

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

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Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning. It's good to have you here on this Lord's Day. Living in Hyde Park, we have the recent advantage of being home to nearly all the construction cranes let out in the city of Chicago.

There was a day where you would drive up Lakeshore Drive and glance to the left at what is kind of the south loop area, and cranes were rising as buildings were being constructed.

The last three or four years, however, that has settled, and the cranes have moved further south into Hyde Park. I can't imagine how many buildings have been going up and will continue to go up, whether it be the hospitals or buildings close to it, south of the Midway and the construction there upon it, or 53rd and the new hotel that is rising and soon to be where the Village Foods were for many years.

That building will be torn down and a 190-foot structure will come into its place. A lot of building. We don't often think of the church as a construction site, but it's been unmistakable early in Paul's letter to the Corinthians that when he's searching for a metaphor to talk about us as God's family, he reaches for a building.

It got underway back at chapter 3, verse 9. If you have your Bible, just take a look there at the context in which our own text comes.

[2 : 0 3] In chapter 3, verse 9, Paul had claimed that he was God's fellow worker. But then concerning the church, he gives two metaphors, and it's the second one I want to pay attention to.

You are God's field, but then beyond that, God's building. The church as a building.

It was immediately followed with Paul's role on the construction site. Chapter 3, verse 10. According to the grace of God given me, like a skilled master builder, I laid a foundation.

Do you see the little phrase there, a master builder? In a wooden way or in a literal way, it's a wise architect. That's the very word, architect.

We're to envision Paul and his role on the site as the architect, laying a foundation. He's not the only one on site, is he?

[3 : 1 1] Verse 10 went on, So here it is, the church as a building, a construction site.

Coming on Sunday morning, Pastor Jackson in his hard hat, as it were. And we, the rocks and the stones and the brick and the steel, going up to the glory of God.

The emphasis of the image on building, interestingly, is focused with, in one sense, not so much the building itself, but those who are charged with the building.

So the emphasis is on those who are building. Take a look at chapter 3, verse 12. Now, if anyone builds on that foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and straw, each one's work will become manifest, for the day will disclose it.

The emphasis is on those who are doing the building, and in particular, the reward you get for it. We all want to be paid for our work, right? Well, Paul is picking up on the imagery that each one will receive wages in the church, those who are building particularly, for the level of work they did.

- [4 : 49] So that if you want to look at the very bookends of our text, you can see that metaphor reemerging subtly at the very end of chapter 4, verse 5, where he writes, each one will receive his commendation, or that is, literally his praise, from God.
- That there will be a day in the future when those who have been building the church will stand before God, and each one receiving various levels of compensation, praise.
- In fact, that went back, didn't it, all the way to chapter 3, verse 8. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his wages. So, the metaphor, the image, is of the church of a building.
- The focus of the image is upon those who build. And the content of our text falls within the purview of the one who is building, and the reward that will be given.
- I don't know if you've ever thought of Notre Dame, or Notre Dame, as we say here in the Midwest. In Paris, I've been there on one occasion, and from what I am told, that building with its famous buttresses, architecturally supporting those great stone walls at the rear, took literally centuries to construct.
- [6 : 11] And the plans went from one architect to another. Seven or eight individuals whose life work it was to construct that, and upon their, in a sense, deathbed, they would hand the blueprints off to the next who would build upon it.
- That's what's happened in the church in Paul's day, all the way into our day. We're building the church, the people of God.
- And there's a warning. Paul sounded the alarm in chapter 3, verses 10-15, that if you build with inferior materials, you will suffer loss on the final day.
- Then when it comes time for wages, the paycheck to arrive, you get in, but you come in with nothing. He had earlier or later then warned them that if you tear down the church, chapter 3, 16, and 17, and elevate worldly building as opposed to God's way, you'd actually destroy yourself in the process.
- So what is the church to do in that context? Chapter 4, verses 1-5, we've been in the midst then of Paul's application of this image. The intention behind the content.
- [7 : 41] What are the people of God to be doing as you're watching those around you build into your life? Three things.
- These are important words for each one of you, for all of us. First, take care then how you view yourself. We saw that last week. chapter 3, verse 18, let no one deceive himself.
- Don't adopt for yourself an understanding of the church and the wisdom of God that is contrary to the cross. There's a word for yourself.
- Secondly, last week we saw there was a word for how you view others. Verse 21 of chapter 3, let no one boast in men. Listen, don't start elevating architects and builders over the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.
- For in Christ you have all builders. They all work for you. Why take only one to yourself? So having given them a word on how to view themselves and having given them a word on how to view others, now here we are, our text, this is how one should regard us.
- [8 : 58] This is how you and I are to think about Paul. Let me ask it this way. What's your view of the Apostle Paul? In our day and age, many love Jesus.
- It's Paul I have trouble with. What's your view of the Apostle Paul? How does Paul want you to regard him? Three phrases.
- First, as servants of Christ. Literally, the word here is not the word that we get a slave from.

