

Worksheet 3: 1 Corinthians 2:6–3:23

Introduction:

In this week's passage, Paul continues to address the problem of the competing factions within the leadership of the Corinthian church (1:10–4:21). In last week's passage, Paul points out that his initial ministry amongst the Corinthians was not characterized by human wisdom (2:4). In 2:6, he points out that his ministry was characterized by wisdom, except that this wisdom is of a different kind. Unlike human wisdom, the wisdom that Paul taught was spiritual—it is the “wisdom of God” that can only be received by spiritual people through the revelation of the Holy Spirit (2:7, 10).

In chapter 3, Paul proceeds from contrasting the two kinds of wisdom to directly rebuking the Corinthians for their factionalism. Factionalism shows that the Corinthians are immature (3:1–4), and that they misunderstand the function of Christian ministry in their midst (3:5–9). In 3:10–15, Paul describes ministry through the metaphor of a construction supervisor. Here he explains that God is the final judge of faithfulness, not the Corinthians. Not only does God evaluate ministry, but He also takes the holiness of His people seriously—believers who defile themselves or others will be destroyed (3:16–17). After this warning, Paul challenges the Corinthians to avoid boasting in themselves and to instead rejoice in the riches they already have in Christ (3:18–23).

Abbreviated Outline¹ (current passage in bold):

- I. Introduction (1:1–9)
- II. Response to Oral Reports (1:10–6:20)
 - A. A Proper Perspective on Christian Ministers and Ministry (1:10–4:21)
 - 1. The Problem of Disunity (1:10–17)
 - 2. The Sin of Dependence on Personal Abilities (1:18–25)
 - 3. The Sin of Personal Boasting (1:26–31)
 - 4. Paul, a Model of Dependence on God (2:1–5)
 - 5. **Spiritual Wisdom versus Worldly Wisdom (2:6–16)**
 - 6. **The Immaturity of the Corinthians (3:1–9)**
 - 7. **God's Evaluation of Christian Ministry (3:10–17)**
 - 8. **Final Argument Against Human Boasting (3:18–23)**
 - 9. Paul's Example of Christian Ministry (4:1–21)
 - B. Immorality in the Church (5:1–13)
 - C. Disputes Between Believers (6:1–11)
 - D. Limitations on Freedom in Christ (6:12–20)
- III. Responses to a Letter from the Corinthians (7:1–16:4)
- IV. Conclusion (16:5–24)

¹ The complete outline is available on the Meadowlands Baptist Church website (www.meadowlandsbaptist.ca). Adapted from Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, The Cross, and The Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville, Tenn: B & H Academic, 2009), 482–483.

Interpretation: *Read through the passage, and then review and make notes under the questions below.*

1. Paul says that the wisdom of God is “in a mystery” in 2:7, and that if the rulers of this age had known the mystery they “would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (2:8). How does the mystery of the cross display the wisdom and majesty of God?

2. What does it mean for God to reveal the mystery to us through the Spirit (2:10-12)?

3. Paul explains that without the Spirit, it is impossible to understand spiritual truth (2:14). On the other hand, “he who is spiritual judges all things” (2:15). What does it mean to “judge all things” as a spiritual person? [Note: you may find it helpful to consult multiple translations on this phrase.]

4. What does it mean to be “carnal” rather than “spiritual” people (3:1)? How does the nearby context help you understand this verse?

5. What is the significance of 3:7–8 to Paul’s rebuke of the Corinthian’s factionalism?

6. What does it mean for the church at Corinth to be God’s “field” and His “building” (3:9)?

7. What does it mean for the church at Corinth to be the “temple of God” (3:17)?

8. What does Paul mean by “let him become a fool that he may become wise” (3:18)?

Application: *Take time to reflect on the implications of this passage for your own life today.*

9. What does this passage mean for your walk with the Lord?

10. How does this passage challenge the way you think about situations in daily life? What should you do about that?
