

T. Shane Martin  
 Green Run Baptist Church  
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**GENUINE SPIRITUALITY: A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS**

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**HOW CHURCH LEADERS PROMOTE GENUINE SPIRITUALITY  
 1 CORINTHIANS 3:5-17**

**INTRODUCTION**

This section of Scripture addresses the Corinthian problem of prideful division within its local congregation. The source of this conflict is two-fold: (1) the Corinthians have not taken their identity from the reality of Jesus' cross. Their pride has not been crushed and their self-promotion is abounding. The gospel has not yet permeated their relationships with one another; hence their continued efforts to one-up each other. (2) The Corinthians misunderstood the nature of church leadership. Paul's letter addresses both of these problems. First of all, Paul reminds them that their identity is to be shaped by Jesus' cross. Their acceptance is not based on their performance, but on the cross. Therefore, they do not need to compete with one another in this way. Secondly, Paul must correct their view of church leadership and that is what he does in 1 Corinthians 3:5-17.

**1. CHURCH LEADERS PROMOTE GENUINE SPIRITUALITY BY UNDERSTANDING  
 THAT THEY SERVE AT THE PLEASURE OF THE LORD JESUS (3:5-9a)**

In verse 5, Paul reminds the Corinthians of his role; he is a servant of his Lord. In fact, so are Apollos and all other church leaders. They simply serve Jesus as He provides grace and opportunity. The Corinthians had elevated these men and pledged an allegiance to them that should have been reserved for Christ alone. To explain this, Paul uses an agricultural analogy (vv6-9a). Paul pictures himself as a farmhand who sows seed and Apollos as another farmhand who waters the seed. While both of those jobs are necessary, it is God alone who makes the seed grow (v6). Because God is the one who produces growth, He alone should receive the praise which the Corinthians are heaping on various church leaders (v7). Even though Paul and Apollos had different gifts and abilities, both had the same goal, the spiritual maturity of the Corinthian church. And their work would be rewarded, not by receiving the praise of men, but by receiving God's praise in accord with their respective tasks (v8). Paul and Apollos are partners who work for one Lord, Jesus Christ (v9a). The Corinthian church is God's field and He has sent Paul and Apollos to work that field. While their approaches to ministry may vary, both have a unified purpose because they serve at the pleasure of the same Master. Whatever growth takes place is directly due to God's favor. Therefore, to exalt one servant over the other is foolishness when God is the true source of all spiritual growth.

As we contemplate the role of Christian leaders within our local churches, we must remember that they are servants of Christ and their ministries must promote our faith in Jesus, not in themselves. Their ministries are an ordained part of God's Church; spiritual authorities are needed, but their authority is limited by the bounds of Scripture.

## **2. CHURCH LEADERS PROMOTE GENUINE SPIRITUALITY BY CAREFULLY BUILDING JESUS' CHURCH (3:9b-15)**

In the latter part of verse 9, Paul changes analogies. He now speaks of the church as God's building (v9b). He and the other appointed leaders are the builders of this building. In Paul's day, building a large building took a great deal of time and involved quite a number of different builders. One may lay the foundation and another may build upon that foundation. Speaking of his initial ministry in Corinth, Paul says that God's grace enabled him to lay the proper foundation for the church, Jesus Christ (v10-11). Now others have come after Paul and they are building upon that solid foundation. Paul cautions them to build carefully (v10). Each builder must be careful because in this analogy, God functions as the building inspector and He will inspect the quality of the building materials. Here Paul contrasts two kinds of building materials: those that will stand the test of fire and those that will not. There will come a day when God will examine every local church and every person within those churches. This passage speaks directly to Christian leaders. On Judgment Day, God will examine how pastors and teachers have built His Church. Those who have laid the proper foundation and built with quality materials will have great reward (vv12-14). Those church leaders who have built on a faulty foundation or used faulty materials on a proper foundation will suffer the loss of reward even though those leaders will be saved (v15).

D.A. Carson writes, *If the church is being built with large portions of charm, personality, easy oratory, positive thinking, managerial skills, powerful and emotional experiences, and people smarts, but without the repeated, passionate, Spirit-anointed proclamation of 'Jesus Christ and him crucified,' we may be winning more adherents than converts.*

Paul exhorts me to pastor you with the final Day of Judgment in mind. Have I prepared you to die well? I must ask that question because your living and dying well is intimately connected to my living and dying well. This reminds me of Robert Murray M'Cheyne (May 21, 1813 – March 25, 1843), a minister in the Church of Scotland from 1835 to 1843. Although he died at the age of 29, he exhibited devotion and wisdom beyond his years. He writes, *As I was walking through the fields, the thought came over me with almost overwhelming power, that every one of my flock must soon be in heaven or hell. This is a reality; every person you see today will soon be in heaven or in hell. Even if that person lives another 80 years, heaven or hell is quickly approaching. M'Cheyne now speaks as every pastor and Christian ought to speak; Oh, how I wished that I had a tongue like thunder that I might make all hear. Or that I had a frame like iron, that I might visit everyone and say, "Escape for thy life!" Ah, sinners! you little know how I fear that you will lay the blame of your damnation at my door.*

## **3. CHURCH LEADERS PROMOTE GENUINE SPIRITUALITY BY TAKING GOD'S WARNINGS SERIOUSLY (3:16-17)**

This portion of Scripture concludes with a sobering question, *do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?* The church has been compared to a building, but not just any building, the temple of God. In one sense, the church is God's dwelling place. Therefore, *if any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.* This is a stern warning to all church leaders to be careful not to do harm to the church. Pastors and teachers who weaken the local church through superficial ministry, heretical teaching or any other form of deceitfulness should expect the judgment of God. But this warning extends to every participant in God's building. While the leaders can do great damage to any local church, the members must be aware of their potential to do harm as well. The Corinthian

church members serve as prime examples of this potential. Their misunderstanding of the gospel, immaturity and divisiveness place their local congregation in a dangerous place. Thank God for a pastor such as Paul who possessed the wisdom and courage to correct them.

### **CONCLUSION**

When considering those who will lead the church, we must remember that they have potential to do great good or great harm. While it is always wrong to exalt leaders to a place which only Jesus should hold, we must not underestimate their importance. And perhaps the key question to ask about a local church leader is “does he cause me to see Jesus more clearly?” This is what Paul is doing in 1 Corinthians 3 when he explains his role as a servant in the church in the light of Jesus’ position as life-giver and foundation.