

Jeff Corinthians 9

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[0 : 00] We're talking about these marks of a faithful pastor who pastors in light of the gospel,! The gospel being the governing factor of his identity and the governing factor for! His labor. Fourth mark, the pastor's ministry is founded upon and informed by the gospel.

There is no, and I know this is common language for us here, but there's perhaps no text in the New Testament that more explicitly mandates gospel-centered ministry than this one.

And I've told my students, I've told our pastors, it's not much of an exaggeration to say that the long-term health of sovereign grace, and I would say the long-term health of Trinity Fellowship, depends on our giving heed to these verses. So here I said Paul earlier, I said Paul uses an agricultural metaphor, pardon me, and an architectural metaphor. Here he switches to that architectural metaphor, and with the change in metaphor comes a change in focus.

Our identity as pastors to our labors as pastors, and more importantly, this shift brings with it an escalation of urgency. Paul turns, his gaze now turns to those now building in Corinth, and it turns to you and me as well. Paul presents himself here now like a general contractor who has carefully laid the foundation, and now others are building on it. He has, you know what I mean when I say he has subbed out the other work? In other words, he's hired subcontractors to do other parts of the work. That's sort of the picture. Now the warning begins in verse 10b, according to the grace of God given to me like a skilled master builder. I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.

Each one take care. It's a little stronger than that. Take heed, carefully consider. If your work is not up to code. In other words, it's not up to standards, then the consequences are going to be serious. So how do we know? How do we know if our work is up to code? How do we know if it meets the standards? We need to know that, don't we? I want to know that. Well, it's all about the foundation. The foundation Paul laid, verse 10, was Jesus Christ. And in the context of the letter, the context of the earlier chapters, that means Christ and him crucified. It's the person and work of Jesus Christ, the gospel, that is to be the foundation of the church. As Paul says in chapter 15, the gospel is of first importance. As he says in chapter 1, as we looked at at length yesterday, any other message, any other ministry that obscures the cross, that it will empty the cross of its power, chapter 2, any cultural accommodation of that message diverts people's faith and trust from God to man. In other words, any ministry not founded on Christ crucified and risen and reigning is God dishonoring and it is soul-endangering. Lives are at stake. Eternal destinies are at stake.

[3 : 56] And Paul's point here is that once the foundation is laid, the building erected upon it must conform to the pattern of the foundation. Now that's the sense of the six different building materials.

Paul doesn't develop the meaning of these and we should not allegorize these. There's one main distinction in these when he speaks about if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw. There's one main distinction. The last three are combustible. In other words, they burn up wood, hay, and straw. The first three are not. So some leaders are going to build with fireproof material that will withstand fire. Other leaders, other pastors are going to build with other materials that will not withstand fire.

And what determines whether they're fireproof, what determines whether they're going to withstand the fire. Is whether the building materials are based upon, derived from, consistent with the gospel. Again, the building must conform to the foundation. You can't lay a foundation on the gospel and then add another floor on spiritual experience or a new wing of the building based on social concerns or a new auditorium founded upon secular psychology. Pick your own wood, hay, and stubble. What's the wood, hay, and stubble in your context?

[5 : 37] Does it mean we never address other issues? Doesn't mean we don't employ other strategies? But the issue is, are we building with them? Do we address them through the lens of the

gospel?

Are they inconsistent with the gospel? Or are they uninformed by the gospel? Are they without reference to the gospel? Are they inconsistent with the gospel? A psychologized approach, for instance, to counseling? That's inconsistent with the gospel.

Or something that marginalizes the gospel? Do we build, do we address other topics in a way that diminishes the gospel centrality, that underplays the gospel's power, that transfers people's passion or relocates people's hope somewhere else than the gospel? And that shift can be so subtle. A burden that we carry, that we take on, maybe even a good burden, that slowly begins to eclipse the priority of Christ and Him crucified in our minds, in our sermons. The passion with which we speak about something begins to exceed our passion for the gospel. And people will perceive what you are passionate about. And they will be passionate about the things that you are passionate about. As my former professor, Don Carson said, people don't learn what I teach. They learn what I'm excited about. To the hope we are passionate about.

To the hope we place in a strategy. To reach people or to change people that displaces the gospel's power to save, to transform. We must be ever mindful and discerning of the building materials we are using.

