

Christians Gone Wild!
1st Corinthians, week 8
Humble Like Jesus (1 Corinthians 3:16–23)
February 26, 2006
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Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?
1 Corinthians 3:16

The Corinthian Christians were reeling from controversy and factions in their young urban church. So Paul, the church founder, wrote multiple letters in an effort to contend for the survival of the struggling and proud church. In this section, he deftly argues that the greatest threat to the church is usually from enemies who join the ranks, much like the betrayer Judas Iscariot who lived among the disciples under the disguise of a true follower of Jesus. Paul gives wise counsel on how to defend the church from such divisive troublemakers by answering three essential questions.

Paul's counsel is perennially timely. For example, many churches today are suffering quite a beating; some 80 percent of all churches have plateaued or are declining, and some 3,500 churches die and close every year. Furthermore, seemingly every bizarre belief imaginable from the bestselling book and forthcoming film, *The Da Vinci Code*, to previously unconscionable sexual practices are being promoted in some churches under the guise of Christian faith with the expectation that Christians will kindly embrace such nonsense in the name of polite tolerance.

Question #1 – Why should we care if our church is being destroyed?

¹⁶Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? ¹⁷If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

In and of itself, a local church may not be any more impressive than any list of non-Christian community organizations. However, what makes the church (not the actual building but rather the people who live their lives together in worship to Jesus) significant is that it is the place God has chosen as His home upon the earth. To articulate this point, Paul compares the church to the Old Testament temple in which God's presence dwelt upon the earth as the "house of God." The temple was the holiest place on earth and treated with absolute reverence lest the unholy, unrepentant, and unforgiven suffer eternal destruction under God's hand of judgment. Likewise, those who destroy the church with anything from the promotion of sin, teaching of false doctrine, creation of divisions, theft of money, and physical harm of faithful Christians will suffer eternal destruction in hell. Therefore, Paul argues that we should care about the purity and health of our church because an attack upon it is nothing less than an attack on the holiness of God.

Question #2 – What causes someone to destroy a decent church?

¹⁸Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a "fool" so that he may become wise. ¹⁹For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written [Job 5:13]: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"; ²⁰and again [Psalm 94:11], "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile."

What makes divisive church people so dangerous and difficult to deal with is that they are so skilled at deception that they have in fact deceived themselves, much like Satan is both self-deceived and the Deceiver. They are very convincing about their holiness and good intentions. Such people are often well-versed in the latest ideas, are intelligent, and competently defend their beliefs. But what they lack is the humility to agree with God and His wisdom. Instead, they favor prideful thinking that is contrary to God's thoughts as revealed in Scripture. Such people are often so concerned with how they appear to others, particularly non-Christians, that they abandon clear biblical teaching in favor of fads and trends. The last thing they want is people to think they are foolish for loving Jesus and believing the Bible.

Question #3 – How can a church prevent its own destruction?

²¹So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, ²²whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas [Peter] or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, ²³and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

Thankfully, God has graciously provided local churches the means to defend themselves from destructive people, and thus remain faithful to Him. The key to church health is ultimately the humility to learn from all of God's faithful servants and not be bound to one teacher, one publisher, one seminary, one denomination, one philosophy, one style, one nation, or one period of church history. God has richly provided an abundance of resources for His church. This means that we need not fear life (God rules over all of life), or death (Jesus has conquered death for us), or the stress of the present (God is in it with us), or the future (God is sovereign over it).

Paul then concludes his counsel by focusing on Jesus Christ. He states that because Jesus, who is our God, was willing to humbly become a person to live, die, and rise in our place for our sins, He connects us to God. He serves as our example of a humble person who is willing to be despised and jeered at by many in order to be loved and approved by the Father.

Verses for next week: 1 Corinthians 4:1–13