

Lake Cities Community Church  
October 17, 2010  
Pastor Craig Schill  
Series: 1 Corinthians

Division Part III  
“**You have a job to do (and so do I)**”  
1Cor 3:5-23

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According to Daniel Medley, general manager of the Teddy Bear Museum in western England, their guard dog, a Doberman named Barney, “just went berserk.” The bears he was suppose to protect became his lunch as tore them apart over 100 teddy bears; and according to the report – “He drooled on many others.” The story made national news because, notably, he tore apart “Mabel – Elvis Presley’s 1905 German teddy bear, valued at \$75,000, which had been on loan to the museum.

Barney’s rampage surprised everyone, because he had been a model guard dog for six years. The dog’s handler, a Greg West, was devastated. He said: “I still can't believe what happened, it's just awful. He's never done anything like this before.” After a lengthy investigation, the reason for the rampage became clear when Mr. West commented that just before the dog went crazy “I was stroking Evil’s bear Mabel and saying what a nice little bear she was.” Experts concluded that Barney acted out of **jealousy**.

“Why is she getting all the attention? Why don’t you care for me like that? Jealousy wrecks havoc in relationships, in families, and perhaps most severely in the church. Jealousy makes us lash out and destroy the very things we desire. People comparing themselves with one another, boasting / bragging, and tearing each another apart. *This is*

*what was happening in the church at Corinth.* Last week the Apostle said: “You are still fleshly...since there is jealousy and strife among you.” (3:3).

Imagine for a moment that we are back in the first century among them. LISTEN and hear their harsh words. WATCH their body language – they have a closed and defensive posture. LOOK into their eyes and see the reflection arrogance there. The Corinthian church is a church in trouble. And so to that church - Paul has written this letter exhorting them to grow up spiritually and to build up a godly church.

**Context:** In chapters one through four, Paul takes on the issue of their divisions and gives them four reasons why they are in the mess they are in. First, they misunderstood the message of the gospel (which is the cross). Second they had a misunderstood the nature of true wisdom. And today we will see that they also had a misunderstanding of the ministry itself. Turn now to our passage this morning: 1 Corinthians chapter 3:5-23.

**Preview:** In this passage Paul is going to clear up their misunderstanding about ministry by clarifying the role of ministers, and then clarifying the work of ministry. Those who do the ministry, and then the actual ministry that they do. The Corinthians were confused about both.

### **Clarifying the Role of a Minister (3:5-9a)**

And so to begin - turn to your neighbor and say, “I am a minister.” This is an important point to begin with as many people dismiss this passage as being reserved for pastors and church staff. Not so. Paul’s definition of a minister is anyone who does the work in the church. Whether it is greeting a visitor, teaching

Sunday School, setting-up chairs, folding bulletins or preaching a sermon. If you are part of a local church and engage even to a small degree in the ministry – *this passage applies to you* – it applies to men and women, boys and girls.

Paul begins: **1Cor. 3:5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one.** The Corinthians (you will recall) had organized themselves around Christian celebrities, and Paul says – “Who then are they – *really?*” You’ve exalted them far too highly. Write down on your handout this first point, (1) **“A minister is a servant.”** Servants are those who serve – but by their own authority, but the work assigned to them by others. Who gave Paul and Apollos their work? “The Lord gave them their opportunity.” You want to know who we are? I like the way one commentator put it, “We are errand boys and errand girls for God” – only servants doing His will. No room for boasting or jealousy. Martin Luther King Junior rightly expressed God’s value of the servant, “Everybody can be great... because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.”

Paul continues, **1Cor. 3:6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. 1Cor. 3:7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.** Write down on your handout: (2) **A minister is nothing!** Isn’t that great! The metaphor is farming, putting out the seeds, providing the water is all the farmer can do. Like someone said, “You can command the servant to sow, and you can command the worker to water, but you cannot command the seed to sprout. Life alone belongs to God.” When it comes to producing spiritual life, changing someone’s heart – that is God’s territory. The Corinthians had sprained their arms trying to pat themselves on

their backs for every spiritual successes in the church. Paul says “No. Ministers do their work – but they don’t do that work - only God does - so stop boasting.

Paul continues, 1Cor. 3:8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 1Cor. 3:9 For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field. Write on your handout three things: “**(3) all ministers are equal**”, **(4) “a minister is a fellow-workers”** and **(5) “a minister is God’s field.”**

The Corinthians were comparing and contrasting themselves with each other. Playing the game of “one-upmanship.” Paul says, “No! You are all one.” You are unified in Christ. You are fellow-workers; on the same team. Stop fighting like you are cross-town rivals! Work together! You belong to Him – you are God’s field. He owns the field, he own the workers and the harvest! He has invited you to join Him in the work, but don’t get carried away.

I grew up watching the great Michael Jordan play basketball. He was simply the best player in the game. On March 12, 1990 he scored a career high 69 points against the Cleveland Cavaliers. The lead was so great that in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter coach Phil Jackson took Jordon out of the game and put in Stacey King, a rarely used rookie substitute player. King went on to score two meaningless free throws in the last minutes of the game. Several years later King was asked by a reporter to identify the highlight of his career. King replied with a smile, “It would have to be that night that Micahael Jordan and I combined for 71 points.”

As ministers we are humble servants, planting and watering but we don’t create life – only God does that. We are all equal in our value and worth, regardless of what jobs we do. We are fellow workers on the same team! We belong to God. there is no room for

boasting, or jealousy or division.

