

What Do We Have To Be Proud Of? (Part One)

We Are Not Original

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Recently, in an ongoing social media discussion among writers about creativity, one commenter asserted, "Originality is overrated. We should care more about saying what is true, doing what is good, and making what is beautiful than simply pushing for originality. Nothing is new under the sun. [He is a Christian, so he was quoting there Ecclesiastes 1:9. And he goes on, he says] And everything is derivative."

Nothing is new under the sun and everything is derivative. Our world is filled with people who bill themselves as originals. You see them in sports, in movies, in the arts, in politics, in business. And you see it on TV, Instagram, if you go there, TikTok, if you go there, YouTube, Facebook, any other social media and media that is out there.

This commenter later pointed out that most of these originals, who think they are unique and coming up with something that has never been seen before, are often called unicorns in this day and age. They usually become viewed as such—as originals, as unicorns—by flouting received truth and tradition and publicly acting out their transgressive and heretical ideas, pushing boundaries of acceptability. Maybe that was a mouthful, so I will repeat it. He said that these unicorns, these originals, usually become viewed as such by flouting received truth and tradition and publicly acting out their transgressive and heretical ideas, pushing the boundaries of acceptability. In other words, if you want to really shorten that into just a little soundbite, they are original by being bad.

Now, everyone is unique by their chromosomal makeup. Our DNA is different from anyone else in this world, and that makes each person unique in that way, and individual. But while that biological reality remains true, meaning there is no one quite like you in terms of your DNA, our non-biological originality, that is, the way we think, the way we speak, the way we act, soon vanishes. I mean, by the time we are, you know, knee high, we

are already beginning to lose our originality, at least in terms of our non-biological ways of being.

So despite starting out as unique beings created in God's image, as He tells us in Genesis 1:26, we quickly absorbed the prevailing attitudes, views, and values of this world. So before long, probably while we are still in knee pants, we have conformed to this evil world. We behave selfishly and strive like everyone else, against everyone else, and against God. Remember what Paul says in,

Romans 3:23 For all have sinned and [have] fall[en] short of the glory of God.

So trying to be original through transgressive behavior is the farthest thing from being unique, because everybody is doing it. It is normal. (Hey, Bill, it's par for the course.) It is simply what everybody else is doing. They are not being unique. They are not being original. They are being normal human beings. They just may be on the edge a bit more.

Now, this proud attitude of believing oneself to be original, unique, special, or superior, if you will, is not new. And like I said, it is everywhere. We need to be wary of it, because it is a fundamental desire of human nature to try to make itself unique, original, special, or superior. That is one of the prime features of human nature: it always seeks its own glory, and it comes out as pride and arrogance, and this hubristic behavior that we do.

The apostle Paul discusses this failing in the opening chapters of the book of I Corinthians. You may want to be turning there. We will be staying in I Corinthians for most of the sermon. What is happening in the early chapters of I Corinthians is that Paul is attempting to puncture the Corinthians' distorted view of themselves. This distorted view was that they had superior knowledge, wisdom, and judgment, and all of this had gone to their heads.

And so he is making an argument through these first several chapters (we are going to be going through the first four chapters in some detail) but Paul spends these first few chapters making this argument so that he can get to the point that he wants to make to them, which is: where did they go wrong? What do they need to do to stop being this way? And so he wants to get them

to the point where he could actually speak to them and give them the wisdom from God that they needed to stop being this way and start listening to him, to Apollos, later to Timothy, so that they will not screw up their lives royally, because they were going in the wrong direction, the exact wrong direction that they should have been going in. And he had to figure out a way that would appeal to their mind to accept what he had to say.

And so he has to make this fairly rigorous and deep argument over several chapters to get to the point where he finally puts the pin into their balloon and helps them to see where they have gone wrong. So their self-esteem was off the charts. They did not think much of the apostle Paul, and so he has to come up with these arguments to show how wrong they were. So we will follow these arguments in I Corinthians 1, 2, and 3, especially as they lead to his solution in I Corinthians 4.

