Notes for Problems with Personality Cults (1 Corinthians 3:1-23)

June 1, 2025

1. God has chosen to work through the avenue of human personality.

* God has chosen to use people as part of His redemptive process
* That determination is based solely on His goodness and grace
* He is capable of accomplishing whatever He wills without us
  + He could write the Scriptures across the sky
  + His Spirit could whisper words into the ears of men
* Yet, He has consistently demonstrated His power through choosing to use us
  + Role of human personality in the writing of the Bible
  + Role of human personality in the task of evangelism
  + Role of human personality in supernatural, spiritual works and miracles
* God’s plan continues through modern ministers
* Modern ministers are not limited to those in official roles in local churches
  + It is all believers

1. Conflict comes when the messenger is elevated above the Messiah.

* Paul writes 1 Corinthians 3 to confront schisms in the church that have developed due to their preferences for specific leadership personalities
* The personalities have history there
  + Paul planted
  + Apollos pastored
* Tendencies in Corinth persist in contemporary culture
  + It is natural to connect with certain leaders and personalities
* It turns problematic when that leader becomes an object of unchecked allegiance and worship
* Tendencies continue, may be magnified in current celebrity culture
  + Story of John Crist visiting churches
  + Story of people leaving mega-church when celebrity pastor doesn’t come on stage
* Personality cults are a sinful misdirection of worship that is intended for the Person they should lead you to
* Fine line with leaders- Bible teaches to appreciate and honor, but cannot ever worship

1. Godly ministry is marked by collaboration and cooperation, not competition.

* Paul uses two analogies to attempt to rectify their misguided understanding of ministry
  + Agrarian analogy
  + Architectural analogy
* In agrarian, there is the cooperation of the one that plants and the one that waters, but God alone is responsible for increase
* In architectural, he lays the foundation as Jesus, and everyone will build on that foundation
* Paul attempts to downplay individuals and magnify the cooperative aspect
  + Who is Paul/Apollos can be What is Paul/Apollos?
  + Even the order of Paul and Apollos is reversed in early manuscripts
* True ministry should be marked by collaboration, not competition
* Current situation- approximately 125 churches in greater Panama City area
  + Approximately 330,000 to 400,000 Christian churches in US
* Sheer number begs question, “Why doesn’t anything meaningful for the kingdom get done?
  + We’re too busy building our kingdoms to build His kingdom
* Our church commitment and core value- cooperation
  + That will be uncomfortable at times, but it is who we are

1. God’s judgment of ministerial work is based on substance, not style.

* Paul claims that the foundation is laid and that foundation is Jesus
  + If a foundation other than Jesus is laid for a church, it is not really a church and it will fail
* He gives six representative materials in descending order as things that we can build with
* The quality of work will be revealed in the future judgment by fire
* Our investment equals received/relinquished rewards, not salvation
* We need to understand the type of judgment- it is not ours
  + God doesn’t judge on style, but substance
  + He doesn’t judge on flair, but faithfulness
* I’m not convinced that God uses a numeric metric at all because He gives the increase
  + God won’t hold us responsible for something that He is responsible for
* We must recognize that we are often ill equipped to judge the way that He does
* Our expectations will not equal the rewards handed out
  + Modern mega-pastors may have little or much waiting
  + Modern small-pastors may have little or much waiting
* Stop trying to judge and just be faithful in doing

1. Recognize and receive the vastness of God’s provision and promise for you.

* The Corinthians factionalism was robbing them of blessings that God intended
* Their preference for one person discounted and removed all that God intended to do through another
* Think of the blessing of an “and” attitude instead of “either/or”
  + What if they were taught by Paul, Peter and Apollos?
* Importance of local church affiliation
  + God gives the local church as an act of grace
  + You need a local place to minister to you and for you to serve with
* Local church affiliation doesn’t equal isolation from resources and voices
  + Carlisle has historically benefitted from a number of pastoral leadership voices
  + The church can benefit from the plethora of resources currently available
* Perhaps at no other time in history have more resources been freely available at a person’s fingertips than at this one
  + You can currently hear or read sermons from the likes of Billy Graham, Charles Spurgeon, Jonathon Edwards, AW Tozer, DL Moody, George Whitefield, Adrian Rogers, Charles Stanley or more.
  + If you prefer more modern, there is Matt Chandler, JD Greear, David Platt, John Piper, John MacArthur, Voddie Baucham, Robert Jeffries, Chuck Swindoll, or David Jeremiah.
* I am not endorsing everything they say. You must test the Spirits and hold fast to what is good.
* God has given you all things for your good. We cannot let personality preferences steal that.