opinions here.*

- Recall a time when you felt judged by someone else. How did you feel? How did you respond?
- Briefly, do you think it is safer to tolerate unrepented sin in others or to challenge it? Why?

### **3. Opening Prayer**

*Dear God, we are thankful for the freedom to gather to learn and grow, without fear of oppression, like our brothers and sisters in Christ in other parts of the world. Bless our time together, focus our minds, soften our hearts, make our time together count for you. Thank you, in Jesus' name, Amen.*

## 4. Context

*This section provides that context that prompted Paul to write chapter 4.*

### Recap on the narrative so far

- Corinthian church is gifted (1:4-7) but divided regarding favouring different leaders and teachers (1:10-12)
- Paul says that his preaching was not with wise and persuasive words but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that their faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power (2:4).
- Paul says that the Corinthians are infants in Christ and worldly since there is jealousy and quarrelling amongst them over which church leaders they follow (3:3-4).
- He says that all the different leaders are only servants, whom the Lord has assigned each a task for a common purpose to build up God's body of believers (3:5-9).

### Overview of today's passage (for leaders' reference)

- *This study is split into two parts - chapter 4 and chapter 5.*
- *In chapter 4, it may be inferred that Paul is responding to how some Corinthians may have passed some judgements on the appearance of his ministry compared to other leaders.*
- *In chapter 5, Paul addresses a case of uncorrected sexual sin in the church which the Corinthians were boastful about.*

## 5. Scripture Reading

*Allow some time for the youths to read Chapter 4 and 5 either by themselves or aloud.*

## 6. Discussion Questions

### **Q1-5: Disciples and discipleship (1 Cor 4)**

#### **1) In 4:1-2, what does Paul see are the roles and responsibilities of the apostles?**

Roles:

- Servant of Christ
- Stewards of the secret things of God

Responsibilities:

- Those who have been something must prove faithful to what they have been given.

2) In 4:3-6, the apostles' work is being assessed/judged by the Corinthians, Paul himself, and God. What might the opinion of these judges be and how much weight does Paul put on their opinions?

Judges	Paul's perspective
Corinthians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No weight - Paul cares very little if he is judged by them (v3).</li> <li>• They should judge nothing before appointed time; wait till the Lord comes (v5)</li> <li>• They should learn from the apostles the meaning of the saying "Do not go beyond what is written" (v6).</li> <li>• Based on contextual knowledge, they take pride in one man over another.</li> </ul>
Self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No weight - Paul does not judge himself (v3).</li> <li>• His conscience may be clear but that does not make him innocent in God's sight (v4)</li> </ul>
God	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highest weight - the Lord is the ultimate judge (v4).</li> <li>• When the Lord comes, he will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. On that day, each will receive their <i>praise</i> from God (v5)</li> </ul>

3) From 4:7-13, how do the apostles' lifestyle status compare to that of the Corinthian church? How does Paul feel about these differences? What do you think is the underlying cause for the differences?

*The main point of this group of questions is to discover the underlying condition of the Corinthians' hearts, which is evidenced by their attitudes and lifestyle. It is important to answer the final question here!*

Status of the Corinthians	Status of the apostles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rich</li> <li>• Become kings</li> <li>• Wise</li> <li>• Strong</li> <li>• Honoured</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On display at the end of procession, like men condemned to die in the arena</li> <li>• Made a spectacle in Christ</li> <li>• Weak</li> <li>• Dishonoured</li> <li>• Hungry &amp; thirsty, in rags, brutally treated, homeless, worked hard with their own hands</li> <li>• Cursed but they bless</li> <li>• Persecuted but they endured it</li> <li>• Slandered but they answer kindly</li> <li>• Become scum of the earth, refuse of the world</li> </ul>

How Paul feels about these differences in status:

- Paul's tone in several verses (v8, 14, 16, 19-21) tell us that he is upset with the Corinthians.
- He is disappointed that they are not living out their faith as God desires (or requires, v2).

Underlying reasons for these differences in status:

- The Corinthians were arrogant and boastful (v6).
- They had gotten complacent with worldly comforts of wealth, wisdom, strength, amenities, and honour.
- They forgot that they have received everything they have from God, by His grace (v7).

**4) In 4:16-17, what were the reasons behind Paul sending Timothy to the Corinthians?**

- Paul considered himself as a spiritual father to the Corinthians in the gospel. He urged them to imitate him because he had a close relationship with God. Christ was Paul's example, so Paul's life could be an example to other Christians.
- Timothy, who is faithful in the Lord, will serve as a visible reminder of Paul's "way of life in Christ Jesus" to the Corinthians.

**5) Mid-study reflection: What can we learn about disciples and discipleship from this chapter?**

- Disciples are ultimately discipled by people. They are not primarily made by ideas, or teachings or letters (even if those are from the apostle Paul himself); they are discipled by real, tangible human people who embody the gospel as they teach it.
- Discipleship requires a combination of theory ('what I teach') and practice ('my way of life'). Good teaching is essential, but transformation happens when people not only teach but actually live out the Christian faith in front of us, showing us how the cross shapes our work, our relationships and in this case our unity and humility in Christ.

***Q6-7: Dealing with sin in the church (1 Cor 5)***

**6) In 5:1-2, what is the issue in the Corinthian church that was reported? What was the response of the Corinthians?**

- Sexual immorality and incest between a man and his father's wife (v1).
- This likely means someone who is not his biological mother, but someone who was or had been married to his father.
- The Corinthians were proud of it and boasted about it (v2).

**7) With reference to 5:6-8, how should the Corinthians deal with sin? How do the concepts of leaven and Passover help to make Paul's point?**

- The Corinthians should be ruthless with sin (v7).
- A small pinch of leaven could make a whole new lump of dough rise and “puff” up. A little sin, like the effects of leaven, can corrupt many.
- At the Passover feast, all leaven was to be removed from the house. Similarly, the church should not tolerate immoral behaviour.
- We should be like a new batch of dough without yeast because Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for our sins.

**7. Main Discipleship Takeaway**

*Ask the youths how they would summarise everything that has been discussed today with one sentence.*

Knowing that it is the Lord who judges us, live in a manner that pursues Christ's way of life (without arrogance and complacency) and be ruthless in removing sin, instead of being boastful.

**8. Application / Reflection**

*Split up into smaller groups to share. Leaders are encouraged to have prepared their own thoughts and sharings for the application questions.*

- 1) “It is the Lord who judges me” (1 Cor 4:4). How does this change the way you view your own efforts in living as a faithful disciple or in serving God in His church? Do you find it liberating, or challenging, or both?
- 2) Are there any ways that you have become prideful and arrogant / too comfortable in your life? How does 4:7 humble you? What should you do instead?
- 3) As the body of Christ, believers must show Christ to the world, just as Paul and Timothy did with the Corinthians. Reflect on the kind of example you have been to the community you have been placed in. Are there any areas where we can help each other to be salt and light?
- 4) Are there aspects of our lives or in our church which we are tolerating sin? Keeping the idea of “a little leaven leavens the whole lump” in mind, how severe might the consequences of these sins be? What should we do about the sin we have been tolerating?

## **9. Closing Prayer**

*Dear Heavenly Father, I thank You for the family of Christ into which You have placed us. We pray that the Word that we have learnt today will not return to You void. Help each of us to remember that you are our ultimate judge. Let us be resolved to help each other live according to Your Word to keep our path pure. Thank You. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

*Remain in your smaller groups and take turns to pray for each other. Where there is time, encourage members to share about specific areas for prayer in their lives.*