[7 : 48] And those materials must be consistent throughout the building. Your Sunday meeting. Your small group ministries. Your discipleship structures. Your singles and youth ministries.

You have to ask yourself, same materials? Are we building with the same materials? Same source of hope? Same atmosphere of grace? Same object of dependence? Same ultimate focus? Christ and Him crucified?

So all of this makes clear what's at stake in verses 13 and following. Each one's work will become manifest for the day.

And He's mentioned the day already. Do you remember that? Chapter 1, verse 8. He will sustain you to the end guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That's the day He's talking about. Each one's work will become manifest for the day. That day of our Lord Jesus Christ will disclose it because it will be revealed by fire.

[9 : 05] And the fire will test what sort of work each has done. Now again, we alluded to this earlier. This is typically applied to all Christians at the judgment. That is not the text's intention.

This is about the judgment of the labors of the Christian leader. This is about us on that day. And although salvation here is not at stake, the gaining or forfeiture of reward is at stake.

As pastors, we await a day. Paul calls it the day when our labors will undergo divine scrutiny. And this day, if you look more broadly at Pauline theology, this day clearly played a key role in Paul's teaching.

I think more importantly in his soul, in his prayers. And let's not forget the context which is instructive for us as pastors.

[10 : 09] Remember what's happening. Paul is being assessed by Corinth. He's being judged. His integrity and authenticity, his very legitimacy is being scrutinized.

And in the face of this Corinthian version of evangelical accusation or internet trolling, Paul waxes eschatological.

In verse 4, just down from this verse 5, he cautions them, don't pronounce judgment before the time, before the day.

I think there's secondary application for everyone. So I do think that's legitimate. But I think what he has, I think he's speaking about leaders because his reference point is, because remember the context, what he's addressing is the way in which the church is identifying with leaders.

Paul, Apollos, Cephas, right? And then he goes on to speak about who are, what is Paul, what is Apollos. And then those descriptions, that agricultural metaphor, he's describing himself and Apollos.

[11 : 32] That's who they are, their field hands. And then he goes on, according to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled builder, I laid a foundation. Someone else is building upon it, like Apollos.

So he planted, Apollos watered. He laid a foundation. Someone else is building. Let them be careful. And then another indicator of that, Jepsek, is verse 16.

Do you not know that you, now I speak, that's a plural you. Do you not know that you are God's temple and God's spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, he's speaking about these

leaders, laborers.

Like Paul, like Apollos, God will destroy him. So I think the first reference seems to me to be Paul's own apostolic ministry, which is under scrutiny.

And then those other leaders that are coming behind him and are laboring among the Corinthians. But I do think there is, again, I do think it's legitimate to apply this in a secondary way to those laboring in the church, even though they may not be a pastor or leader.

[12 : 45] Because, yes, that idea you're speaking about, every member of ministry, everyone serving, everyone being gifted, that's very important as well. I think he's certainly talking about itinerant people coming through, like Apollos and like Peter.

Based on what we see in Paul's first missionary journey, and the way in which he appointed elders in every church, Acts 14, 23, he comes to Corinth later than that.

We have every reason to believe this church would have had elders as well. At this point in Paul's ministry, though, he's not writing to elders, he's writing to the churches as a whole.

Later, our first session, we talked about this, Paul's kind of second career, he kind of changes his strategy. He's not writing to churches anymore, he's writing to leaders.

But here he's still writing to churches. So I would assume, although there's no evidence for it here, I would assume that there are elders. But I think Paul has those guys in mind.

[13 : 50] I think they should be listening carefully to this. Yeah. So again, we should not pronounce judgment before the day, before that day.

Our day, today, the days we labor in there, our day is fraught with premature assessments.

We inhabit, I mean, with, and especially with globalization and social media and the internet age, we just inhabit an eco-culture where instant authoritative accusations are lodged and jumped on and liked and tweeted and amplified and shared.

And pastors can be fearful. Pastors can tremble. Pastors can backpedal.

Pastors can accommodate. Pastors can compromise. Pastors can begin to stop drawing dark lines where the Bible draws dark lines.

[15 : 08] They can begin to speak in generalities rather than in the open disclosure of the truth. So when those pressures come, we have to ask ourselves, what day am I more aware of?

