

The Ultimate God-Given Desire of Servant Builders and Co-Workers of God
*Pleasing our Lord with His Building of the Kingdom through Our God-Enabled Faithfulness to
the “Wisdom of the Cross”*

Scriptural References:

1 Cor. 3:5-15; 4:1-21; 9:24-27; cf. Philippians 3:14; Matthew 25:21, 23; cf. Luke 19:17

1. **Metaphors for Church Leaders: Christ’s Servant Co-workers who are Entrusted with ‘the Mysteries of God’ by which They Live and with which they Encourage and Exhort Others, 3:5-3:17 & 4:1-17 (Ciampa & Rosner)**
2. 3:5-17 **“Christian leaders are only servants of Christ and are not to be accorded allegiance reserved for God alone. God cares about his church, and he holds its leaders accountable for how they build it” (Carson).**
 - a. Apollos and Paul are mere servants, *of the Lord* (thus, Christians’ affection and allegiance should be directed to the Lord), like manual laborers or humble farm workers; both occupations not highly regarded in Corinthian culture.
 - i. The apostles and prophets/preachers are co-workers; fellow workers *belonging* to God
 - b. In verses 10-15, “Paul here envisions a scrutinizing of Christian leaders, not a judgment of all Christians, and the fire is not an instrument of punishment (as in Revelation 20), but of purification. It is not a judgment of people but of their work. Elsewhere Paul indicates that he believes that all Christians will face similar judgment: ‘we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ’ (@ Cor. 5:10; cf. Rom. 14:10). The judgment in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 is not of all humankind, of the justified over against (other) sinners, but of wise and unwise builders of the church” (Rosner & Ciampa).
 - i. Is the wisdom of the Cross or the wisdom ‘under the sun’ being used to build the local church in both numbers through evangelism and spiritually mature disciples of Jesus? Are the materials used to build worthy of the Foundation; will they endure God’s scrutiny?
 - ii. Carson, “The fire then is not purgatory. Nothing is said about tormenting the builders and purging them in flames. Rather, it is the quality of their work that is revealed by the fire. If a builder’s work is burned up, ‘he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames’ (3:15).
 1. “Two things must be said to clarify this picture Paul has painted and to drive his points home into our lives. First, those who ‘suffer loss’ but who escape ‘through the flames’ are not the ‘carnal’ or ‘worldly’ Christians of 3:1-4, but are Christian leaders who build the church with materials that will not withstand the final conflagration. The worldly Christians of 3:1-4 constitute all or part of the Corinthian church, and the church is represented, in the first analogy, by the field, and in the second, by the building. What we might call the ‘church ‘builders,’ people like Paul, Apollos, and other evangelists, preachers, and teachers, are either the workers in the field or the builders of the building. It is they whose work is tested by fire. This means that the sophisticated form of the ‘carnal Christian’ theory, which postulates that some people make a profession of faith, shortly thereafter return to a lifestyle indistinguishable from that of any believer, yet finally make it into heaven by the skin of their teeth (‘as one escaping through the flames’), finds no warrant whatever in this passage. Even the ‘worldly’ or ‘carnal’ Christian is still identifiably a Christian, and in this passage it is the church builders who barely escape the flames, not the ‘ordinary’ church folk themselves.”
 2. cf. - Luke 6:43-49 “*Are You In or Out?!*” sermon on knowing an evil verses a good tree by their fruits.
 - c. “The issue then is not reward or punishment, heaven or hell, but reward or no reward. It is the builder’s ‘work’ (3:13) that will be burned up, not *the builder* himself. As Fee states, 1 Corinthians 3:14-15 is not ‘a soteriological statement.’ The *reward* can only be an eschatological ‘prize’ (1 Cor. 9:24-27; cf. Phil. 3:14). Whatever its precise nature, its essence is ‘praise from God’ (4:5). We may compare Jesus’ promise in the parables of the Bags of Gold in Matthew and the Ten Minas in Luke: ‘well done, good and faithful servant!...Come and share your master’s happiness’ (Matt. 25:21,23; cf. Luke 19:17). In both cases the reward for faithful service is the master’s pleasure and his confidence, which leads to a further entrusting of responsibility.”

