

Session 3



A Servant's Heart

THE POINT

Serve Christ with eternity in mind.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Americans have a long history of celebrity worship. It started with Florence Lawrence, “The Biograph Girl,” the first movie star in 1907. Since then, the obsession has only increased: athletes, influencers, reality TV stars, and even kids with YouTube channels now command fan bases that hang on their every word.

Sadly, celebrity worship has made its way into the church—but it’s not simply a modern problem. Take Polycarp (AD 69–155) for example. He was an early church father who was likely mentored by the apostle John. When he was martyred for his faith, his status skyrocketed. Believers honored “his bones, more valuable than precious stones, and more esteemed than gold.”¹ One letter even praised him with language that would normally be reserved for Christ: “The blessed Polycarp . . . to whom be glory, honour, majesty, and a throne eternal, from generation to generation. Amen.”²

There’s no place for celebrity worship in the church. We may have different roles, but no one is more important than another. Our shared calling is this: to fix our eyes on Christ as we serve Him humbly—together.

QUESTION 1:

Who’s a celebrity you always wanted to be like?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

1 CORINTHIANS 3:5-8

⁵ What then is Apollos? What is Paul? They are servants through whom you believed, and each has the role the Lord has given. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷ So, then, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. ⁸ Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

Paul opened chapter 3 by chastising the Corinthians for thinking like the world thinks, and he brought the issues of division and wisdom together. “For whenever someone says, ‘I belong to Paul,’ and another, ‘I belong to Apollos,’ are you not acting like mere humans?” (1 Cor. 3:4).

These men, to whom some were tempted to assign celebrity status, were nothing more than servants. It didn’t matter whether the task was glorious or something lowly; the role of the servant was to carry out the task. In fact, the Greek word *diakonos* is tied to the idea of someone eagerly pursuing an assigned task—like a runner chasing the finish line. Paul and Apollos weren’t comparing their roles. Instead, their focus was on pursuing their task and carrying out the role the Lord had given to each of them.

This principle applies to us today. Being a child of God also means being a servant of God. “Serve with a good attitude, as to the Lord and not to people” (Eph. 6:7). The danger arises when we compare our service to the service of others. Psychologists refer to the Social Comparison Theory—an idea that there is a drive

within us to evaluate ourselves by comparing ourselves to others. For the record, self-evaluation is good, but Scripture calls us to examine ourselves to ensure we are walking with God as we should. Jeremiah said it this way: “Let’s examine and probe our ways, and turn back to the LORD” (Lam. 3:40).

But doing a self-evaluation by comparing ourselves to others is faulty. Self-evaluation calls for us to consider our obedience to what God has called and equipped us to do. It’s not, “Am I serving like Paul? Am I serving like Apollos?” Instead, we should ask, “Am I doing what God wants *me* to do?”

Jesus often used agricultural metaphors, and Paul followed His example by comparing the church to a field. Even a city boy like me understands that there are different tasks to be done before the carrots are available for sale in the produce section. Someone’s got to plant the seeds, and someone’s got to see to it that the seeds and plants are sufficiently watered. But these tasks aren’t independent of one another. They are interdependent. The planting comes to nothing if someone doesn’t follow along and

water, and there's nothing to water if someone doesn't first plant! It's the same in the ministry of the church. No task is more important than another, and no one's task or role stands alone.

We're in this together—but for what purpose? We are working together to build up God's church and advance His kingdom. Catch that emphasis: *God's church. God's kingdom.* Notice in this passage the emphasis on God and His role. It's God who assigns *our* roles (v. 5); it's God who gives the growth (vv. 6-7).

There is diversity in our roles and ministries, but we are united for one purpose. "Now he who

plants and he who waters are one." When we work together with a single focus and purpose, the fruit we produce is healthy. Your role—and mine—is to serve where God has placed us.

QUESTION 2:

How can we guard against putting people on a pedestal in the church?

1 CORINTHIANS 3:9-11

⁹ For we are God's coworkers. You are God's field, God's building. ¹⁰ According to God's grace that was given to me, I have laid a foundation as a skilled master builder, and another builds on it. But each one is to be careful how he builds on it. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than what has been laid down. That foundation is Jesus Christ.

Paul continued his teaching that we all serve together, but he moved from the metaphor of planting a field to building a structure. These pair well together, because both emphasize that the tasks we do are done in partnership with one another and in line with the will of God. "For we are God's coworkers." Considering Paul's emphasis that both he and Apollos are fellow servants and coworkers, it would appear that Paul now lifted himself up above the others. "I have laid a foundation as a skilled master builder." Paul wasn't making a comparison as though he were a skilled master builder, and Apollos wasn't. We should read that verse in light of two things.

- **First, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2 about the source of wisdom.**

Godly wisdom comes through the Spirit. Paul was acknowledging that any skill or wisdom he had for building the church came through the empowering work of the Holy Spirit.

- **Second, note what Paul did with that skill and wisdom: he "laid a foundation."** God sent Paul to Corinth to share the gospel and plant the church. He founded the church and was responsible for laying the foundation that was God's church and witness in the city. But the work of building the church wasn't his alone.