Today? Or this season in my church? Or the day? Yesterday? Or what happened last year? Or whatever your crisis was? What? As we, brothers, as we build, as we prepare sermons, as we serve in ministries, as we counsel, as you sit in elders' meetings, as we serve our families, as we train our little ones, as we parent teens, which you guys aren't doing yet, but you will, we must never lose sight of the day.

Judgments today are clouded at best. People's criticism of you is of little consequence.

The day will reveal what's true. And if we as leaders and pastors have given attention to personal comfort or ministry results or self-preservation or social manipulation or personal acclaim, we've given attention to that and neglected the gospel, we will suffer great loss.

Saved, mercifully, but as if snatched from the fire. So this is one of those points that should fill us with the fear of God.

[17 : 04] Think about it. It's possible. It's possible to spend your entire life in Christian ministry. An entire life. Laboring in the church and yet build so shoddily that at the judgment you have nothing to show for it.

Nothing to show for it. Not because you're weak. God's strength is going to be perfected in your weakness. Not because you feel inadequate. You should feel inadequate.

But because at some point, maybe a crisis moment, maybe you're intimidated by someone or more likely, imperceptibly, slowly, you've shifted the foundation from the gospel to something else.

That's a fearful thing. So we would do well to ask as pastors, at what point am I most vulnerable to shifting the foundation? Where am I most vulnerable to compromise?

To temptation? To fear? To pride? To self-serving? To self-reliance? Finally, number five.

[18 : 22] We've moved in this direction already. But the pastor is aware of divine accountability for the effects of his life and labors upon the church.

You know, I said that Paul has shifted to an architectural metaphor. But what happens in verses 16 and 17, the building metaphor is developed further and we find a surprise.

He's talking about a building. In verse 9, he says, you are God's field, God's building. Talking about foundation, talking about building on it with gold and silver and these sorts of things.

But then we see, we come to verse 16 and we find this surprise. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you. You are God's na'as, his temple. And it's three times in this text. Three times in two verses. You're God's temple. If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him for God's temple is holy. [19 : 33] He's stressing exactly who they are. The church is not just any building. It's the very temple of God. Here, and these pronouns are plural. Here, it's not the individual Christian who is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

He will make that point in chapter 6. But here, it's the church as a whole. It's the local church that is the temple of God. You guys know that probably from, or you do know it, I'm sure, but you know it from different angles, different courses you've had.

What we can't do and what this text won't allow us to do is to grow accustomed to that language. It's not just a theological assertion that you learned in ecclesiology.

We should, we need, pastors need to recapture the wonder of this language. It's an astonishing thing for Paul to say. Remember, at this moment when Paul wrote this, the temple in Jerusalem was still standing.

Sacrifices were still being made. For Jews, it was the central locus of the divine presence on the planet. But for Paul to transfer this claim to a group of predominantly Gentile people living in, in Greece of all places.

[20 : 52] It was in, it was the Greek Antiochus IV that desecrated the temple in 167 BC and had a pig sacrificed on the altar and rededicated the temple to Zeus.

It's a shattering hermeneutical move. And it's one that completely relativized the central institution of Judaism and at the same time magnified the dignity and centrality and importance of the local church.

How can you do that, Paul? How can you make such a hermeneutical move? He can do it because the Spirit of God is present in this community.

He can do it because it's in churches like Corinth and like yours and like mine that praise and worship are rightly offered to God the one definitive sacrifice having been made on the cross.

He can do it, he must do it because in the new covenant age the church is now the divine sanctuary where the living God most fully expresses his presence.

[22 : 00] He says, pastors, we must not lose that wonder. We don't want to lose that wonder. That wonder about just who your people are that will sustain you.

That wonder will protect your heart from bitterness. Meditating on that will kindle in your affections love for your people even in the midst of conflict.

It will bolster your faith in barrenness. It will compel your labors in weariness. Brothers, behold your church.

Behold Trinity Fellowship. Any church, large, small, strong, weak, thriving, or running on fumes. It is a sacred entity.

It is God's holy preserve. The most consequential place on earth is the local church. And God will deal severely with anyone.

[23 : 13] And you have, second, the indefinite pronoun here, I think, does extend the warning beyond leaders. If anyone, it extends the warning beyond leaders to the divisive, to the slanderer, to internet trolls.

Anyone who harms her, the church, anyone who weakens her, or anyone who uses her for their own purposes or advantages, or self-exaltation.

