Growing in Grace, Growing in Community: Life Lessons on Maturity with the Corinthians

***Leadership: Whose Church is This?*** 1 Corinthians 3:5-–4:5

The Corinthians were divided over leaders, so Paul deals first with the divisiveness, and now turns to leadership. It is easy for humans to make two mistakes at this point: First we can dismiss or disregard leaders, and second, at other times, put too much stock in them. We run the gamut between insubordination and hero worship! Paul helps us see that there is a way both to respect leaders for their role and at the same time, expect them to be responsible and accountable. The key is understanding that they don’t own the church and its people, but are merely stewards of God’s precious Flock. There are four issues: worship, accountability, unity, and judgment. As mature believers, we will. . .

❖ Realize that all glory is God’s, and so we don’t worship leaders as heroes. 3:5-9

Worthy leaders should be respected, but not idolized.

❖ Remember that the Church is God’s, so we expect leaders to build wisely. 3:10-17

Worthy leaders will build up the church wisely and unselfishly, and never destroy God’s work.

❖ Live as though all things are God’s, so we don’t “go tribal” over leaders. 3:18-23

Worthy leaders will not encourage “groupies,” or build their own kingdoms.

❖ Leave judgment to God, and so wait patiently for Christ’s judgment upon His return, without needless criticism of leaders. 4:1-5

Worthy leaders are faithful to the Lord, and leave the judging to Him.

**Growth Principle #4: The spiritually mature Christian views the Church as God’s possession, avoiding hero worship and party spirit while holding leaders accountable to build up the church wisely.**

Paul clearly is speaking not only to the church, but its leadership in this passage. He is avoiding a direct confrontation, since things already are volatile and His authority is being questioned, but at the same time he is reminding the church’s leadership that they dare not take their positions for granted. . .

***1. All leadership is a divine stewardship, a privilege, not a right.*** Ephesians 4:11-13

***2. Leaders must be chosen and appointed carefully from among those who have proven themselves (through experience and training) to have a true understanding of the church and its ministry.*** 1 Timothy 3; Titus 1

***3. Jesus will judge and reward leaders according to the quality and sincerity of their work***. While all believers will give an account to the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:10), the “trial by fire” (3:13-17) applies to leaders. Leading God’s people is a great privilege, but also a great responsibility, and should not be approached lightly. Hebrews 13:17; James 3:1; 1 Peter 5:1-4

***4. Jesus indwells and watches over His people.***

While each believer has God’s Spirit, this passage is teaching that He indwells each body of believers, each local church in an intimate way. This means that any unjustified attack upon God’s people or local church is an attack upon Jesus. Those who gossip, seek to divide churches, spread rumors, or do anything that undermines the cohesiveness and integrity of a local church will answer to Him. 2 John 9-11; 2 John 5-12



***Going Deeper--For Growth Groups:***

1. What are the dangers of having unqualified or immature leadership in a church? What are some ways to prevent placing the wrong leaders at the helm? What kind of training and experience are necessary for elders and deacons (trustees) to do a good job?

2. With so much at stake, why do churches and other organizations allow poor leaders to take office and to continue in office? When necessary, how should leaders be confronted about poor leadership?