



INTRO

Boasting in leaders is not only foolish, it is also dangerous.

Within what we might call “our circles,” we generally have an aversion to praising leaders too much or valuing them too highly. We look at the subset of Christian denominations that believe they have apostles with equal (or even greater) standing and authority as the first-century apostles. Some of these groups even believe their apostles can write new Scripture. When you look closely at these groups, it’s obvious that there is a tremendous amount of man-worship, manipulation, corruption, and a general sense of devouring the sheep that should be led and cared for. That’s foolish, and it’s dangerous.

But look, *we* are in danger as well. We can fall into the same error. Paul Washer recently made the following comments that were, for some, apparently controversial. He said, in a sermon at the church that John MacArthur pastored for many years, the following:

“John MacArthur is dead.” And then, for emphasis, he said, again, “John MacArthur is *dead*. Voddie Baucham is dead. R.C. Sproul is dead. James Boice is dead. Their legacy will go on, but you cannot live on their legacy. And this church cannot exist, maintain, or advance on the legacy of men who have now gone home to be with

the Lord. Our greatest problem in the kingdom of heaven today is always the same problem: a lack of godly, Spirit-filled, Bible-saturated men. When certain men die, it can be a discouragement...[But] what you and I need to understand is that there is only one hero in this gospel story..."¹

Like Paul Washer, I love these men. I honour their work in the Lord. And Paul Washer's words are utterly UN-controversial—or, at least, they should be. Washer says not that we should forget these men or trample on their legacies or downplay the work that God did through them, but that we should not build our faith on them or put our hopes in them. They must not serve as our foundation.

We already have a foundation. That foundation is Jesus. No other foundation is needed. We must not build on another foundation, and we must not pretend that there can be any new foundation added to the one that already exists. In Jesus and in the apostolic writings, the secret and hidden wisdom of God was revealed, and God's revelation in this era of history is complete. There is no "new revelation" being given today. New insight into existing revelation? Sure, we are happy to receive it. New understanding? Yes, also good! But new revelation? Something being revealed today that has not previously been revealed by God? No.

There is no new scripturally authoritative revelation being given. And there are no apostles today who possess authority equal to or exceeding that of the first-century Apostles—despite the claims of some groups today. And even when there were, it was sinful to boast in them.

John Stott once observed that "The shameful cult of human personalities which tarnished the life of the first-century Corinthian church still persists in Christendom, and a most improper and unbecoming regard is paid to some church leaders today."²

¹ <https://churchleaders.com/news/2214654-paul-washer-john-macarthur.html/2>

² John Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait*, p. 101

And so (and even more so) today, we must not engage in the folly of boasting in men. And that is the point of Paul's writing here in 1 Cor. 3.

1. Leader Allegiance Is Evidence of Immaturity (v1-4)

1 But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, 3 for you are still of the flesh.

Infants in Christ. Infants need milk; they can't handle solid food. They need food that has already been digested and converted into milk. This is the spiritual state of the Corinthian church, and Paul seems a little frustrated. He cannot address them as those who are filled with the Spirit, but as people who are still too obedient to the flesh, as babies in Christ. Which is to say, they are spiritual people, but, in a sense, *just barely*. They are still more fleshly than spiritual.

They are infants in Christ, but they are, to be sure, *in Christ*. But because of their present state, he must supply them with milk when they should be ready for meat. He speaks first in the past tense, "I fed you milk," and then in the present tense, "I'm still feeding you milk! I fed you with pre-digested food, not solid food. You weren't ready, you're still not ready."

Why is this the case? What evidence does he give that they have not grown up in the Lord? It's this:

For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?

This is what children do. They want things that other people have, and sometimes they just take them. They sometimes fight easily and over unimportant matters.