Now it will help to understand the direction of Paul's thinking if we understand that the opening chapters of this epistle revolve around the subject of wisdom. Wisdom is the principal idea here that he is talking about. He is comparing the world's wisdom with God's wisdom, and he more than implies that they have nothing in common, that they are two very separate things, little overlap, and one is definitely superior to the other. He also implies that God's people must wean themselves from human wisdom and seek and learn and grow in godly wisdom during the process of conversion.

God's elect do not have God's wisdom in full, you know, upon baptism. It is something that they must grow in. And I think some of us, people who are older in the faith, think, I just have a tablespoon of it after all these years. We oftentimes do not think about thinking the way God does, and we get ourselves into trouble. We have trials, we have tests, we make bad decisions, we ruin things because we are not acting with godly wisdom. And so it is our mission throughout our conversion to grow in godly wisdom.

Becoming children of God requires us to change our entire way of thinking. I should probably repeat that, because it is a very vital concept: *becoming children of God requires us to change our entire way of thinking*. Most of us still think the way the old man did, at least in parts. We may have changed our thinking about this, that, or the other thing, but in most cases we still drag along the old man all the time, and he is constantly telling us what to do

in our minds, and it is the wrong advice, because the old man is the evil, sinful man, not the godly man.

And so putting on the new man, as the apostle Paul terms it, is this process of changing the way we think, from the way we thought before we were called—inspired by Satan and the ways of this world—to the point that we actually begin to think in a godly way, like Christ thinks. And that takes a long time. It takes a lot of study. It takes a lot of meditation. It takes a lot of repentance and making ourselves do that.

Let us start in the book of I Corinthians, chapter 1. We will start in verse 10 and we will go down through verse 13. This is where he really begins his argument. In the earlier parts, in the first nine verses, he throws a few crumbs in there about things, we do not need to be too worried about not having caught them. Just that I will mention one: Paul says here, in verse 7,

I Corinthians 1:7 [They had] come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He assures them that God had, once He had called them, given them gifts. There was no doubt about that. He does not keep gifts away from us. Now, they may not be the gifts we thought we should have been given. This is, I think, part of their problems—they thought they were given gifts that He had *not* given them. They assumed that they had been given certain gifts, and they ran with what they thought were these gifts, and they were not correct.

Verse 10:

I Corinthians 1:10-13 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you, or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

We could go on, but we do not need to go any further than that. We started here because this division among the people indicated to Paul that something was terribly wrong with the Corinthian church.

These divisions that they had set up among them—declaring some of them that they were Paulites, and the other group saying that they were Apollosites, and the other one said they were, well, I will just say Peterites, and they were following these. And there were a few that said, "Hey, I'm going to follow Christ," and that was good that they were following Christ. And so he pleads with them to be unified, to think and judge in the same way, to have one mind, that is, to judge as Christ would. But the problem there was that they were fighting among themselves. That is contentions there. They had these contentions that were going on, and they could not see eye to eye on anything.

And what had happened is, of course, these divisions had happened, and people started declaring themselves backers of various ministers. Sound familiar? The church of God has been doing something very similar for the last 30 years or so. Now, their partisanship implied deeper problems, especially this lack of wisdom. So Paul was concerned, and he says, I can see just by this reporting from Chloe's household that these problems exist, and these things that you see on the outside are only symptoms of what is rotten on the inside. And that is why he goes on in the next section to talk about wisdom.

Let us go on to verse 18, we will go down to verse 25. He writes:

I Corinthians 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Look at that. Right away he is saying, Look, the things that we preach—the gospel of Jesus Christ, the message of the cross here—is producing two different reactions. On the one side, those who are perishing, that is, those who are unconverted, those who Jesus called the dead spiritually, the ones who had not been called, they look at it as foolishness. Why would God have His Son die? Why would this be the way to salvation? But He says, to those who are called, to those who have been brought into the church of God, the

same gospel is the power of God to salvation. That is the way we have to go to be saved. So he is setting up here this dichotomy; there are two things that are happening here, and they are diametrically opposed.

