

“Team Work or Turf Wars?”¹ (1 Corinthians 3:1-9)

What does it take to be successful in the world of team sports? Contrary to popular opinion, it is not tattoos, jail time, and steroids. It is teamwork! The greatest athletes in the world are only considered successful in the ultimate sense when they win the big one—the championship. However, the only way to accomplish this in team sports is to be a team player and to play on a team that is committed to teamwork.

Right now March Madness is going on. By this afternoon we will be down to the four best teams in college basketball. Next weekend these teams will match up against each other. I can assure you the team that plays together will stay together and win the NCAA Championship, a week from tomorrow evening.

Similarly, in the church of Jesus Christ *the team that serves together stays together and wins together*. However, the team that becomes consumed with individual accolades will falter and be forgotten. In 1 Cor 3:1-9, Paul is going to coach us to play up to our spiritual potential. He does this by laying out two coaching tips. First, Paul says...

1. Recognize your faulty perspective (3:1-4). Paul writes, “**And I, brethren,² could not speak³ to you⁴ as⁵ to spiritual men,⁶ but as to men of flesh,⁷ as to infants⁸ in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it**” (3:1-2a). The word translated “and I” (*kago*) ties back to 2:1-5, where Paul writes about his experience in Corinth.⁹ During his 18-month ministry in Corinth, Paul preached Christ and many Corinthians believed the message of the cross. Paul writes that when he was in Corinth, he spoke to them as “infants” because they were new believers. They were brand new to the faith! So he gave them milk to drink because they were spiritual babies.¹⁰ This is not meant to be a derogatory remark. Every Christian begins as a spiritual infant. There is nothing wrong with this.¹¹

One of our favorite family pastimes is to look through family photo albums and watch family home videos. It’s astonishing to look back on the lives of our children. It’s fun to see them when they were babies and toddlers and couldn’t walk or talk. Back then we didn’t expect much of them—they were babies. There’s nothing wrong with being a baby, but to remain a baby all your life is not healthy. Something is terribly wrong! This was the case in Corinth. Paul is writing them approximately five years after he first began his ministry there. By this time the Corinthians should have become spiritual children, teenagers, or even adults. Instead, they are still babies.

But does Paul have in mind the image of children who need to grow, or that of infantile adults who need to adjust their attitude?”¹² Many Bible students assume that by calling them “infants” Paul intends to emphasize their need to grow. Yet, Paul’s contrast is not between infancy and maturity but between infancy and spirituality. It is more likely that Paul is rebuking his readers, not because they are babes still and had not progressed further, but because they were in fact being childish—a condition contrary to being spiritual. The problem is not that they have failed to progress but that they have failed to comprehend, in particular, the message of the cross (cf. 1:18-25).¹³

This view is confirmed in 3:2b-4, as Paul moves from the past to the present: “**Indeed, even now you are not yet¹⁴ able, for¹⁵ you are still fleshly.¹⁶ For since there is jealousy and strife¹⁷ among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not mere men?**”¹⁸ Paul is shocked that the Corinthians are still on a diet of milk. There has been ample time for spiritual attitudes and actions to develop. By now these Christians should be spiritual, but they are still fleshly infants. Paul expected them to be able to receive “solid food,” yet they are still on Gerber. However, the “solid food” is not advanced and complicated doctrine; it is godliness of living. The term refers to spiritual, not necessarily theological maturity.¹⁹ The “solid food” that Paul refers to is not deeper doctrinal truths but rather the word of the cross.²⁰

This is important to understand because many people think they are mature since they know the Bible and are deep thinkers. Nothing could be further from the truth! God is more interested in our attitudes and actions. While knowledge is certainly valuable, obedience is far more important. To what extent are you presently obeying what you know about God's Word? To the degree that you are obedient to what you know, you are a spiritual Christian. Do your attitudes and actions presently reflect Christ? We must recognize that our attitudes and actions are a greater indication of spirituality than our ability to memorize Scripture, study the Bible, and talk theology.