In calling the Corinthians infants, Paul is not saying that they are not born again, but they sometimes act like they aren't. They are not what they could be or should be by this point, but he is not saying

they are not saved and redeemed by God. He's saying that jealousy and strife are evidence of fleshly thinking, of immaturity, of acting as mere humans instead of the Spirit-filled believers that they are. They have the mind of Christ, the Spirit of Christ, and yet they act and speak in ways that show they ignore these benefits and cater to their own internal desires as well.

It's like the 24/7 Holy Spirit channel is available, but they are often tuned to the channel called "My preferences."

Jealousy and strife are not fruits of the Spirit; they are fruits of the flesh. They indulge in what is lower while neglecting what is higher and readily available. They are, remember back in Chapter 1, "enriched in every way." So why, then, Paul asks, do they live in this unrefined, unenriched, lowly, merely human way?

What's the evidence of this immaturity? Paul revisits a theme he touched on at the beginning of his letter.

4 For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human?

Evidence: They swear allegiance to humans more readily than to Christ. This kind of quarrelling and division happens when people lose their focus on Christ by instead focusing on one of Christ's messengers. This is an identity problem. They are finding their identity in other people rather than in Christ.

They were forming tribes and then choosing sides according to which Christian teacher they liked best. They analyzed, scrutinized and chose. They weighed their impressions of one against the other and made it into a competition.

Paul confronted the issue in 1:13 with three piercing questions: **"Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?"** These are scathing questions, and the answer to each one is an emphatic "NO!" Leader allegiance is evidence of immaturity, and, therefore, we must not engage in the folly of boasting in men.

Back now in chapter 3, Paul again asks some questions of his readers, in order to demonstrate that...

2. Leaders Are Assigned Servants (v5-9a)

5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

If they have made these teachers into idols, Paul's intent is to knock them down! "Listen, we are not to be the focus of your faith. The power source is God; we are merely the conduit of his message, the deliverymen. The Lord assigned us."

Paul's writing is powerful, his intellect sharp, his authority clear. He wrote much of the New Testament. He planted many churches. His list of accomplishments is unmatched among mere humans.

And yet here he equates all that he has done to one simple part of the grain-farming process and everything Apollos has done to another single part of the process. Paul planted, Apollos watered. Paul merely put seed in the ground; Apollos merely came and watered that seed. But neither of them possessed the necessary miraculous power to make anything happen. That is God's work.

This is one reason why "counting conversions" as a metric is dangerous (especially if it is offered as a statistic in a fundraising letter). When we count conversions, we are counting something and, in a sense, taking credit for it, but the thing we are counting can only be credited to God. If we want to catalogue everything that "counts for something," then we would need to count how many seeds were planted as well. But that isn't really quantifiable. But why should the harvester be more honoured (or funded) than the seed-planter? How can we give credit where credit is due?

Paul has a better idea: Don't take credit for any of it! All credit belongs to God. If we can see our work this way, and if we can see the work of others this way, this will assist us all in our humility. It keeps our work in perspective. It ensures that all credit and glory go

to God. It destroys pride. It removes the temptation to elevate and exalt ourselves on the basis of how many people experienced conversion in our presence.

We merely plant. Or we merely water.

7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

We are less than insignificant. Any significance we hold is because of the great treasure we steward. We are important in the process only insofar as God chooses for us to be part of the process.

But we, friends, are hungry for significance, and we are eager to give allegiance to people we consider significant. We are eager to identify something that is greater than we are, something we can admire, trust in, give allegiance to, and give money to. If someone positively impacts our lives, we feel a sense of indebtedness that we are eager to pay back to them.

Now, we should be eager to give honour, to give respect, to esteem leaders highly, as we are instructed to do in Scripture. Romans 12:10 instructs us to **"Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor."** Outdo one another in showing respect, in building each other up, in showing that you value each other. But we need to know why we do this, and we need to know how to do it properly.

More specific to our passage this morning, in 1 Thes. 5:12-13 Paul writes to the believers there: **"We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work."** His instruction is to pay attention to those who labour for the Lord among you. They've been called to take the lead, and leadership properly exercised is never easy; it is hard, and it is heavy. So value them highly... Why? Because they are your betters? No. Because they are smarter than you? No. **Because of their work.** Because of their work. Because of the work that has been *assigned* to them.