I Corinthians 1:19-25 For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." [Now this is the wisdom of the wise of this world, the understanding of the prudent of this world. And he says] Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Let us consider here that he brings out that the Greeks pursue wisdom, and even so, even after saying that they are looking for the wise way to live, these uncalled philosophers pronounced the message of the cross to be foolishness. They cannot see wisdom in it, which clues us in that their wisdom is different, *very different*. They cannot see the wisdom of God. They are blinded to it.

Now, the elect consider the gospel to be the power of God to salvation, but their carnal counterparts view preaching Christ crucified as illogical or even silly. It is foolish. And these are completely contrary beliefs—the world's belief versus the church's belief. It is a direct clash of worldviews.

And in addition to this, he says that the Jews, who you would have thought would know the wisdom of God, or at least had been exposed to it, well, they desire salvation to involve great signs and astonishing miracles. They are out there for the entertainment, almost. They want to see something neat happen, like something Moses would have done in the wilderness. That is their idea of salvation, God coming down and doing all these wonderful, spectacular miracles.

On the other hand, the Greeks, well, they are not into fireworks and all the kind of miracles. The Greeks would prefer a well-developed, well-reasoned, logical argument. They would like to sit around the agora and discuss this rationally, and talk about salvation and how this could occur through reason and through ascension, as it later got to. By the time you get to Neoplatonism, you know, they are trying to do all these strange things and make a logical system out of it where you could ascend into godhood. Paul saw it in the mid first century. They were going in that direction already.

So these representatives in this world, the Jews, the Greeks, neither desire the truth of the gospel, neither desire the wisdom of God, neither desire the power of God to salvation. They want to do it their own way, and pat themselves on the back for being so wise and smart.

Now, here the apostle is laying a foundation for his argument. And what he is saying between the lines here is that godly wisdom is beyond men, whether they are carnal Israelites, like the Jews, God's chosen people who have had the revelation of God at their fingertips for centuries, or whether they are carnal Greeks, the renowned masters of human philosophy and reason and so-called wisdom. Both are wrong. You cannot go to the world and find wisdom to salvation. It is not there.

Neither of these groups, the Jews or the Greeks, have any grounds for rejecting the gospel, because they are unqualified to judge it. They cannot comprehend it. Their thinking processes, their mental and spiritual capacities, are not even close to providing them with true understanding. They have gone off on these tangents, and the tangents are not going to lead them to the Kingdom of God and salvation.

And so what is the takeaway that Paul wants the Corinthians to understand here? You cannot trust worldly wisdom, whether it comes from the Jews or whether it comes from the Greeks! They do not know. They *cannot* understand. They have a worldly prudence and wisdom in ways of understanding the physical matter of this earth and the things that we deal with here as human beings, but when it comes to the spiritual step up to the way and wisdom of God, they have got nothing. They are clueless.

This should help you decide, or at least evaluate, how much you take from other things, like commentaries and Bible helps, but also browsing the Internet and seeing a spiritual article by some Internet minister, or (I was going to say flipping the channels on your TV set, showing my age here) TV ministers. You know, a blind squirrel every once in a while finds that nut, and it is true. But you need to be very careful about the wisdom you take from worldly sources about spiritual things. Truly, the capacity for understanding what God is doing is not there.

Let us go on, verse 26. This is an important part of his argument, because remember, the Corinthians thought that they were suddenly superior and wise in godly wisdom.

I Corinthians 1:26-31 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord."

He is setting them straight here. Paul gives them a dose of reality. He is trying, at this beginning part of his argument, to puncture their vanity a bit, so that they can feel humbled enough to accept what he has to say. He reminds them that they were not called from among the upper crust of humanity. They were not special. In fact, he says—his words—they were foolish, weak, and lowly when they came out of the world. And God would confound and shame humanity for making something glorious of such ignoble characters.