### **Clarifying the Work of Ministry (9b-23)**

Having cleared up their misconceptions about ministers, Paul now sets in to correct their view of the work of ministry itself. Look at verse nine. He switches metaphors from farming to construction: **3:9 - You are God's building, not ours. 1Cor. 3:10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it.** First, write on your handout that the work of church ministry must be (1) **carefully done**. Thoughtful and intentional. He implies, of course, the Corinthians were not being careful – they were sloppy with their church work. While they had a high view of themselves as leaders, they had a low view of the actual work to be done.

Verse 11: **For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.** On your handout write that God's (2) **work must be done on the foundation of Jesus Christ**. We have seen in previous weeks that they wanted to substitute or include in the foundation such things as worldly philosophies and man-made wisdom. Paul says – “NO – be careful how you build, the work of the church be always be centered around Jesus Christ – not the poor, not social justice, not a particular systematic theology, not a church growth technique, not a pastor's personality, not your denomination or music style – Jesus and Him alone must be the center of the church.

Paul continues with the construction image: **1Cor. 3:12 Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw...** Stop there. Typical building supplies for God's temple in the Old Testament included the gold, silver and

precious stone. The best of what the earth had to offer were presented back to God in the physical construction of the temple. Wood, hay and straw were, on the other hand, the building supplies for regular houses. On your handout write this: (3) **“The work must be of high quality.”** The Corinthians were like the lazy pigs who built inferior houses out of sticks and hay so they could indulge themselves. “I’m a **lazy pig**. I need time to play. I am building a **house of hay!**” They had time to indulge their own desires, but no time to build a quality church. Don’t do God’s work with cheap building supplies. Paul says in Colossians, Do your work heartily, with a good attitude, as unto the Lord. Give God your very BEST. Your best attitude. Your best effort. Your best everything! Why?

1Cor. 3:13 (For) each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. 1Cor. 3:14 If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. 1Cor. 3:15 If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. On your handout: **(4) Quality work will be rewarded. (5) But poor quality results in loss.** Paul is not talking about losing your salvation He is teaching that the work of ministry in the church is so important that it will be evaluated and compensated by God. You will rejoice over your rewards or regret your loss and that you didn’t do a better job.

Pastor Francis Chan in his book Crazy Love writes the following: “God wants our best, deserves our best, and demands our best. From the beginning of time, He has been clear that some offerings are acceptable to Him and others are not. Just ask Cain... Chan says, For years I gave God leftovers and felt no shame. I simply took my eyes off Scripture and instead compared myself to others. The bones I threw at God had more meat on them

than the bones others threw, so I figured I was doing fine. A mumbled three-minute prayer at the end of the day, when we are already half asleep. Two crumpled-up dollar bills thrown as an afterthought into the church's fund for the poor. Fetch, God! But leftovers are not merely inadequate; from God's point of view, they're *evil*. Let's stop calling it "a busy schedule" or "bills" or "forgetfulness." It's called *evil*. Chan is referring to a passage in Malachi where the priests were offering God to sick and injured animals as sacrifices. But the message is the same. If you are going to be involved in ministry in the church – take it seriously because God does.

Verses 16-17, [1Cor. 3:16](#) Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that the Spirit of God dwells in you?* [1Cor. 3:17](#) 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. [1Cor. 3:18a](#) Let no man deceive himself.

These are some of the most famous verses in 1 Corinthians, but unfortunately they are often used out of context to teach about individual purity. But Paul is actually talking about the work of ministry. He is saying that **you** (plural – you the church) are the temple of God, the place of the Spirit. And therefore if you are an irresponsible worker, have a bad attitude, are tearing down other people, doing shoddy work – you and I will be held accountable. Do not be deceived in this! We are to treat God's work in the church with great seriousness. The work we do in the church should be our best work.

Paul sums up his argument in verses 21-22, listen to the beautiful prose that Paul famous for: [1Cor. 3:21](#) So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, [1Cor. 3:22](#) whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or

things to come; all things belong to you, 1Cor. 3:23 and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.

## APPLICATION

In terms of application, here in summary of what Paul is saying to you and I about church ministry: **“We do not exalt ourselves as ministers, but we do exalt the work of ministry!”** The Corinthians were consumed with promoting themselves and yet were not really interested in the hard work of ministry. That was a misunderstanding of ministry – they had it backwards. Paul has clarified that.

As we close just think for a moment about yourself and the work you do in our church. Have you ever sought to promote yourself and subtly turned the spotlight onto what you are doing? Have you ever viewed a job in the church as unimportant or beneath your skills? Have you ever found yourselves jealous of someone else who was doing work you wanted to do? Have you ever taken the work of God too lightly, giving God your leftovers, rather than your best effort? I know I have done all these things in the past. The struggle the Corinthians had with ministry is a struggle that continues today.

All this reminds me of a speech Winston Churchill made in 1942 to the coal miners of England. I would like to close with this story. These men struggled to see how their dirty, thankless jobs mattered to the war effort. Churchill said to them: “We shall not fail, and then someday when children ask, ‘What did you do to win this inheritance for us, and to make our name so respected among men?’ One will say, ‘I was a fighter pilot’ another will say, ‘I was in the Submarine Service.’ Another: ‘I marched with the eighty army;’ a fourth

will say, "None of you could have lived without the convoys of the Merchant Seamen." and you in your turn will say with equal pride and with equal right - we cut the coal.

Everyone on the same team, doing their part. Every part important, the airplanes and submarines would not work without supplies, supplies would not come without convoys, convoys would not be able to go without the coal.

We do not exalt ourselves, but we do exalt the work we do, for it is God's work in the battle for men and women's souls. Humble, unified ministry of the highest quality. That is how we build up the church on the foundation of Christ.