In this context, behaving in the "flesh" means "living in rivalry and disunity within the church."²¹ Much to Paul's chagrin, the Corinthians were behaving like unbelievers (cf. Rom 8:5-9) in their speech and attitudes. They have the Spirit, but at this junction they are neither thinking nor acting as if they do.²² Their overall position might be spiritual but their practice of quarrelling and their admiration of pagan intellectualism is unspiritual.²³

In 3:3, Paul brings up two sins that can destroy the church: "jealousy and strife."²⁴ The interesting thing about these sins is that they are not considered serious sins in the church. Yet, Paul saw the spiritual danger that could tear the church apart. These sins are made manifest in 3:4, through party divisions. The apostle Paul had been the evangelist who founded the church, and there were those who were loyal to him, who trusted and respected him, who liked his style. Apollos came after him, and there were people who gathered around him because they preferred his teaching.²⁵ As a result, jealousy and strife broke out. Paul says this is naive, dangerous, and contrary to everything God wants for us. It is sinful for church members to compare pastors, or for believers to follow human leaders as disciples of men, and not disciples of Jesus Christ. The "personality cults" in the church today are in direct disobedience to the Word of God. Only Jesus Christ should have the place of preeminence (Col 1:18).

It is interesting that in 3:3 Paul returns to the problem that he began to address in 1:10-17. It would seem that Paul does this to create suspense. If the Corinthians are wise and spiritual they will see the relevance of the intervening discussion about "the word of the cross" (1:18-2:16).²⁶ Again, Paul is not chastising the Corinthians because they were babes in the faith and had not progressed like they should. Throughout this book he is going to delve into deep doctrine (e.g., ethical conduct, marriage and celibacy, freedom in relation to food offered to idols, the Lord's Supper, the use of spiritual gifts in the church, and the resurrection). This book is full of theological meat. Rather, Paul rebukes the Corinthians because their attitudes were childish—completely incompatible with the fact that they were people who had the Spirit of God.²⁷ They are bickering over who the best preacher is.

How should this type of division be handled? Paul explains in Titus 3:9-11: "But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned." When Paul says we are to "reject" such a person, he means we are to break fellowship with such a person (cf. Matt 18:15-17). Paul takes seriously divisions that can creep up in the life of the church.

Consequently, in this section Paul rebukes the Corinthians for behaving in an unspiritual fashion. Apparently, he is concerned that some of us are still in the nursery when we should be in the infantry. This doesn't happen by mere Bible knowledge. There must be a change in our attitudes and actions. Sadly, many of us think that we will grow spiritually as we age. Maturity requires time but has nothing to do with age. Maturity and spirituality are reflected in how we come together as a church family.

[After some constructive criticism, Paul turns next to a positive explanation of how his readers should view himself and his fellow workers.]

2. Remember your role in God's work (3:5-9). Since the Corinthians were guilty of preacher worship, Paul must cut himself and Apollos down to size. In 3:5a Paul writes, **“What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants²⁸ through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one.”²⁹** Paul opens this section with two rhetorical questions that begin with the word “what.”³⁰ By asking “what” rather than “who,” Paul focuses on the place or position to which the Corinthians’ leaders have been elevated, rather than upon the personalities of each. If the Corinthians had been answering these questions they would have responded: “My leader is my everything! My leader is my teacher, my counselor, my guide, my confidence, my pride.” Paul brings the Corinthians back down to earth. Speaking of himself and Apollos, the two greatest leaders the Corinthians have known, he says, in effect, “We are not heroes, to be adored; we are not gods, to be worshipped; we are not masters, to be blindly followed. We are simply servants of God, who by God’s grace and appointment were allowed to be instrumental in you trusting in Christ.”

Paul says he and Apollos are simply “servants.” In time, believers would attach the term “servant” (*diakonos*) to a church office (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8, 12), but it began as a stock term for common laborers, like table waiters (John 2:5) and palace attendants (Matt 22:13). Thus, Paul is not claiming elevated status but is embracing lowly servility. He is saying, “Look, I’m just a waiter who bussess tables. Nobody builds a movement around a food service worker! Apollos and I were just waiters God used as servants to bring food to you. So don’t try to honor us; it’s totally misplaced. Give your praise to the One who prepared the food, who understood what your spiritual needs were, and then delivered it through us. The Lord is the One who gave the opportunity for us and for you. God sovereignly placed you where He knew you needed to be to hear the gospel, and He put us there with you. Therefore, why prefer one waiter over another? This is foolish.”

This should serve as a humbling reminder to us: We are servants, waiters who wait upon God and His people. What a great reminder that we should treat waiters and busboys with respect and honor, because that is what we all are in the spiritual realm.