3. 4:1-21 **Applications: *The Apostles as Models of the Wisdom of the Cross*** (Rosner & Ciampa)
- a. Paul declared the status of Christian leaders using four terms: *Servants subordinate to Christ and the Church* (3:5, 4:1), *Fellow workers with one another belonging to God* (3:9), *Stewards accountable to God Himself* (4:1,2)...
 - i. of *'the mysteries of God'* (4:1) “which they are to dispense refers, as in 2:7, to the gospel in all its fullness [and] to the ‘deep things of God’ in 2:10. The context [of 4:2-5] suggests that the ‘mysteries’ have to do with the message Paul has shared with the Corinthians, certain points of which had resulted in his being judged by some of them. In building the church, ministers manage a major project, the resources for which are nothing less than the fullness of the gospel of God” (Ciampa & Rosner).
 - b. Verses 1-5 “The verb ‘to judge’ is used three times in vv. 3 and 4. It was used in 2:14-15 in the sense of ‘inquiring into’ spiritual things. There too ‘the person with the Spirit...is not subject to merely human judgments.’ Likewise, here in 4:3 Paul, a spiritual man, will not be evaluated by any human being, but rather only by God (v. 4). The evaluation of Paul’s ‘faithfulness’ is God’s prerogative alone. The only assessment of Christian workers that counts is not congregational (or denominational), nor even personal, but only that by ‘the Lord who assigned them each his task’ (3:5). [Verse 5] is the most explicit indication of what Paul had in mind in his earlier reference to the rewards to be received by God’s servants (cf. 3:14). The judgment in question will be ‘then,’ not now; this is another damper on Corinthian eagerness to assess their leaders. Paul has in view judgment as it concerns believers in Christ. In other places Paul speaks of those in his churches as his joy, crown, and glory on the Day of Judgment (2 Cor. 1:14; Phil. 2:16; 1 Thess. 2:19-20). **John 5:44** contains a similar view of *praise from God* and pits it over against ‘raise from human beings’...” (Ciampa & Rosner).
 - c. Verses 6-13 “...Paul moves from speaking figuratively and indirectly about the church and its leaders, to speaking literally and directly to the situation in Corinth. In terms of tone and style, he shifts from polite metaphors to blunt commands, accusing rhetorical questions, and even insulting sarcasm and strong language. As Fee observes, with 6-13, ‘the argument has reached its moment of truth.’ Calvin’s summary of the simple logic of Paul’s forceful assault on Corinthian pride in [v. 7] is accurate: ‘No room is left for taking pride in ourselves, when it is by God’s grace we are what we are.’ The already/not yet tension is...between spiritual immaturity and maturity. In this sense **4:8** recalls **3:1-4**: the Corinthians may think they have ‘already’ arrived at maturity (4:8), but in Paul’s view they are ‘not yet’ there (3:2). The twice repeated ‘already’ of v. 8 refers to the Corinthians’ thinking of themselves as morally and spiritually perfected, in Paul’s view without ‘participation in Christ’s sufferings, becoming like him in his death’ (**Phil. 3:10**). We could paraphrase v. 8 as: ‘So soon and so easily you are filled...!’ It is not that they think they have experienced the eschaton that Paul still awaits, but rather that they have advanced to maturity ahead of Paul. Paul goes on in the following verses to contrast the cross-shaped lifestyle of the apostles with this Corinthian egotism. As Garland puts it: ‘The apostles live according to the wisdom of the cross; the Corinthians imbibe the wisdom of this age and pass themselves off as kings.’ Imaging oneself to be filled, rich, and reigning was in fact a claim made by Cynic and Stoic philosophers. The Corinthians had apparently adopted the inflated self-understanding of pagan philosophers. Hence, Corinthians problems are not to be attributed to their faulty theology or premature eschatology so much as to their conformity to the norms and values of pagan culture.
 - i. Verse 10 presents the first antithetical triad in which the teaching (*foolish vs. wise*), condition (*weak vs. strong*), and position (*dishonored vs. glorified*) of the apostles and the Corinthians are set in opposition. Dripping with irony, and recalling the themes of 1:18-2:5 (see esp. **1:26-28**), Paul effectively rebukes the Corinthians for their inflated self-esteem that takes no account of the lowly message of the cross. Appearances and reality are shown to be on collision course in view of the experience of the apostles. The issue of the Corinthians’ aspirations in terms of social status and prestige is summed up with the accusation: *You are honored, but we are dishonored*. Paul’s discussion of glory and honor in 1:26-28 makes it clear that his is not intended to be an accolade. There, God chose the dishonorable in order to shame the honored! In this light the Corinthians’ claim to be prudent, powerful, and of good repute disqualifies them from God’s call. It is not that Paul doubts their standing before God, but rather he employs