And, you know, what's most, think about the context of chapters one to four. What is most contextually prominent here, especially those who split the church into factions.

I fear, I know people who, I think back in my history, people who have divided a church, exploded a church, and I, I, it just frightens me.

So, I tell guys in the pastor's college, I say, you become an elder, you join a team, you gain credibility as a leader, you better not abuse that.

[24 : 39] You become dissatisfied on your team, you tread carefully. You do everything you can to maintain those people's loyalty to that team.

You don't draw them away to yourself. You don't try to get people to agree with you. No, you, you build that church into that team.

You divide, we, we, people, anyone, we divide the church at great parable, at great peril, sorry, this is God's temple. Disunity is desecration of a holy place.

And so, to damage authentic unity within the church is to, as Paul says it, it's to incur the judgment of God. So, we must be careful. And as critical as this warning is, its intended effect for us is a happy one.

It's one that will protect us. It's one that will give us hope. If we derive and maintain our pastoral identity from this text, and if our labors are governed by this text, God promises wonderful things, great and mighty things, whatever our culture or our critics might bring.

[26 : 08] If we're building with the gospel, when it alone is not a slogan on our website, but the foundation of our churches, if it's the framework for our thinking, if it's the paradigm for our living, if it's the substance of the diet we're providing, if it's the atmosphere of the congregations we are leading, if it's the object to which we are directing everyone's hope, if it's the measure of all of our evaluation of ministry, the effect will dwarf any pastoral ambition.

It will be a display of the glory of God in our churches. The fruit will be Christians who are mature and joyful and grateful and resilient and sacrificial in their living.

That's the kind of people that will inhabit our churches. And for us as pastors, though it's all from God, all power, all wisdom, all growth, all fruit, there will be inexplicably a reward.

Verse 14, the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward.

And what a reward! Paul says in chapter 4, verse 5, then each one will receive his commendation from God.

[27 : 43] You know what the word is? Epinos, praise. We'll receive praise from God himself.

And one word of praise from the master will make every unnoticed exertion, every heartache, every trial, every tear, every departure, it'll make it worth it.

One word of praise from the master, it'll all be worth it. You know how encouraging a note from one grateful person can just lift your soul?

You're discouraged, someone sends you an email or maybe a note, and it just, they're just encouraging you, thanking you. You know how that can lift your soul? Compare that with a word of commendation from Jesus.

So this is just a principle Paul lays out. He wants us to meditate on that, to take a moment to anticipate that future and allow it to quiet your heart.

[29 : 14] Do that. What would that be like? What would that be like? In the presence of, it's not going to be like sitting in this room, in the presence of multitudes of angels looking on?

All the saints of history? Can you imagine? And you and me with all our sin covered and all the blemishes removed, you are acknowledged and honored with praise from the one who sits on the throne?

You want perspective for the long run? You want motivation to persevere? Encouragement to finish well? There it is.

There it is. Let's move into chapter 4 which brings the argument of the opening chapters to a close and does so in a tremendous way, a very direct way with a mix of both warmth and confrontation and irony.

Now, the argument begins to turn in chapter 4 verse 1. I want you to see this. This is how one should regard us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mystery of God.

[31 : 04] Now, to understand where Paul goes, you have to see that this verse functions as like a hinge. It looks back to chapter 3, how they should view leaders, and it looks forward to chapter 4 and the verses that come here.

So, it looks back to this paradigm for leadership. And what was that leadership? So, this is how one should regard us as servants of Christ.

So, he's looking back, right? Christian leaders are simply servants. That's his point, right? We're simply servants. So, that's the way you should view us. Don't measure us by the world's standards. Don't view us as leaders of your cliques.

Don't put us on a pedestal. Don't view us as heroes with whom you identify to increase your status, to build up your own pride, right? View us as servants then. So, he's drawing a conclusion to that, right?

To the earlier argument. Are you with me? We're simply servants of God. So, in other words, the church is to think of leaders in non-status, non-status functional terms.

[32 : 14] But, the verse also looks forward. And now, the servant metaphor is employed for a different purpose. So, now look at verse 2. Look at where Paul goes. So, this is how one should regard us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy or faithful. But, with me, it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court.

In fact, I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. You see his point?

Yes, I am God's servant, so don't exalt me, but also, I am God's servant. And because Paul and the other servants are servants of God, then they are ultimately accountable to not the Corinthians, but to no one but God.