Matthew Henry comments that "Ministers of the gospel are described by the work of their office, which is to serve and honour

the Lord. It is their duty not only to give good counsel, but also to warn the flock of dangers, and reprove for whatever may be amiss. The people should honour and love their ministers, because their business is the welfare of men's souls."³

Being loyal to a leader is good. Loyalty would look like sticking with someone even when they are under attack because they speak the truth. That loyalty is a positive character trait. But that must be distinguished from pledging allegiance to a leader.

Pledging absolute allegiance to a leader is not good. That would look like defending and approving of and enabling a leader even when they break God's commands or frequently stumble into unrepentant moral failure. Continuing to endorse such a person is not a positive mark of character. It is a moral failure that sinfully condones moral failure.

Expressing gratitude for the work of good leaders is good. God has worked through leaders in your life. Expressing gratitude for that is good.

Finding your identity in a leader is bad. Making them the reference point of your life, the foundation of your faith, the object of your veneration—that's bad!

We respect and honour leaders because of the burden they carry, *not* because they are better, more highly exalted or serve as a sort of mediator between God and man.

Ungodly leaders encourage you to pledge your allegiance to them. They want to rule over you. They want your affection. They want your money. They want to paint a picture of themselves where they seem to be sitting at the left or right hand of Jesus. They want your unyielding support. They want to be seen as better, more powerful, as worthy of perks and bonuses.

But mostly, these types of leaders want you to serve as a layer of protection for them when they fall into sin. They want you to find your identity in them, to live your life according to their principles.

³ Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary

They often leverage this for personal gratification, for sexual gratification. The Evangelical church today is, listen, RIDDLED with such people—and this grieves me.

Paul's instruction is clear: "You need to understand what we are. We are servants who execute the wishes of our commander. You believed *through* us, but you are not to believe *in* us."

8 He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. 9a For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field...

Commentator F.W. Grosheide remarks that he that plants and he that waters "are both on the same side, precisely because they do not do the real work. They belong together and do not measure up to the principal thing."⁴

That principal thing is, of course, God. And the idea of reward or the receiving of wages is introduced here not so that we might speculate what we will receive for our work, but again to emphasize that leaders are like manual labourers: they do work, they receive wages. They are average Joes with an above average weight of responsibility. All the human effort involved in ministry is one category; everything that only God can do is in the other category. One category is much larger than the other. You can guess which one it is.

Do you see now what he's saying? Leaders are assigned servants. The saving of men's souls is work that only God can do. God assigns leaders to—pay attention to this—do work that he could very well do himself. So not only are leaders assigned servants, but we are privileged assigned servants. But we are not more than assigned servants.

The entire scope and point of the metaphor is clear. The Corinthian people are God's field; they belong to God. People like Paul and Apollos are God's workers in the field; they, too, belong to God. God

⁴ F. W. Grosheide, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953).

owns the field and the workers, and he gives out job assignments. So Paul is saying again, it's not wrong to appreciate the work that's been done among you, but this whole pedestal thing that's bordering on worshipping us? That is foolishness; it needs to stop. We are no more than field workers. Don't praise us for the work that is done by God or the results that are because of him.

It is folly to boast in men. Good leaders are clear on the next point in Paul's letter...

3. Leaders Know That Jesus Is The Foundation (v9b-17)

Godly leaders know that they are not the foundation. Paul now switches metaphors.

9b [You are] God's building. – 10 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. 11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

If you want a quality structure, you need a quality base. Everything else is going to rest on this base, on the foundation, so it better be solid. For the type of work we are assigned to perform, there is no other possible foundation besides Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the foundation of the work we do.

Part of Paul's assignment is to lay this foundation. And he does this not by the power of his own intelligence or natural abilities. No, it's "according to the grace of God given to me." It is a gift of grace to be called as a workman for God. Paul is called, and he is called to establish Jesus Christ as the only foundation.