‘shock tactics’ to encourage them to match their conduct with their confession. In 6:20 and 10:31, using cognate terms, Paul will exhort the Corinthians to be more concerned about glorifying God than honoring themselves.”

1. ***Jeremiah 9:23-24***

- ii. “If the Corinthians are ‘already’ replete, rich, and reigning (4:8), Paul counters in vv. 11-13 that his present experience is entirely otherwise; to underscore the contrast Paul repeats the word ‘now’ in the temporal phrases that mark off the subunit: *To this very hour* (4:11a) and ‘right up to this moment’ (4:13b). Paul’s point is that ‘the present is a time of suffering, not glory.’

1. “Perseverance is an unspectacular but essential Christian virtue. Paul gets knocked down, but not knocked out” (*Rosner & Ciampa*).

- d. Verses 14-17 –cf. ***Colossians 1:28*** “The command to imitate him must be understood in context. What Paul expects the Corinthians to imitate are those things that will end the boasting and factionalism in Corinth. Garland explains: ‘They are to welcome being regarded as fools for Christ, and as weak and dishonored... They are to recognize that all that they are and have come to them as a grace-gift from God (3:10) and that they are not inherently extraordinary (4:7). They are to think of themselves as no better than menial field hands (3:5) and servants (4:1) awaiting God’s judgment to determine if they were trustworthy (4:5). They are to rid themselves of all resentments and rivalries with co-workers so that they can toil together in God’s field (3:5-9). They are to resist passing themselves off as wise or elite by using lofty words of wisdom or aligning themselves with those who do and to rely instead on the power of God that works through weakness, fear, and trembling (2:1-4).’ These actions and attitudes constitute the pattern of Paul’s life both in the present and as he had lived it out before the Corinthians. **In short, Paul is a model of the wisdom of the cross. Paul’s life in its entirety had been stamped by the message of the cross, which excludes boasting and promotes humility.**

Indeed, later in the letter, he will say, ‘Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ’ (11:1). The Corinthians (and we) should make it their aim to be able to follow Paul in calling others to imitate the pattern he has modeled (2 Tim. 2:2), which is, after all, the pattern established by Christ himself” (*Rosner & Ciampa*).

- i. Carson, “The guardian in the first-century Hellenistic household...exercised a certain authority over the child...but it would never equal that of a father. Paul was the one who first brought the gospel to the Corinthians; in that sense, he alone became their ‘father,’ a fact nothing could change that.”
- e. 4:18-21 “***Warning the Believers***” Carson (pp. 112-113), “...bringing the people of God to consistent Christian living in the light of the gospel of the crucified Messiah is so important to Paul that he will not turn from its goal. If he moves people in the direction by encouragement and admonition, all [too] good; if severer discipline is called for, he will not flinch. But spankings still hurt, even from a father who insists that he is spanking his son because he loves him. It is much better for the son to change his behavior, so that the manner of the father’s coming will not be with discipline but with a gentle spirit.”