It's the word of an assistant in a house setting. Let me give you some examples. It's used in Luke chapter 4 where Jesus stands up for that first day in the synagogue and reads from Isaiah and says, Today this has been fulfilled in your hearing.

And he rolls up the scroll and it says, and he handed it to the servant. To the, literally, same word here, the assistant. The young boy whose job it was to hold God's word that it might be proliferated among the people.

[10 : 10] Paul says, View me that way. When you come into the house of God, I am the one who holds the word that it might be explained. It's the same word that's used in Acts 13 when it says that Paul and Barnabas took John with him, John Mark, as an assistant.

Paul says, I am to be viewed as an assistant of Christ. This is no small honor. This is no, view me as the least.

No, this is the word that says, view me as someone who has a critical and important role in the work of God. I am assisting the proliferation of God's work in the world. I have an honorable place.

That's not the way they were viewing Paul. They didn't view him with those acolyte-like robes on. They viewed him as someone who had become detrimental to their understanding of the church.

That's one. View Paul with that regard. Secondly, chapter 4, verse 1, as stewards of the mysteries of God. Now, the word steward there is exactly from the word that you're getting all this building imagery.

[11 : 26] You're a building and he's a steward of the building. He's working concerning the very mysteries of God. This, again, is an elevated phrase. He's a steward of mysteries of God.

He wants you to view him as the one to whom God has given things that must be revealed. The view of Paul in Corinth was supposed to be rising with these terms.

Elevating. These are not terms that bring him down, but rather up. And then third, not only as an assistant of Christ, not only as a steward of the mystery of God, but third, as one who is making every effort to be faithful.

Look at verse 2. Moreover, it's required of stewards that they may be faithful. In other words, I think he's literally saying here, or by way of illusion, I am making every sincere effort to do my job well.

They weren't thinking of him in those terms. In fact, Paul here equates himself with God. Do you remember chapter 1, verse 9? God is faithful. Paul says, I am faithful.

[12 : 35] View me that way. For indeed, he says, it's a small thing that I should be judged by you or by any other human court.

The question there is not if I should be judged. That is indeed the language of a man who has been judged by the church as being unworthy of their tastes.

They wanted something more than Paul. They wanted something larger than life. Paul came in weakness and in fear and in trembling. He preached the crucified Christ.

They wanted someone with rhetorical flair that would have the persuasive powers of ability to make themselves look large in the world. Paul says, no, I came with none of that.

But I am the very assistant of Christ. That as the word of God becomes the word of Christ to you, I am the one holding that. That as the word of God is proliferated throughout to the ends of the earth, I am the one assisting in that.

[13 : 47] And I am conducting my work faithfully. So, stop judging me as though I were the inferior one.

Look what he says in verse 5. He really concludes there. Therefore, do not pronounce judgment before the time. That's what they had done. Before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.

Then, each one will receive his commendation from God. And so, we ask ourselves this morning in this construction site. We are all on site.

What kind of word do you want? What kind of pastor do you want? What's your appetite? Is it the wisdom of God?

Which is the foolishness of the cross? The weakness in the world? One like Paul? Paul? Think of it in regard to his message and his manner.

[15 : 01] Think of it in regard to what is vying for your mind right now. Let me put it differently. Who do you praise?

One like Paul who stands in weakness or those who stand with great strength. who are your teachers? Who are your architects?

Will they be Kant? Will they be those who create a worldview where God himself is absent? Or will you look to the architects whose foundation rests upon Jesus Christ?

Who are your heroes? Paul is saying, do not make a judgment against me before that day. For on that day all builders will stand and God himself will bring praise or commendation.

Each one according to his work. I pray for us as a church that we will ever hold fast to the weakness of the gospel and to an architect as skillful as Paul.

[16 : 19] Let me pray. Our Heavenly Father, it's this analogy of sorts that we are a construction site this morning is a good one and we all want to grow.

We all want to become something beautiful. we all want to be commendable on the skyline.

May our hearts be wedded to a building that will only look like the cross rather than the glory of man and may we be fixed to those who continue to give us Jesus rather than earthly glory.

I pray for each one here that you would settle their hearts with all of those architects that compete for space in their mind and that you would give us Jesus in whose name we pray.

Amen.