Paul is laying a foundation that others are going to build on. And just as care was taken in laying the foundation, care must be taken in building upon the foundation. He cautions them, first, against laying another foundation or trying to build on another foundation. They are

tempted, as we have seen, to regard one of their favourite human teachers as a foundation to build upon. Paul warns against this.

But a second warning is given. Even if you are building on the true foundation of Jesus Christ, you must take care how you build.

12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— 13 each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.

So we have the foundation; next, we need quality materials and quality work to be done. Paul lists six building materials in two categories: one is a list of quality building materials, and the other is a list of weak, disposable building materials.

Now, the question is: Will those who build honour the foundation by spending much time and effort building with costly yet durable materials, or will they dishonour the foundation by building cheaply and quickly?

The church is built up by teaching and service. The building can happen with the flimsy materials of spiritual fads, worship gatherings that are not more than entertainment, sermons that barely scratch the surface of God's word. These are all cheap materials that will get burned up.

Or we can build the church by persistent prayer, bold proclamation, courageous witness, and passionate worship. These building materials will last. They will survive the testing fire.

God will inspect the work, and he is not a fallible government inspector who may or may not know what he's talking about. When God inspects the work, he does so with an all-knowing, all-powerful eye.

We're going to find out one day. We're going to find out who was taking shortcuts. We're going to find out who was framing the house with sticks they found in the ditch and covering the exterior with

styrofoam. The Day of Judgment will come, and on that day everything will be revealed.

So we're clear, the judgment that will happen with this work is not the judgment of who is a believer and who is not. This judgment is not about who will spend eternity with God and who will spend eternity in hell. This is a judgment of the quality of work done by those who are believers, servants of God.

The picture Paul paints here of fire revealing quality is one of a fire sweeping through a house. Everything that the fire comes to that can burn, it burns, and what's left is the stuff that won't burn. A house is built with various materials, and then a fire comes along and determines how much of that house was built with quality materials.

There are two possible results of this inspection...

14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

The results of this test will determine what kind of reward, if any, a builder receives. If your work stands up, there will be a reward. If we build today, for today, and we build things that we know can be built quickly and impress easily but are of poor quality, they will be burned up, and we will answer for this on that Day. And on that Day, we'll receive no reward.

Instead, today, be diligent to construct something that may not be immediately acknowledged as breathtaking but will eventually be revealed as solid and precious and worthy on the day of testing. You will not be rewarded on the basis of how popular you were; God does not need your popularity to accomplish his goals. God will not reward popularity, but faithfulness will bring an abundant reward.

Again, in this passage, everyone who has taken part in the building process is a true child of God. So we're not talking about a judgment of damnation for anyone in this scenario. This is a judgment of testing the work we've done. Who has built well and who has built poorly? The one who has built well will receive a reward, while the

one who has built poorly will escape from the burning house—and that itself will be his reward! He will get out, but he'll lose all his work.

Paul now pivots the metaphor and makes it more personal...

16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Earlier, he said, "You are God's field." Now, he says, "You are God's temple." The temple is no longer something that we go to; it is something that we are. It is made of us, of these living stones that Peter talks about. The church is a building made of people. And the Holy Spirit dwells in this building.

He needs to remind them of this. YOU are God's temple! In you, in us together, the presence of God dwells. The Spirit of God is present in us and among us. We, together, the community of believers, are God's temple. And that Spirit is most evident, to us and to the outside world, when we are living in unity, not when we are supplanting Christ as the leaders of his church. Not when we are honouring men in the place of Christ. Not when we are subdividing the body of Christ. But when we are unified in Christ and under Christ.

Unity is important to God. And he takes maintaining that unity very seriously as a result. Listen to what Paul tells them next...