Do you see his clever move there? Leaders do, in a sense, belong to the Corinthians. He said this at the end of chapter 3, all things are yours. Paul or Apollos or Cephas, the world or life or death or the present and the future, all are yours.

[33 : 39] You are Christ. Christ is God's. Yes, so we all belong to you. So you don't have to pick sides. You don't have to measure, guys. Just receive all that God gives you through all these different leaders. So yes, we belong to you, but more fundamentally, Paul belongs to God.

He is the one who called them. He is the one who empowers them. They serve his purposes, not their own, and so they're accountable to him. So the basic requirement for a servant of God is not their status.

It's not their gifting. It's not their influence. It is their faithfulness, verse 2. They are to follow their master's instructions. They are to serve their master's purposes.

They are to be governed by their master's priorities. They do serve God's people, yes. They sacrifice for God's people.

To use Paul's language in 2 Corinthians 12, they spend and are spent. They lay down their lives for God's people, yes, but, so they serve people, they lay down their lives for people, they pray and serve and preach and love God's people, but they do not serve the purposes of God's people.

[35 : 02] Do you see the difference? They do not serve the priorities or the preferences of God's people. They serve the purposes of God. See the difference?

Now, again, man, they do serve the people's interests, their deepest interests.

Absolutely. We work and labor for our people's good. Philippians 1, we work and labor for our people's progress and joy in the faith.

We toil, as Paul said, struggling with all of God's energy that works within us, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone complete in Christ, Colossians 1, 28.

So we labor for them, we labor for their good in Christ, but we do not serve their purposes or their preferences. purposes. So Paul's point, if a leader is faithful to the master, then that lowly status of a servant actually sets them free from having to please people in the church.

[36 : 18] I love you, I serve you, but I do not answer to you. The term Paul uses in verse 1, this is how one should regard us as servants of Christ and stewards, see that word?

Oikonomos, that changes the metaphor. Instead of a field hand now, the pastor is a steward. The slave in charge of the other employees, the one that the master puts over his household.

Remember Jesus' parable in Luke chapter 12. Who then is the faithful and wise manager?

Remember that? It's the same word. Who then is the faithful and wise steward or kanemas?

Who is the faithful and wise manager whom his master will set over his household to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is the servant whom his master finds so doing in that day.

So that's the idea that Paul is doing here. So Paul's, again, bottom line, Paul's servant status actually sets him free from the Corinthians assessment.

[37 : 35] So this is the other side of the servant coin. We are servants of our people. We put their interests above our own. We will be judged for how we care for them, but ultimately we're servants of God.

So it's his interests that inform and shape our ministry, not people's preferences or our culture's preconceptions. Now, it's here we begin to see what I spoke about in our introduction, the underlying problem of an arrogance toward Paul, a disregard for him and his ministry, and most likely an unfavorable comparison of Paul with other leaders, especially the talking heads of Corinth.

And in verse 6, there's a change in tone that's almost dramatic. Paul takes on the arrogance of the Corinthians head-on.

Look at what he says. I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.

That's one of Paul's favorite verbs in this letter. The word is *fusiao*. It means to puff or blow up. You blow up a balloon, you inflate a balloon.

[39 : 16] But beginning here, it's the first time it's used, but beginning here, it's going to be woven throughout this section. Chapter 4, verse 6, verse 18, verse 19, chapter 5, verse 2, chapter 8, verse 1.

So this is a proud church. This is a self-important, self-righteous church. It's the opposite of a church that's holding fast to the gospel and applying the gospel and allowing the gospel to inform and transform their lives.

Such a church that is allowing the gospel to inform their lives, it will not be puffed up. It will not be arrogant. It will be humble. It will be grateful.

It will be generous. It will be joyful. And here, the initial problem that we've looked at has come, has brought back into focus, internal rivalry fostered by arrogant claims about the possession of wisdom, infatuation with rhetorical skill, and exalted spiritual experience.

Paul's warning them, don't be puffed up. Now, one exegetical note that I'll just point out to you in verse 6, where Paul says this, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written.

[40 : 41] What do you think he means by that? The verb there, it's that you may not go beyond, it's *ha*, relative pronoun, *gegrapti*.

Gegrapti, which always means, in Paul, in most places in the New Testament, always refers to Scripture, what was been written.