Paul continues his clarification in 3:6-7: **“I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then³¹ neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.”³²** The point indicated above in 3:5 is illustrated in 3:6. Paul “planted” as he introduced the Corinthians to faith in Christ and taught basic discipleship truths to those who believed (4:15; Acts 18:1, 17).³³ Apollos “watered” as he followed up Paul in Corinth, and fortified, fed, and nurtured the work that Paul had begun (Acts 18:24-19:1).

There is an operative word in these verses. It is the word “one.” This word helps explain God’s mathematics. One plus one equals one. Ten plus ten equals one. One hundred plus one hundred equals one. Regardless of how many people are serving, God is the One that makes things grow.³⁴ Paul states this twice in 3:6-7. He wants us to understand that “unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it” (Ps 127:1). We should dream and plan for ministry. We should want and expect our church and our ministries to grow. Nevertheless, growth is God’s business, not ours. God is the One who causes the growth! Therefore, we must pray and trust Him for it. Are you praying for the growth and health of your church? If not, please begin doing so today.

By using the illustration of a garden, Paul helps us to understand that he and Apollos are not gardeners, they are garden tools. They are shovels and rakes. Now no one fawns over a garden tool, right? Most people don’t walk into a beautiful garden and say, “Look at that shovel!” “Look at that rake!” Instead, they focus on the garden and the gardener. Likewise, since we are mere garden tools we ought to direct people to the Gardener. He is the One whom has done all the work! The mark of a successful servant is: Does he or she point others to the Gardener (see John 3:30)?

Paul continues his illustration in 3:8 with these words: **“Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.”**³⁵ Again, Paul emphasizes that all servants are one. There are no celebrities. One garden tool is not better than the other. Yet, Paul does state that “each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.” In the end, servants are to do all that they do for Jesus Christ, for one day He will evaluate their lives. On that day, He will reward us according to our own labor. It should also be noted that Paul used the singular of the word “labor” or “work.” The point is: We are not rewarded for our success; we are rewarded for our faithfulness. Is your life characterized by labor and faithfulness? If so, you will receive³⁶ a reward.

Paul closes this passage in 3:9 with these words: **“For we are God’s³⁷ fellow workers;³⁸ you are God’s field,³⁹ God’s building.”** Paul first reaffirms that he and Apollos are both “fellow workers” of God. They do not work *with* Him” (see 2 Cor 6:1), but *for* Him. Hence, God wants us to glorify Him in and through our ministries.

Paul then switches his imagery from that of agriculture to that of architecture when he calls the Corinthians “God’s field” and then “God’s building.”⁴⁰ God is the focus of this passage. His name shows up six times in the last five verses. He is the only One worthy of glory.

Back at the turn of the century, there was a plague of locusts in the plains of the United States. In a matter of a few days, that swarm of locusts swept over the states of Nebraska, Iowa, and Kansas. In less than a week, they did over five hundred million dollars worth of damage (in the currency of that time). Locusts don’t have a king to get them organized. They don’t have a draft board to call them into ranks. By instinct the locust knows it has to be in community with other locusts. When that occurs, they are able to topple kingdoms. The wisdom of the locust is the wisdom that tells us we must have community.⁴¹

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Scripture Reference

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Romans 7:14-25

Romans 8:1-4

Galatians 5:16-26

Galatians 6:1-5

Hebrews 5:11-14

Ephesians 4:11-16

Study Questions

1. When did I *first* believe in Jesus Christ as my Savior? How long did it take me to grow from infancy to childhood? How am I doing spiritually at the moment? Am I a spiritual infant, child, teenager, or adult? What category would my immediate family members place me in? If the Lord were to examine my progress, what label would He attach to me? How can I begin to adjust my attitudes and actions so that I can naturally progress in my maturity?
2. What “fleshly” attitudes and perspectives do I currently have that are holding me back from being the mature Christian God has called me to be? Is there anyone in my life who I could ask to hold me accountable? Will I be courageous enough to transparently share my struggles?
3. In what areas of my church experience do jealousy and strife creep in? Is there someone who has gifts and abilities that I want? Do I struggle with the person who seems to have all the friends that I wish I could have? Will I make a commitment this week to release my fleshly emotions to the Lord?
4. Do I honestly see myself as Christ’s servant? Where am I most prone to be prideful? How might the Lord seek to humble me in this perceived area of strength? Will I attempt to humble myself so that the Lord doesn’t have to humble me? Read Matthew 23:11-12; James 4:6-10; and 1 Peter 5:5-6.
5. What responsibilities do I currently have in cultivating God’s garden? Do I see myself as a valuable part of God’s work in this world? How am I currently partnering with other people to accomplish God’s work? Why is teamwork so important? Can I honestly say that I am a team player or am I a one-man or one-woman show?