17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

The church has a security system. It's not provided by ADT but by GOD. And when this security system does its job, it doesn't make a loud screech or shine a red light when it detects an intruder. Here's what it does: it destroys people. **"If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him."**

There is a reckoning happening right now among groups who claim to have apostles who possess apostolic authority equal to or greater

than the foundational Apostles. This is the kind of thing God warns about.

We have the ultimate security system. God is our security system. And the main thing that sets off this security system is those who cause division between God's people. God cherishes unity and despises division. Therefore, those who intentionally cause division are walking on extremely thin ice with God. Division is damaging to the witness of the church. And as we've seen numerous times, division was one of the things that the Corinthian church was very good at!

Paul writes this in Titus 3:10-11: **"As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned."** When someone divides, or afflicts, or hurts the church, God is going to take care of that. He will deal with the aggressors. Take comfort in that.

But also, be careful if YOU are the aggressor. If you are in the habit of causing division in the church, God's Word says that if you are pulling the church apart, God will pull you apart. Be warned.

If we have a right understanding of the church, we will gain a new appreciation for how serious division is. Paul has gone to great lengths to show the Corinthians how God's church is put together. The foundation is Jesus Christ. He is a foundation laid by a master builder. Other builders make their contributions, all working together with great skill and care to produce something that is durable and of good quality. It is to be one, unified, cohesive, connected unit.

And now the Corinthians are doing this... "Well, we like the Paul parts, so we're going to remove those and take them over here!" "Well, we like the Apollos bricks, so we're removing those and taking them over there and building something new!" "We're crazy about the fine roof that our man Cephas put on that house. We'll be taking that!"

What kind of house do you have now?!? You don't have one anymore. It's pulled apart, and the integrity of the structure is compromised. The building begins to fail in its main purposes: to be

a refuge and a sanctuary, to be a shelter, to be a place of order and worship and fellowship.

They were destroying this by pulling it apart, and here is Paul's warning in response: Anyone who purposefully destroys God's temple will be destroyed by God. These are strong words, and they are not just words of warning; they are words of accusation. He's not just saying, "If you do this, this will happen," he's also saying, "You're doing this RIGHT NOW, and this is what's about to happen if you don't stop!" These are very strong words.

Leon Morris captures the force of Paul's words in writing that "to engage in making divisions is to destroy the divine society and thus to invite God to destroy the sinner."

Causing division is a serious sin that results in very serious consequences. The church is God's cherished, living possession. Jesus is the foundation. And therefore it is folly to boast in men, which is also Paul's final emphasis...

4. Boasting In Leaders Is Foolish (v18-23)

Paul has said much about worldly wisdom and godly wisdom so far in this letter to the church in Corinth. He has been somewhat preoccupied with it. Reliance on worldly wisdom was the root problem that was leading to a lot of other dysfunction in the church.

So here he goes again...

18 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.

Don't be deceived.

Don't fool yourself.

Don't live in an illusion.

If, by your own estimation and in the eyes of the world around you, you are one of the wise ones, the clever ones, if you are on the cutting edge of new ideas and people look to you as someone who will lead humanity into a bright new future... Then throw your ideas away because they are actually foolishness. You need to trade all of that in for real wisdom. You need to become a fool in the eyes of the world if you want to be truly wise.

How would someone put this into practice? Give up the desire to have credibility with the world. Give up on the hope of having a seat at the table or of gaining widespread respect. You should do this, because...

19 For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," 20 and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

The Corinthians had this elite class of intellectuals and philosophers whom they admired, people who really did sound wise. Well, God finds their seemingly refined ideas foolish as well. As smart as these people appear to be, they are unable to understand the profound truths that are only revealed to those who have humbly received the Spirit of God. They can't understand the wisdom of God because they don't have the Spirit of God.

In making these statements, Paul is not, and I am not, minimizing their skill or expertise or competency in their fields of study. But if, in the end, they will not acknowledge and accept the wisdom of the cross, then all will be lost.

