

FITTING IN AT THE CROSS

... our significance in the big picture
1 Corinthians 3-4
WEFC March 14, 2001

ILL of being criticized or responding with the Cross in mind.

The cross:

... the most dominant, far-reaching, change-all event in history for all of humanity.

Everything, literally everything, that occurs has to be filtered through the Cross of Jesus Christ. Nothing is exempt from the influence of the Cross.

... even stuff like personal criticism and our response to it is needs to get filtered through the Cross.

Though the Cross is the ultimate, change-all event in history, we often avoid it because ... it is the Cross.

... and no matter how we look at the Cross, it's primary message is death ... death to something ... before a new life springs up.

Criticism stings; it hurts; ... accurate or not. And when criticism is being dished out, most of us feel the hair on our neck begin to rise ... and our gloves come off.

Though it may seem odd, the Cross does not want to be pushed out of this arena. It prefers to be planted right in the middle of all the things being said.

There is a direct connect between the Cross and criticism ... at least in God's way of living ... and that is the connection He wants us to make when we are being torn up by peoples' words.

Even when people are making the dumbest comments, looking suspiciously at us, talking about us behind our backs ... even there we need the Cross.

This is how practical the Cross of Jesus is. It is so every "dayish" ... so where we live at.

He was taking a beating from them, but rather than exchanging barb for barb, **1 Corinthians 3 & 4** are the notes on how he responded ... a rather unusual response ...

We just might find it helpful.

Key Thought:

When criticized, the Cross gets us to think intelligently (rather than emotionally) without protecting either ourselves or others.

If the Cross is allowed to intelligently guide our mind, ... to do its work ... it gives us the refreshing reality of having ...

- exposure without embarrassment
- directness without damage

... in other words, the Cross influences more to being real than any other factor. It works because it creates the environment in which we can face what is happening.

When we are at each other's throats, glaring at one another, verbally jabbing each other, here is how the Cross breaks the impasse.

The presence of the Cross tells us that ...

1. To deal with an issue, identity must first be established

3:5-7

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.

Back at Corinth talk centered on who was the better preacher, Paul or Apollos. It was the vocal opinion of a group that Apollos out-performed Paul.

The setting is that the disagreement is taking place between people of the same local congregation.

Rather than defending himself in the ordinary way, Paul recognizes that this is a time for the Cross to heavily influence his thinking and speech.

Since Apollos and he were at the center of the debate, and probably got along quite well, ... though the people were lining up behind their favorite candidate ... Paul makes his point.

While the people had an issue, Paul tugged them to catch the whole idea of identity.

This is not a matter of what or who we like more.

Rather, this is a matter of understanding who these people are.

Both Apollos and Paul are **SERVANTS** (the word **ONLY** is not present in the original text but is an NIV addition)

Issue: When it comes to our tastes, who do we like best?

Identity: In light of the Cross, with whom are dealing?

What is the more intelligent question to ask?

Who are these two gentlemen?

... servants, through whom you came to believe— as the Lord has assigned to each his task.

Their identity ...

- on the same team
- have the same Coach
- both carry out the specific assignments given to them by the Coach
- their Coach is an unparalleled genius

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.

... and just in case they folks didn't get the picture, it is spelled out in unmistakable terms

So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

If you want to know who the brilliant One in this whole scheme, it is God.

Paul – his job on the team ... seed planter
Apollos – his job on the team ... water boy

The reason the team is great? ... God. He takes that planted and watered seed and does His amazing work so that it springs to life and grows.

It doesn't make much sense to cheer for the seed planter or the water boy. They are doing their job, but that's not where the action is at.

Take a look at who really makes things happen.

When we read:

So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

That word, "**anything**" is used in a special way. It doesn't mean that either of the people are insignificant. To get the sense it may be best to paraphrase it this way:

If you need to pick out the "star", if you are going to put someone on a pedestal, then choose the one who (if removed from the scene everything would come grinding to halt) really is the "make-it-happen" Person.

In other words:

We can't put the Cross in a closet, forget about it, and think that we are being intelligent.

God is "key" to everything, everywhere, through all time ... even when people are being cut to pieces by criticism.

So are the seed-planter and water boy useless?

Not at all.

Give the Cross its prime influence.

But what do we do with these two people around whom this whole mess centers?

Now that we know who is who, we can move back to the issue.

