



perfectly united

studies in 1 Corinthians 1-4

SCPC term 1 2008

sunday 6 april 2008

study 10 one model 1 Corinthians 4:14-21

KEY VERSE FOR SERIES: I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. **1 Corinthians 1:10**

1 Cor 4:21—the last verse of this passage and so also the last verse of our 1 Corinthians 1-4 series leaves things on a real cliff-hanger, as Paul asks the Corinthians this piercing question: “What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit?”. If you think that sounds like a dad speaking to a child, that’s exactly what it is. Paul, as the man God used to plant this church in Corinth, likens his relationship to them as one of father to children. And whatever they might be hearing from baby-sitters now caring for them, he thinks perhaps they should remember the message of Christ that he preached, that gave them birth into God’s family. That message isn’t just human talk but the power of God (1:18), and one that leads to more than talk—it has the power to change lives.

some notes on questions

Q1. Paul is not some passing critic having a go at the Corinthians just to make them feel bad about themselves. He wants them to feel better about Jesus! So he is warning them about their attitude which could easily cause them to drift from Jesus. The apostles might look like the “scum of the earth” (4:13) in the world’s eyes, but they are models of what I means to follow Jesus.

Q2. Having addressed them as children in verse 14, he now identifies himself as their spiritual “father” in verse 15. Just like he challenged dodgy gospel builders in chapter 3, there is perhaps a swipe here at the “babysitters” (guardians) who have stepped in after Paul. They are meant to build on the foundation the apostle laid (3:10). They’re job is the job of a baby-sitter. But when the actual parent says something, it’s really time to listen.

Q3. We need to be careful here. Paul is NOT saying words don’t matter. The contrast between talk and power in verse 20 is contrasting mere “human” talk with the power of the message of the cross (see 1:17-18). And it is *that* talk which is much more than ‘talk’ alone—it changes lives.

Q4. Look back to 2:1-5—it seems that exactly the kind of fancy talk that Paul shunned is what the Corinthians are now listening to. And with that the message of the cross is being overshadowed. This showy talk might sound impressive but it lacks real power—the power of the cross.

Q5. Paul seems to be trying to shock them into action and realize how serious this situation is. Masterfully, the rest of 1 Corinthians is a mix of the two options!... Paul wields the whip and yet somehow always in love. The very next issue Paul addresses in the letter, which we’ll come back to next term, is the issue of discipline in the church. He treats being their father very seriously.

Q6-8. These questions focus on the issue of leading lives that *match* our words—but remember through it all that the *right* word—the word of **the cross**—is God’s power to change our lives.

ministry needs ... we have recently highlighted the need for carers for MOPS—and indeed that need is still there. There are also a range of other ministry needs we’ll be highlighting in the current term. We very much rely on you as leaders to raise those needs in your groups and also to be pro-active in suggesting to group members ways they could serve. More about that at the leaders meeting **Wednesday April 30**.

coming events
NORTH COAST
CHRISTIAN CONVENTION
Evans Head
May 24-25

small group bible study leaders' notes