And all will be futile; it will all have been an exercise in folly. And this applies equally to those in the world as it does to those impostors who have infiltrated the church. These supposed ministers believe the gospel of self-improvement, self-actualization, in the singular pursuit of prosperity. These people market themselves as experts in the field of spirituality. But they seek not the glory of God, but their own glory, while appearing to seek the glory of God.

And, tragically, these types of people, who boast in themselves, are the very types of people that other people love to boast in. People

love to give this type of praise and allegiance, and certain types of "ministers" love to receive praise and honour. It is a sick cycle of giving and receiving praise that happens under the guise of Christian ministry. That's the veneer, the outer layer, the camouflage.

But this is all folly!

21 So, again, **let no one boast in men.**

Remember what he said back in 3:7 - "**Neither he who plants nor he who waters is *anything*.."**

And in that statement, we see what attitude a true minister of the gospel should have. He does not exalt himself. Rather, he downplays his own importance in the process of God's redemptive work. While it's true that faithfulness and obedience are honoured by God, a faithful minister of the gospel never uses this as leverage.

But the irony here is that this is the kind of leader these Corinthians actually want! It's that worldly wisdom coming into play again. This is the way the popular teachers and philosophers of that day acted. They taught for financial gain, and for respect, and popularity among the people. And because they are still so attached to that worldly wisdom, they assume that Paul will want to be honoured in the same way.

But Paul detests this arrangement; he'll have none of it! He recognizes that apart from God, he has no wisdom of his own. If a man is truly wise, it is only because he has submitted every thought and word and deed to the word of God. And it means that he is drawing on the same source of wisdom as every other person in whom the Spirit of God lives. When we recognize this, it removes any ground we might have for boasting, and it also makes pledging our allegiance to a human teacher look silly.

All true servants of God are drawing on and proclaiming the same wisdom. To prefer one over the other is to judge based on superficial differences, and deciding based on superficial differences is to use worldly wisdom instead of godly wisdom.

Don't boast in men. Honour one another, yes. But boast in one another, no. When we boast in men the way we are supposed to boast only in the Lord, we attribute the work of God to human beings. This is dangerous in every way! It is dangerous for you, believer, to place your faith in anyone but Jesus. And it is dangerous for the one receiving praise. No one's soul is strengthened by receiving praise that is due only to God.

And besides, there's no good reason to do any of this...

For 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 Christ's, and Christ is God's.

Don't boast in men; don't brag about a particular teacher BECAUSE... in Christ, those teachers, in a sense, belong to you.

Choose between Paul, Apollos, and Peter? Why would you do that? They are all yours... that and all these other things. What else does he tell them is theirs? The world, life and death, the present and the future... is he missing anything? I don't think so! There is no limit to the things that are ours in Christ.

They were still so worldly in their understanding of leadership, because everything they knew about leadership they had learned from the world. But they are learning from Paul that in the church, leaders are given authority, but that authority is given not for the purpose of *receiving* the services of others, but for the purpose of *providing* service **to** others.

Pastors and elders and other church leaders are servants of God for your good; we are his gift to you, but we don't belong on pedestals. We belong to you to serve you and equip you. And we, all together, belong to Christ. In fact, these things are all ours only *because* we belong to Christ. We have access to these things through Jesus Christ.

"all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

What a magnificent statement. From lowest (us) to highest (God) in a few words. From insignificant (us) to ultimately significant (God) in

one phrase. We underestimate the access we have through Christ. We belong to the one to whom everything else in the universe belongs!

And therefore... it is foolish to boast in men. Don't boast in men, because... all things are yours. You already have everything you need. All good teachers are for you; you are not for them.

CONCLUSION

Whenever you are tempted to idolize or venerate or pledge your allegiance to a minister of the gospel, pray to the Lord that you will be delivered from this impulse, from this delusion. To persist in this type of idolatry is to vandalize the temple of God.

Leader allegiance and the jealousy and strife that ensues are still evidence of fleshly thinking, of immaturity, of acting as mere humans instead of the Spirit-filled believers that we are. Paul issues strong warnings against this behaviour.