Notes

¹ This title came from Bruce N. Fisk, *First Corinthians: Interpretation Bible Studies* (Westminster John Knox: 2000), 14.

² For the fifth time, Paul addresses the believers in Corinth as “brothers” (1:10, 11, 26; 2:1; see comments at 1:26). In spite of their deficiencies, he still considers them part of the family of God. Verlyn D. Verbrugge, “1 Corinthians” in the *Revised Expositors Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, awaiting publication), 58. See also Harvey who notes that vocatives (*adelphoi*, “brethren”) sometimes mark transition points within a letter-body, and this seems to be the case in 1 Cor 3:1 (see also 1 Cor 1:26; 2:1; 4:6). See John Harvey, *Listening to the Text: Oral Patterning in Paul’s Letters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 159.

³ Paul shifts back to the first person singular, and his wording purposely recalls 1 Cor 2:1 (*kago, adelphoi*) and 2:6 (*laloumen*). David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 105. See also Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 287.

⁴ Paul’s use of the plural pronoun “you” (three times in 3:1-3) indicates that he was addressing the whole church, not just a faction within it (cf. 1:10). The actions of many in the congregation had defiled the whole body. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 123; Marion L. Soards, *1 Corinthians: New International Biblical Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 67-68; Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 132.

⁵ Three times in 1 Cor 3:1, Paul uses the word “as” (*hos*) to state that he was not able to address the Corinthians “as spiritual people, but as merely human, as infants in Christ” (italics mine). The word “as” introduces the distinctive characteristic of a person. Hence, while Paul labeled the Corinthians as *nepiois* (“infants”), he nowhere calls into question the genuine nature of their conversion. He appears confident that they are indeed “in Christ.” Nonetheless, it is equally clear that the Corinthians are not thinking or behaving as mature believers. See BDAG s.v. *hos* 3a, Electronic Ed.

⁶ In this context, the term “spiritual” (*pneumatikos*) denotes people who have received and obey the leading of the Spirit of God. Yet, the Corinthians are not behaving in a spiritual fashion, so Paul cannot address them as “spiritual” (i.e., healthy believers).

⁷ [In verses 1 and 3] Paul uses two different words. The word used in verse 1 is *sarkinos* and the one used twice in verse 3 is *sarkikos*. Some see no difference in the meaning of the two words, but probably most do. If there is a difference, it is this: *Sarkinos* means “made of flesh,” that is, weak but without attaching any blame to that condition. In the case of the Corinthians, their weakness was due to their immaturity. On the other hand, *sarkikos* does have an ethical or moral connotation. It means “to be characterized by the flesh, something that is willful and blameworthy.” The first word means “made of flesh,” while the second means “controlled by the flesh.” See Charles Ryrie, *So Great Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1989), 61.

⁸ As Clark states, “A man is spiritual whom the Spirit possesses but not all regenerate persons exhibit the Spirit’s working to the same degree...*Nephos* unlike *brophe* does not always mean infant; it is a more elastic word and applies to youths as well. *Nephos* indicates the possibility of growth and therefore of different degrees of growth so that there can be as many classes of Christians as there are individual Christians.” Gordon H. Clark, *1 Corinthians* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, [1975] 1991), 59.

⁹ The Greek word *kago* is used in 1 Cor 2:1, 3. In 3:1, *kago* is emphatic, and also indicates a transition (cf. 2:1). Paul has just finished writing, “But we have the mind of Christ” (2:16b). He now contrasts himself and the apostles with the Corinthians.

¹⁰ See Paul’s maternal instincts in 1 Thess 2:7 and Gal 4:19.

¹¹ Alan F. Johnson, *1 Corinthians*. IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 71; Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1958] 1990), 61.

¹² Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 289.

¹³ James Francis, James. “As Babies in Christ: Some Proposals Regarding 1 Cor. 3:1-3.” *Journal for the Study of New Testament* 7 (1980): 43, 57.