And think about what Paul has done in his argument. We've mentioned this. He's spotlighted six different Scripture quotes so far. Six different quotes of Old Testament Scriptures.

I think I put those on your outline. 119, 131, 29, 216, 319, and 20. Now, the first two and the last two make a similar point.

There should be no boasting in human beings. That's what the verses are saying. Right? Now, in the wider Old Testament context, remember when Paul uses a verse, he's not just using a proof text, but he's taking into account the larger context of that original verse.

[41 : 57] In the wider Old Testament context of these verses, there's always the theme of divine reversal. God confounding the wise, confounding the strong, confounding the prosperous. The two quotes in chapter 2, verses 9 and 16, they don't mention boasting, but they do contrast God's ways with man's ways.

So, you see, he's used all these Old Testament verses that speak of not boasting, or God rebuking boasting, or God confounding the proud ways of man.

So, he's been quoting all these Old Testament verses, and then he says, I want you to not go beyond what is written. In other words, the cumulative force of all these texts he's been quoting make a powerful point to the Corinthians.

In other words, the whole fabric of Scripture countermands those against human pride. The whole fabric of Scripture calls for trusting God alone.

So, don't go beyond what is written. Let these verses inform you. So, Paul is laying his entire argument on a scriptural foundation. And so, their boasting was going beyond Scripture.

[43 : 21] It was transgressing the bounds that Scripture places on human pride and self-reliance. Verse 6 again, I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers.

And note how he uses brothers again, even as he starts to confront them. He always softens it with that affectionate term. That you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written. That none of you be puffed up in favor of one against another.

How are they going beyond Scripture? How are they violating Scripture? By their pride. That look down on others. That cause division from others.

That's how they're going beyond Scripture. And then, in verse 7, Paul punctures that pride like a balloon with three questions.

Who, what, and why? Who, verse 7, sees anything different in you? In other words, who made you superior? Nobody.

[44 : 28] And then what? What do you have that you did not receive? Nothing. Right? And then why? If you have received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

In other words, the answer is obvious. You have no reason to boast. You're boasting, you're going against Scripture, and you have no reason to do it. Now, the underlying conflict rises to the surface, especially in verses 8 to 10.

And look at the, look at this rhetorical flourish. Already you have all you want. Already you have become rich.

Congratulations. Without us, you have become kings. In other words, after our ministry, apart from associating with us and building upon what we built, wow, without us, look at what happened to you. You became kings. And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you. For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men.

[45 : 49] We are fools. There's those categories again. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute.

As you can see, Paul, while he rejected the rhetorical methods of the sophists, he could still be powerfully rhetorical. The contrast he draws here are vivid.

The language is powerful. The sarcasm is, in ironies, is thick. Two things, again, inform this language. The Corinthians, proud possession of wisdom.

And so Paul's, and here's what's happening, the vocabulary there. Paul's description of the Corinthians echoes the claims of Stoic and Cynic philosophers. To be rich, to reign, those are catchwords of the Stoics.

So the Stoic idea was to be, not to be superstitious, but to be strong and free and self-reliant. The Stoics gloried and being unattached to things, and therefore they owned all things.

[47 : 00] They were rulers of all. So Paul is using, again, their language against them. And there seems to be another thing at work here as well.

Number two, this is on your outline, I believe, the Corinthians' exalted spiritual experience, which is probably some form of over-realized eschatology that we've mentioned before. They felt like they had arrived.

They are spiritually privileged and exalted. They have the full blessings of the new age. They are pneumatikoi, people of the Spirit. The kingdom was already theirs.

And Paul's weakness stands in sharp contrast to that. But he uses that weakness to rebuke them. In contrast to their reigning, what has Paul become?

Verse 9, a spectacle. And God has exhibited them so. The word there, exhibit, apadetnumi, was commonly used in the context of gladiatorial shows.

[48 : 12] And the word spectacle there, theatron. What English word does that sound like? Theatron. Theater.

Like a coliseum. Like a theater for a gladiatorial show. Do you see the metaphor? In this image, the Corinthians are, as it were, seated up in the privileged box seats while Paul is being paraded in the ring.

And what does he say? God has exhibited us last of all. He's not only paraded in the coliseum, but he's paraded last.

In other words, he and the other apostles in a gladiatorial show, they're in the final fight, the grand finale. The final fight in a gladiatorial show is when the condemned criminals would fight to the death.