Leaders are still assigned servants. Paul teaches them that these ministers they seek to put on pedestals are merely fellow servants. The Corinthian people and these teachers all belong to God. Only God can do the miraculous work of giving spiritual life, and so it is wrong to attribute that accomplishment to human beings.

Leaders must still acknowledge and then build on the sure foundation of Jesus Christ. We are God's building. We are set on the foundation of Jesus Christ, and we are to build on that foundation with grace-acquired skill and quality materials so that on the day of testing, our work will survive. In 1979, Pink Floyd sang "All in all, you're just another brick in the wall." It was a protest against conformity, against the forces that sought to stifle individualism and self-expression. However, what they meant as a rebellion against an insult, we take as a glorious compliment! If we can be integrated into the Lord's temple as a single, unremarkable brick in the wall, what a wonderful honour!

Lastly, boasting in leaders is still foolish. Let me complete the Paul Washer quote I began with: "What you and I need to understand is that there is only one hero in this gospel story, and it is not me. It is not you. It is not John MacArthur. And it is not R.C. Sproul. It is not Charles Spurgeon... It is not [Jonathan] Edwards. It is Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ is seated upon a throne in full glory and full power, and [he] longs to show himself strong among men whose hearts belong to him."⁵

I think Paul Washer uttered these words not because this kind of hero-worship is rampant among us, but simply because it is present, even if only occasionally. And we, of all people, want to be scrupulous about avoiding this.

In my personal library are thousands of books, each one written by an author, many written by authors I admire, many are even written by the very men just mentioned in that Paul Washer quote. These are men that I hold in high regard. You might as well, and there is nothing wrong with that. These men are all gifts of grace to God's people.

But if I ever begin to replace the one foundation of Jesus Christ with the foundation of my favourite pastor/author/theologian, I am in grave danger. And if I am in grave danger, as your main teacher, so are you.

The folly of boasting in men must never take root among us. I must never boast in the men I admire, and you must never boast in me. But we must do our God-honouring best to appreciate, encourage, build up, and honour one another appropriately, as God's Word instructs us to do. And we must all, together, acknowledge and continually look to the one and only true foundation, who is Jesus Christ.

Let's pray.

⁵ <https://churchleaders.com/news/2214654-paul-washer-jonmacarthur.html/2>

Intro

1. Where are you most tempted to drift from gratitude for leaders into admiration that feels spiritually precarious?

Leader Allegiance Is Evidence of Immaturity (v1-4)

2. What are some common preferences about teachers that quietly become identity markers ("I follow ___")?

3. What would repentance look like for someone who realizes he's been fueling division through his allegiances?

Leaders Are Assigned Servants (v5-9a)

4. What's the difference between honouring leaders biblically and treating them as spiritual mediators or saviours?

5. How can a church cultivate genuine esteem for leaders while refusing to make them the reference point for salvation?

Leaders Know That Jesus Is The Foundation (v9b-17)

6. What are examples today of building with "gold/silver/precious stones," and what are examples of "wood/hay/straw"?

7. Why does Paul move from "building" language to "temple" language—what does that add to the warning and urgency?

Boasting In Leaders Is Foolish (v18-23)

8. Where do you see worldly definitions of wisdom and success sneaking into church life or leadership culture?

9. How does "let no one boast in men" challenge the way we talk about favourite teachers, platforms, and movements?

Conclusion

10. How can we appreciate faithful teachers as gifts of grace without replacing the foundation of Christ with a human foundation?

The content of this booklet was written by Michael Krahn, lead pastor of Community Bible Church in Ilderton, Ontario. We are a gospel-centered church devoted to the faithful teaching of Scripture, the building up of believers, and bearing witness to Christ in our community and beyond. To learn more, join us for a Sunday service, or connect with us directly, scan the QR code or visit: cbcilderton.ca/contact-us