The presence of the Cross tells us ...

2. Think twice, you are handling with "God's property"

- each person accountable

- work is judged on durability

- **God's church is sacred**

Build "smart"

Let's take things out of sequence for just a moment

If we give our "two cents worth", we are "building"

Once we speak, once we act, even casually, we are "builders". Our involvement implies responsibility / accountability.

3:8

... each will be rewarded according to his own labour.

3:10

... each one should be careful how he builds.

Whatever we do ...

- it all matters
- it will be noted and “rewarded”
- not action is

It all matters.

It all is noted and “rewarded”.

8 The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labour.

9 For we are God's fellow-workers; you are God's field, God's building.

10 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds.

11 For no-one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12 If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw,

13 his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work.

14 If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward.

15 If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

8 The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labour.

Servants are to clearly understand their role / responsibility.

Whether we are seed inserters or water-boys, servants do not work against one another. They work to get the big job done.

Further, what each servant does will be examined and rewarded as to their input, their efforts.

Here are the perks of the Christ-follower that we need to catch.

You are not simply putting in time here until God takes you to heaven.

How you live today is how you invest in the future. It is an indicator of whether we have gotten the picture, whether we know what matters, whether we have accepted our identity and our position in life.

This is also the incentive ... if I learn how to be a servant well, God notices and rewards.

The One who sits behind the big desk has walked in our shoes. He knows what it takes and He rewards.

That is why it is wise as a young person to start investing early ... and that we keep on investing throughout our lives.

Those over whom the people were arguing were both serving the same Lord.

Let not make too much about the Church Staff or the leaders.
Let's keep Jesus and the cross predominant. Everything should flow out of that realization.

The point is has to do not so much with job description as to do with attitude and perspective.

Paul is being taken to task for his sloppy work ... so now he responds to the criticisms directed his way.

10 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it.

To get a better gist of what Paul said is that the words – EXPERT BUILDER may be better translated WISE builder.

Wisdom has been a sticking point. What is WISE thing to do?

What is the smart thing to do?

... and Paul's point is that he built the church at Corinth on the foundation of Jesus Christ crucified.

That was a smart way to build the church.

He didn't build it around his personality; programs; or a great organizational structure.

Jesus was the basis for the church.

That remained as smart move.

... and as for their criticisms indicating that he had done a poor job, he response is, "What better foundation can a church have than Jesus and Him crucified?"

Now, if he has built the church on the foundation of Jesus Christ, what are they now building the church on and with what kind of "material"?

You say I have done a poor job, a sub-standard job.

Not so.

Paul does not just accept their evaluation.

God has graced Him.

He was in at the ground level, at the start of the work. He inserted the seed into the ground.

He did a good job ... he worked as an "expert builder".

Don't get hung up on the gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw.

The point of all those materials are simply this:

Is the work fireproof?

Will the work put in stand the scrutiny and examination of God?

The standards by which God examines a work are stringent ... tough, because He is building that which lasts for eternity.

12 If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw,

13 his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work.

14 If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward.

15 If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

Here is what the day of examination could look like.

There are those who have made the cross of Christ central to all that they do ... they will be rewarded.

There are those who ignore the Cross and are building in advisedly by means and methods that are fickle.

In the end, on the day of examination, they will be saved by the proverbial "skin of their teeth". They are accepted into God's presence, but they walk in as paupers, rather than coming along with all that has could have been an extra benefit and blessing to them God's presence.

So that one day, when we start our eternity with God, there is not going to be a mishmash in heaven where we are all equal.

Those who walked under the wisdom of the Cross will be "rewarded" more than those who walked their own way.

The person's eternal destiny is not questioned ... but their level of life is.

... and one of the central points on rewards is the cross and whether we have understood our identity and functioned in that identity ... or have we attempted to step up and discard the cross?

Just in case you think that how one acts in the Church isn't that important, and how one handles disagreements is not such a big thing ... we get the next lines ...

16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

The Church ... is not some insignificant extracurricular activity that doesn't matter.

The Church is where God lives.

His spirit resides in us.

Mess with the church, and you are messing with God.

God is seeking to build it and if you are going to try to wreck it, God has news for you.

God values the Church.

18 Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a fool so that he may become wise.

19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: He catches the wise in their craftiness;

20 and again, The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.

**21 So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours,
22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future— all are yours,
23 and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.**

So then ... let's get more specific and deal with the issue, writes Paul.