Building a church—reaching, discipling, encouraging, and more—is not the task of one person. Pastor search committees are too often on a quest to find a new pastor who can "really grow

our church.” If you’re expecting your pastor to singlehandedly grow your church, you’re going to be highly disappointed. Your pastor’s role is not to do the work of ministry—that’s expected of the church for it to truly be the church. His role—his calling—is to equip *you* to do the work of ministry (Eph. 4:11-12). In other words, we’re in this together. I have a role in the building process, and you have a role.

As we build and do our part, we need to ensure we are building carefully on the right foundation. Careful construction happens when we follow the same blueprints—and the church’s blueprints are laid out in God’s Word. We study the example of the early church. We learn from Paul’s instructions to churches like Corinth. We learn from both the things they did well and the things they were chastised for. Paul’s reminder to the church in Corinth about the value of the Old Testament can also be said to us about both the Old and New Testaments: “These things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our instruction, on whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor. 10:11).

The Bible is our blueprint, and the Bible clearly points to the foundation of the church: “That foundation is Jesus Christ.” There is no church

without Jesus. Without His ministry, death, and resurrection as the center point of who we are and what we do, we are no different than any social club in your community.

Unfortunately, too many churches have lost sight of that. They may have started on the right foundation—building on the gospel of Christ—but over time, their emphasis shifted more and more toward their programs. At times, church leaders were elevated above the lordship of Christ. No church is immune from the damage that comes from forgetting the foundation. Even the wonderful church of Ephesus was later rebuked because they had “abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first” (Rev. 2:4-5). The message is clear: be careful to build on only one foundation: Jesus Christ.

QUESTION 3:

What are some ways you've seen God at work as a master builder in our church?

1 CORINTHIANS 3:12-15

¹² If anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw,
¹³ each one’s work will become obvious. For the day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire; the fire will test the quality of each one’s work. ¹⁴ If anyone’s work that he has built survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone’s work is burned up, he will experience loss, but he himself will be saved—but only as through fire.

Engage

SERVING WITH ETERNITY IN MIND

Choose one of the images below that represents service you might do with eternity in mind. Then write a prayer asking God to help you keep a Christ-centered focus.



My Prayer:

What we build (with the service we do) matters. Paul listed six potential building materials: “gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw.” If we were constructing a literal building, wood is a good, strong building material; gold and silver would not serve well. But in Paul’s analogy, gold, silver, and precious stones are the very things we want! When a building catches fire, it’s the wood, hay, and straw that are quickly consumed, but the precious metals remain. And that’s Paul’s point: build and do your work so that what you do remains. Let your service have eternal value—work that points to Christ, reflects His character, and makes a lasting spiritual impact.

There will come a day when Jesus returns, sets up His eternal kingdom, and we will stand before Him. At that unknown time in the future, our works will be examined. Paul later told the Corinthian believers, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Cor. 5:10). Let’s be clear: this judgment has nothing to do with the believer’s salvation and security in Christ. Paul was writing to *believers*, and for all who have trusted Christ, He took that judgment and punishment on Himself on the cross. We will stand before Him as His saved children, and it’s our actions and service for Him that will be examined. That’s why Paul could say, “If anyone’s work that he has built survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned up, he will experience loss, but he himself will be saved—but only as through fire.”

A lot of us will be surprised on that day. To continue with Paul’s analogy, we’re going to stand before God with what we built with our lives.

QUESTION 4:

How would you describe the things that will or won’t survive the fire?

I want to ensure that what I do not only matters—but matters for eternity. That will only happen as I build wisely on the foundation of Christ. For all of us, any work that exalts self or others over Christ or grows out of a self-serving motive will be burned up on that day. There is a reward involved. Paul didn’t supply us with any details regarding that reward, but he mentioned it twice (vv. 8,14). I have no doubt Paul’s motive in all that he did grew out of his love for Christ, but he wasn’t ashamed of the award that was included. As he told the Philippians, “I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God’s heavenly call in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14).

I have no idea what that reward entails, but I know it will be worth it—far beyond the level of my service and certainly beyond what I deserve. Let’s serve Christ with a humble heart. Serving Him won’t always be easy, but it will always be worth it. The joy we find in obedience now will pale in comparison to the reward He gives later.

QUESTION 5:

How can we ensure that what we do now matters for eternity?

LIVE IT OUT

How will you live out the calling to serve Christ?
Choose one of the following applications:

- **Pray.** Ask God to give you a servant's heart. Pray to serve without a focus on how you might benefit from the service but with a heart centered on honoring Christ by loving and helping others.
- **Ask.** If an area of service within the ministries of the church isn't immediately evident to you, ask your pastor or those in leadership how you might serve Christ and His church.
- **Encourage.** Others often see our strengths before we do. Think of someone who would serve well in a particular ministry of the church and encourage them to get involved. That might just be the nudge they need!



1. James Endell Tyler, *Primitive Christian Worship* (London: J.G.F. & J. Rivington, 1840), 94.
2. E.C.E. Owen, *Some Authentic Acts of the Early Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), 41.