¹⁴ Nevertheless, the word *oupo* (“not yet”) does afford the prospect of a possible advance. Paul holds out hope that God will begin to change the attitudes and actions of his Corinthian readers. But he recognizes that his rebuke is part of the maturing process. Hans Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 72.

¹⁵ It is worth noting the three usages of the word “for” (*gar*) in 1 Cor 3:3-4.

¹⁶ The *NET* captures Paul’s thought with the translation “for you are still *influenced* by the flesh” (italics mine). This rendering removes the confusion of “you are still fleshly” (e.g., *NASB, HCSB*) or “you are still of the flesh” (e.g., *ESV, NRSV*). As those who are “in Christ,” they are not “of the flesh,” although the flesh was certainly influencing their behavior. Fee rightly comments: “Being human is not a bad thing in itself, any more than being *sarkinoi* [fleshly] is (v. 1). What is intolerable is to have received the Spirit, which makes one more than merely human, and to continue to live as though one were nothing more.” Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 127.

¹⁷ Later in his letter (1 Cor 11:18), Paul uses the term *schisma* (“division, dissension, schism”) to describe the results of their internal strife (cf. 1:10, *schisma*).

¹⁸ John Calvin observed, “But he [Paul] does not mean they were completely carnal, without even a spark of the Spirit of God, but that they were still much too full of the mind of the flesh, so that the flesh prevailed over the Spirit, and, as it were, extinguished His light. Although they were not entirely without grace, yet they had more of the flesh than of the Spirit in their lives, and that is why he calls them carnal. That is plain enough from his adding immediately, that they were ‘babes in Christ,’ for they would not have been babes, if they had not been begotten, and this begetting is the work of the Spirit of God.” John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 121.

¹⁹ See Michael Eaton, *Preaching Through the Bible: 1 Corinthians 1-9* (Kent, England, 1998), 42 and R.T. Kendall, *When God says, “Well Done!”* (Scotland: Christian Focus, 1993), 23. *Contra* Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the First Epistles to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 101. Marion Soards explains: “Having drunk the milk of the gospel, the Corinthians could not feed on the solid food of the cross of Christ. They could not digest the solid food of the message of the cross because they were looking for a wisdom different from God’s revealed wisdom. Their improper concerns left them immature, unable to be nourished by the bountiful banquet inherent in the gospel.” Soards, *1 Corinthians*, 67. See also Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 125; Nigel Watson, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*: Epworth Commentaries New Edition (London: Epworth [1992] 2005), 32.

²⁰ The contrast between milk and solid food seems to be a transparent metaphor for rudimentary and advanced teaching (cf. Heb 5:12-14), but its meaning is to be governed by how Paul uses it in this context. See Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 107.

²¹ Hays 1997:48-49. Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 72 further clarifies, “Here Paul is thinking not so much of personal bickering (although these are also included, cf. 1 Cor 6:1ff) as of the ecclesiastical *erides* (“quarrels”) of 1 Cor 1:11.” Fee states that this specific carnality relates to division. However, he believes Paul may be addressing another schism of people in chapter 12 than in chapters 1-4. The church is big enough to deal with various contentions. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 129.

²² D.A. Carson, “Reflections on Christian Assurance.” *Westminster Theological Journal* 54.1 (1992): 8.

²³ Eaton, *1 Corinthians 1-9*, 42.

²⁴ See Rom 13:13: “Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife [*eris*] and jealousy [*zelos*].” These are the exact Greek words used in 1 Cor 3:3. The order is merely reversed. *Eris* and *Zelos* are also used together in a vice list in Gal 5:20.

²⁵ While the Corinthians claim to follow Paul and Apollos, they are not following the example of these two men who are humble and focused on cooperation rather than competition (see 3:5-9a).

²⁶ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 110.

²⁷ As Fee says, “The Corinthians are involved in a lot of unchristian behavior; in that sense they are ‘unspiritual,’ not because they lack the Spirit but because they are thinking and living just like those who do.” Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 123.

²⁸ “Observe how, because Paul wants to impress the Christians with the fact that he and Apollos are simply servants, he avoids using the first person plural, ‘we are servants’ but leaves out the verb, so that the implication is that he and Apollos and whatever other workers there might be are no more than servants.” Harold W. Mare, *1 Corinthians*. The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, [1976] 2001): Electronic Ed.

²⁹ The last phrase is taken to refer to each believer’s faith, but more likely it should be translated as “the Lord gave him his ministry.” It refers to each person’s ministry whether Paul’s or Apollos’s.