To the bloodthirsty screams of the crowd. You're sitting up, eating, drinking wine and eating grapes and we're condemned criminals in the spectacle of a gladiatorial show.

[49 : 31] That's the image he's giving them. Then in verse 10, note this, Paul ironically uses the language from chapter 1, 26 and 27 to characterize the Corinthians in himself.

Do you recall that language? Not many wise, not many powerful, not many noble. So he applies those things to them. And then he applies the terms in 1, chapter 1, verse 27, foolish, weak, low, despised.

He applies to himself. So you see what he's doing there. So we got, so chapter 1, we got God and what did God do in chapter 1?

He chose the foolish, weak, lowly, you remember that, right?

what is the world value? The world values the wise, the strong, the noble, the well-born.

[50 : 58] So that was chapter 1. Now in chapter 4, Paul takes the same terms and he talks about himself.

So who is Paul? He's a fool. He's weak. He's despised. So all those things that God favors and God chooses, Paul applies to himself, ironically, because they're condemning him for this.

And then, what about the Corinthians? you are, you're wise. You think of yourself this way.

You're wise. You're strong. You're noble. It's a brilliant argument. You see the irony.

They perceive themselves in the very terms that God opposes. They boast about it. And Paul's like, no, no, God opposes those things. Yet that's how they think Paul should be.

[52 : 09] Already you are, you have all you want. You've been rich. You've become kings that you did reign so that we might rule with you. Verse 10, we are fools. You are wise.

We're weak, but you're strong. You're held in honor, but we in disrepute. They wanted Paul to live up to those things. And Paul says, no, I'm the things that God chooses. But the way Paul is, is the way they are supposed to be.

That's what they should be pursuing. Verse 11, to the present hour we hunger and thirst, we're poorly dressed, buffeted and homeless, we labor, working with our hands, we are reviled.

When reviled, we bless. When persecuted, we endure. When slandered, we entreat. We become and are still like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things. Now, Paul is doing something very important here.

He hasn't moved on from the cross, but this is an application of the cross and a display of Paul's theology of the cross.

[53 : 17] So here's what we see in Paul's example. The cross is not only a message of forgiveness. It is to be the paradigm of the Christian life.

To be a Christian is to be a servant of Christ. To be a servant of Christ is to live as he lived, to go the way of the cross.

To be united to Christ is not only to share in the power of his resurrection, but also the fellowship of his sufferings. Exactly what Jesus predicted, right?

Matthew 10, 24. Disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave his master. If they persecuted me, they're going to persecute you as well. Jesus goes on, don't fear them though.

Nothing is hidden that will not be revealed. Don't fear those who kill the body, but fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. But your very hair, the hairs of your head are numbered, so don't fear.

[54 : 30] You're of great value to me. So discipleship in both Jesus and Paul is viewed eschatologically in terms of the last day, in terms of the final judgment, in terms of the great reversal.

And so we see something we've mentioned before, we see it teased out and developed here. The gospel doesn't just proclaim forgiveness.

It creates a worldview. And it's a worldview entirely at odds with our culture's values of success and prominence, et cetera. I know you men are surrounded far more than I am with prosperity gospel.

gospel. I can only imagine, I'd love to hear from you on, I can only imagine that the temptation that must be to certain people, to downtrodden people, to impoverish people.

But again, it's a worldview. And it's one entirely at odds with the gospel. It could not be more at odds with the gospel.

[55 : 55] It could not be more at odds with Jesus' demand to, if anyone follows me, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me in the way of the cross.

At odds with Jesus' warning, whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. The glory of the gospel is not that we're deprived of good things, it's that we receive the greatest thing, the most valuable thing, the greatest treasure, the most satisfying pleasure, which is Christ himself.

So we don't, we may suffer in the world's, in the world's perspective, but we gain Christ. Christ, I count all things to be lost, Paul says elsewhere, in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I've suffered the loss of all things and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know him.

So this reality that the cross offers not only forgiveness but a pattern for life is particularly relevant for pastors. We are, as one writer put it, we are participants, participants in what we proclaim. The gospel is not merely a message we proclaim, but it is the setting and context for pastoral ministry. So Paul's, Christ's death and resurrection shaped Paul's entire conception of ministry. [57 : 57] Here in 1 Corinthians 4, Paul regarded those apostolic sufferings not as trials to be avoided or overcome or to be ashamed of.

