

1 Corinthians Chapters 3-6: All Can Do Good Work

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on 1 Corinthians

The main problem in the Corinthian church was that of factionalism.

Cliques were forming under the banner of Paul's name versus the name of Apollos, another missionary to the Corinthian church. Paul would have none of this. He and Apollos are both workers serving the same end. In every workplace, Paul explains using an agricultural metaphor, the various workers have a common goal in mind, but they have different tasks in line with their abilities and calling. All are necessary and no one can do every necessary task.

By the grace of God, different people are able to play different roles in the world's workplaces. But specialization at times leads to interpersonal or interdepartmental factionalism. If Christians believe what Paul says about the God-given nature of different roles, perhaps we can take the lead in bridging dysfunctional divides in our organizations. If we are able simply to treat others with respect and value the work of people different from ourselves, we may be making significant contributions to our workplaces.

Paul introduces another workplace metaphor – that of a building under construction, in order to make a point about doing good work.

“According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.”
(1 Cor. 3:10–15)

This may be the most direct statement of the eternal value of earthly work in all of Scripture. The work we do on earth—to the extent we do it according to the ways of Christ—survives into eternity. Although Paul is writing about the work of building a Christian community, his words apply to all kinds of work. Whatever our work, it will be evaluated impartially by God. The final assize will be better than any performance review, since God judges with perfect justice. God is able to factor in our intent, our limitations, our motives, our compassion, and his mercy. God has called all believers to work in whatever circumstances they find themselves, and he has given us specific gifts to fulfill that calling. He expects us to use them responsibly for his purposes, and he will inspect our work. And to the

degree that our work is done in excellence, by his gifts and grace, it will become part of God's eternal kingdom. That should motivate us—even more than our employer's approval or our paycheck— to do as good a job as we possibly can.