1 So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God.

2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

3 I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself.

4 My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.

5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

Think this through with me ...

People who are lobbying need to see us as “servants” of Christ who have a God-given task.

Now if God has given us a job to do, should we listen to you or God?

God assigned me the task, and to God I am responsible.

Now, whether you at Corinth evaluate me, or whether I evaluate my self, either option is not what matters.

God's in charge. He is running the whole thing.

Personally, what I am doing, I am doing without ulterior motives. But just because I consider myself innocent does not mean that I am innocent.

“I” am not the judge of “myself”.

So here is the conclusion of the matter:

5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

Judging matters will works are still in progress is unwise.

Judge at the end not in mid-stream.

So what is the right time for people who see everything through the cross? ... when Jesus Christ comes back.

At that point we will have an accurate evaluation.

We will know what presently is classified information because it is locked away inside of us.

So matters like motives are really hard to assess, and because of who Jesus is, because He is so wise and insightful, at His return, such classified and sealed information He will have access to.

And at that point God will do the judging and God will praise each person accurately.

6 Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, Do not go beyond what is written.

Then you will not take pride in one man over against another.

7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

What we have is not our own making.

God has given us our uniquenesses and our gifting, then if God has done it why do we boast?

Cashing- In Too Early rather than staying Crossed-In

8 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings— and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you!

All of us would love to get into God's future kingdom. Not a one of us would turn down having no pain, freedom from frustration, being able to communicate clearly without being misunderstood, not being embarrassed about talking or living for Christ ... that would be wonderful.

Some of the Corinthians decided that it was ALREADY time to take out the difficult parts of Christ-following.

For them there was not need to draw lines in the sand, to take a stand, to work hard for Christ, to be stressed out for Jesus sake.

They were acting as if today was the age in which God was reigning and they were enjoying the benefits of being His sanctified people.

But Paul was acting like this was a time to give it all you have for Christ's sake.

This was a time to not claim all our rights, it was time to serve, be last, take slander and return those negative comments with blessing,

This was the day to not please yourself, but stand for God.

This was day to go hungry for Christ; not have enough to drink ... if needs be.

Paul saw this as a time of conflict, not a glorious reign.

This was the time to not fit in with society but be distinct from it because this was not God's society.

The Corinthians were acting as if they had moved past the present and were into the God's age of blessing and no hardship.

They were acting as if there was no battle.

9 For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men.

10 We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honoured, we are dishonoured!

11 To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless.

12 We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it;

13 when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.

We can lead where we walked ... not where we point ... on the basis of personal involvement.

Paul had followed God in being bold for Him in Corinth. It had not been an easy work, but one that clearly had been initiated and sustained by God.

14 I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children.

15 Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.

16 Therefore I urge you to imitate me.

17 For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.

When it came to finally clinching the argument, note what he does.

He does not say ... "See the Bible says so, so listen."

It would have been quite legitimate to do that.

But he doesn't.

Instead he wraps things up from a different angle.

15 Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.

There is nothing closer than a parent-child relationship.

Deep ties allow for tough word words.

Secondly – Imitate me

We need to be able to understand our identity and our role in God's church ... so that we can have others imitate us ... because we are imitating Jesus.

8 The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labour.

9 For we are God's fellow-workers; you are God's field, God's building.

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22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future— all are yours,

23 and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

1 Corinthians 4

Apostles of Christ

1 So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God.

2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

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darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

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7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

8 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings— and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you!

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14 I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children.

15 Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.

16 Therefore I urge you to imitate me.

17 For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.

18 Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you.

19 But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have.

20 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.

21 What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit?

Do not brag as yours that which you did not produce

8 – You have all you want

- you are acting beyond reality
-

3:5 – people are God’s servants

- God is the “cause”; the “producer”; the one who makes things happen.

3:10 ... who is Paul ...

- one graced by God
- foundation layer
- our work is noticed, it is being evaluated

3:16 ... we are God’s temple and the residence of the Holy Spirit

3:18 ... do not deceive yourselves ... ALL THINGS ARE YOURS ... but your Christ’s and Christ is God’s.

Chapter 4

1 – People out to regard us as servants of Christ entrusted with the secret things of God.

2 – therefore the servants who have a trust must prove faithful

God judges me

6 – Put the principles into practice between Apollos and Paul