³⁰ The neuter *ti* (“what”) is used instead of *tis* to focus attention on the function or significance of these men, rather than on their persons. The neuter also anticipates the word “anything” (*ti*) in 1 Cor 3:7—“neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything.” In this context, the word “what” (*ti*) indicates disdain. Additionally, the conjunction *oun* (“then”) in “what then” (*ti oun*) indicates a conclusion drawn from the party division about Paul and Apollos.

³¹ That God is the primary worker is made prominent with the result clause beginning with *hoste* (“so then”) in 3:7. See C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*: Harper’s New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 85; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 132.

³² Paul uses the aorist tenses of *epheusea* (“planted”) and *epotisen* (“watered”) for his planting and Apollos’s watering compared with the imperfect *auxanen* (“to cause to grow”) which he employs for God’s continual action of causing growth (1 Cor 3:6). Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 2 ed. International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914), 57.

³³ The image of the people of God as God’s planting has many biblical echoes (Exod 15:17; Num 24:5-6; Isa 5:1-7; 61:3; Jer 2:21; Amos 9:15).

³⁴ Kendall, *When God says, “Well Done!”*, 24.

³⁵ The idea of a reward according to one’s work runs throughout the NT (e.g., Matt 16:27; Rom 2:6; 2 Cor 11:15; 2 Tim 4:14; 1 Pet 1:17; Rev 2:23; 20:12-13; 22:12; cf. 1 Enoch 100:7; 2 Enoch 44:5; Pseudo-Philo, Bib. Ant. 310).

³⁶ The future tense of “receive” suggests that it will be an eschatological reward at the day of judgment.

See also Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 132.

³⁷ The emphatic position of the Greek word *theos* (“God”) in all three of its occurrences in 1 Cor 3:9 makes it clear that Paul is stressing *God* as the one to whom the “servants,” “field,” and “building” belong.

³⁸ The term “fellow-worker” (*sunegros*) is used in Rom 16:3, 9, 21; 2 Cor 1:24; 8:23; Phil 2:25; 4:3; Col 4:11; 1 Thess 3:2; Phlm 1, 24; 3 John 8. See also 2 Macc 8:7; 14:5. The Greek word could mean fellow workers with God, or fellow workers together in service of God. Here, Paul *may* be saying that he and Apollos *and* God are in association with one another in the work of the ministry. (The *NIV* adopts this understanding with the translation, “For we are God’s fellow workers.” See also *KJV*, *NJB*.) However, it seems better to understand this sentence to mean Paul and Apollos were fellow workers or servants *for* God. Elsewhere Paul spoke of believers as “fellow workers” *with* God (2 Cor 6:1), but that was not his point here. Daniel Wallace explains, “It is better to see an ellipsis of ‘with one another’ and to see *theo* as a possessive gen. (thus, “we are fellow-workers [with each other], belonging to God”). Contextually, the argument in this section is very explicit: Paul and Apollos are nothing, but God is the one who brought about both salvation and sanctification (3:5-7). Syntactically, there are other examples of sun- prefixed nouns taking an *implied* gen. of association while the gen. mentioned in the text functions in another capacity (cf. Acts 21:30)—cf., e.g., Rom 11:17 (fellow-sharers [with the Jewish believers] *of the root*); 1 Cor 1:20; 9:23; Eph 3:6; 1 Pet 3:7. (In 1 Thess 3:2 both genitives are used: one association, one possessive [‘our brother and co-worker for God.’] This text closely parallels 1 Cor 3:9 in thought and word [cf. Phil 1:7]). Thus it is likely that the apostle is not claiming that he and Apollos are God’s partners, but his servants. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 130.

³⁹ The image of the people of God as a field draws on a well-known tradition concerning Israel, perhaps deriving initially from Israel as God’s vineyard (Isa 5:7; Ezek 36:9).

⁴⁰ Such dual images have their root in the OT’s description of the task to which God called his servant and prophet Jeremiah: “to uproot” and to “tear down,” and later “to build” and “to plant” (Jer 1:10; cf. 24:6; Sir 49:7). See Verbrugge, *1 Corinthians*, 81.

⁴¹ Preaching Today Citation: Haddon Robinson, “The Wisdom of Small Creatures,” Preaching Today, Tape No. 93.