How does he view these trials? They are the identifying marks of the authenticity of his apostleship. Why? Because they manifest his conformity to Christ's sufferings. He's essentially saying to the Corinthians, if you really want to belong to Christ, look at me. this is what it looks like. This is where it leads.

This will, this is meant to transform a pastor's perspective on his sufferings. in his second letter to the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 4, in referring, you'll recognize this, in referring to the gospel centered in the risen glorified Christ, Paul says this, we have this treasure in jars of clay.

[59 : 20] Remember that? Why? To show that the surpassing value, the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

So, Paul's, Paul's own frailty and weakness and suffering, they're not just byproducts of ministry. Well, this is what happens. No, they are the very setting in which the resurrected Christ is most clearly seen.

That you, you understand what I'm saying? That you persevere as a pastor in suffering, that itself, your own perseverance, puts the gospel on display.

It's a simultaneous display of Christ's death and resurrection. When you suffer as a pastor, you're putting on display Christ's suffering. When you persevere through that and God uses you, you're putting on display Christ's resurrection.

So, Christ's own this is pastoral theology. Christ's sufferings are reflected in our sufferings. His risen life comes to expression in our perseverance.

[60 : 26] Are you with me? So, our life in ministry is to continually embody and point to Christ in His death and resurrection.

Our life in ministry, they tell the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. They embody it, they manifest it, they point to it. Brothers, there is a divine intent, a glorious intent, when you suffer in your service for Christ.

I want to, we see them all in 2 Corinthians 4. I want us to turn over to 2 Corinthians 4, take a little detour here. 2 Corinthians 4, Paul is speaking about his apostolic sufferings, which he does, by the way, four times in this letter, four times he lists his sufferings.

In verses 7 to 15, there are four purpose clauses that point to the divine intent for a pastor's suffering.

And I put these on your outline. We suffer so that it will be clear that the power for our ministry originates with God and not ourselves. Verse 7, but we have this treasure in jars of clay, purpose clause, to show, in order to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

[61 : 54] So that's one reason. When you suffer as a pastor, when you suffer as a servant of Christ, there's a purpose for it. It's not just happening. There's a purpose for it.

It's so that it's clear to those looking on that the power originates from God and not yourself. That changes.

So when I'm suffering, it helps me think, okay, good. All right, so this is going to then demonstrate that the power's not mine. It comes from God. That changes my perspective on suffering.

Number two, we suffer so that the resurrection life of Jesus will be evident as God sustains us in our suffering. Verses 10 and 11. We're always carrying, look at the wording, we're always carrying in the body, in Paul's body, the death of Jesus so that, purpose clause, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake. We're always dying to ourselves. We're always confronting our weakness. We're always countering opposition.

[63 : 07] We're always giving over to death so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our mortal flesh. So when we suffer, it's so that the resurrection life of Jesus will be seen as we persevere, as God sustains us.

So you're not just gritting your teeth and holding on. You're accessing God's grace. He's the one who sustains you and that shows, yes, Jesus' life, Jesus' resurrection is real because I see it in you.

Isn't that glorious? Thirdly, we suffer as a witness to those we serve and as a means God uses to extend grace to them.

So, verse 15, he says to the Corinthians, it is all for your sake, meaning all of this suffering, it is all for your sake so that as grace extends to more and more people, it may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God.

So we suffer, we embody the cross, we follow in Jesus' footsteps, we fill up his sufferings as a witness to those that we serve and as a means of grace to those we serve.

[64 : 24] So as people see us persevering in hardship, they see Christ and they receive grace.

Your people are watching you and when they see you suffering and not complaining, when they see you trusting God in the midst of hardship, it gives them grace.

they see Jesus. They see the cross. Isn't that remarkable?

When we see that, it will totally transform our perspective on pastoral sufferings. They are not random. They're not a mark of failure.

They're not something to be despised or avoided. It doesn't mean we seek out suffering. It doesn't mean suffering is pleasant. Suffering is experienced as suffering.

[65 : 36] But it does mean that our pastoral sufferings, that's what he's talking about, they are purposeful. And the purpose is to display the reality of Christ.

and the power of Christ, his resurrection power at work in us. It's breathtaking. The cross is not only a message to be proclaimed, but it is the pattern by which we are to live.

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