

## **LESSON 7: 1 CORINTHIANS 3:16-4:5**

### **Fools for Christ**

(1) Paul describes himself as the “wise architect” – the architect’s contribution is knowledge, as opposed to the worker’s contribution which is labor. But each one is to be careful how he builds. (2) Of foundational importance in this regard is that there is no foundation other than Jesus Christ (there is no Christianity without Christ). (3) But as for the building atop that foundation, Paul distinguishes between two categories of building materials – those that are valuable, that will withstand the fire of testing (on the Day of Christ’s coming and the revealing (and judging) of all things) (e.g., gold, silver, costly stones), and those that are worthless, that will not withstand the fire (e.g., wood, hay, straw). (4) The picture here is of fire sweeping through a house consuming all that is worthless, all that is combustible. (5) The worker whose work endures the fire will receive his reward (literally, his “wage”), but the one whose work is consumed will not receive a wage, though he will still be saved as one escaping through the flames. Note then: those to whom Paul is writing are all saved, for they have all built upon the one true foundation, Jesus), but the difference is between those who have gone on to build well and those who have built badly.

1. Verses 16 and 17 are simultaneously comforting and challenging. In what ways are they comforting? In what ways challenging? In particular, why do you think Paul included these two verses here, following on his comments in the preceding paragraph (especially as it concluded in verses 13-15)? What is his warning to the Corinthians, and to us? Finally, why do you think he begins with “Don’t you know...”?
2. Why does Paul warn the Corinthians “Do not deceive yourselves” (v. 18)? What does he mean that we “should become a fool so that we may become wise”? Consider this passage (vv. 18-23) in connection with the Bible’s take on fools (Psalm 14; all of Proverbs; Matthew 10:16). What characterizes a “fool” in these and other biblical passages? How are we to understand Paul here? How is it that “the thoughts of the wise are futile” (v. 20)?
3. Explain the connection between Paul’s point in verses 16-20, and his conclusion in verses 21-23, which begins with “So then...” What is so significant in this context about the fact that “all things are yours”? And indeed, that “you are of Christ, and Christ is of God”?

## Apostles of Christ

1. In 4:1, the word that NIV renders as “those entrusted with” is *oikonomos*, meaning steward, estate manager, deputy; this person was usually a slave entrusted by the master to manage his estate. Explain the relationship between this person, the master, and the other slaves. How is the church to regard these men? With what are they entrusted? What therefore is the sphere of their responsibility? Linking this section to what we’ve just discussed in the preceding chapter, in what way are each of us stewards of the gospel, and for what are we responsible?
2. What is required of those who have been entrusted much (v. 2)? What is the relationship of “faith” to “faithfulness,” and how would you explain this to someone in helping them to understand the dynamics of Christian life?
3. Why does Paul “care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court” (v. 3)? Should we not be concerned with how others adjudge us? If not, why not? If so, to what extent? And what point is he making by claiming that “I do not even judge myself”? What’s his point here? What are some of the possible shortfalls of basing our assurance in the affirmation of others? Of ourselves?
4. Explain the connection between his point in verse 3 and that of verse 4. What point is he making about the connection, or lack thereof, between our conscience and our ultimate standing before God? How and why should this be important to each of us as Christians?
5. What is the conclusion that Paul makes in verse 5? Again, what is the point here? What significance would these words have had for the Corinthians? For us?