Now, verse 30—here is the key. Let us read that again:

I Corinthians 1:30 But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God.

That is about as far as we need to go for our purposes right here. God's people, whenever and wherever they were called, would be special, but only because they were in Christ. Their only true distinctive specialness, uniqueness, superiority, if you will, would be because they were in Christ. They were part of the Body of Christ. He is telling them this early: you are not special. The only reason you are special is because God called you to be Christians.

And then he says, Christ Jesus became for us wisdom from God. Oh, this must have stung, because they thought they had this wonderful wisdom, and they were applying it to the congregation and making their pronouncements about: Apollos, he is the best minister because he has got rhetorical training and he sounds great. Oh no, Paul is better. He has had all these experiences and he relates them to us so that we can understand the way of God. Oh no, Peter, he is the head of the church, right, under Christ. He is the chief apostle, you know, he is the one that is in charge of all these foreign missions and everything going out. We need to follow him. And then there is the little old lady in the back row who is saying, "I'm going to follow Christ."

No. The wisdom that they thought they had in dealing with the problems that they had in Corinth was not their own. The true wisdom was in Christ. But they were making the mistake of using their own mental faculties, their own knowledge that they had gleaned from the world, their own ways of putting things together, to try to solve these problems, and it was not working.

They were just breaking out in more and more contentions and problems. They were continuing to split. They were not using the wisdom from God, which is in Jesus Christ—His words, His example, His inspiration. No, they were doing it all on their own. It is our faith in Him that will help us to find out what true wisdom is.

Let us go on to chapter 2, because he needs to explain this to them, and he gives them the mechanism for how it works. We will not read the first five verses, Paul is just testifying to them that he did not preach to them like the wise of this world. He had done it on purpose. He had preached to them only what? How does he put it here?

I Corinthians 2:2 I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

So he had exemplified the wisdom of God, how that should be taught to a congregation like the Corinthian church. He explains that and tells them, by the time you get to verse 5, your faith should not be in men, but in the power of God.

Verse 6, and we will read down through the end of the chapter here:

I Corinthians 2:6-8 However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

He just gives them a blatant example of how unwise the upper crust of humanity is, or was, at the time. They were so dumb, so unwise, that they killed their own God—the Creator of all things. Is that wise? He is saying, Corinthians, why are you trusting these people who killed Christ? Where is the wisdom in that? He said the real wisdom is hidden. It is a mystery. It is not something that is just out there for people to pluck off a tree or take from this or that or the other thing. No, it is something that God has to give. That is what he is getting at here.

Verse 9:

I Corinthians 2:9 As it is written, "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

Mankind does not know. They have not guessed. They have not figured out the way that God is gifting men to prepare them for salvation, and ultimately for the Kingdom of God. But he says human beings on their own have not figured this out. They have not figured out the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. We often use this in a prophetic sense, but

it is also in a theological sense, a doctrinal sense, a wisdom sense, a gifting sense. God has prepared all of these things from long ago, about how He is going to bring men to salvation. And one of the biggest things is how He is going to instill these people with His wisdom.

Verse 10, the answer:

I Corinthians 2:10 But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit.

That is the game changer. That is the thing that no one in this world has, unless God the Father specifically gives it to him through Jesus Christ.

I Corinthians 2:10 For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.

Access to that Spirit gives those who love Him the ability to search out everything about God, even to the deepest things. Now, that does not mean that God will reveal all those deep things to us. He has kept some things to Himself, but we have access to His mind. That is certainly a deep thing, and He has only withheld those things that we cannot understand now, we cannot process now, we have no way of understanding now. That is for the next step.

Now he, obviously, knows that he needs to explain some more.

I Corinthians 2:11 For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?

So he acknowledges here that man does have a spirit, he has a spirit nature that is in him, but it is a human spirit, it is not God's Spirit. This human spirit, which gives intellect and all of those things that come with it, all those faculties of mind, let us say, like language or reason or those sorts of things, they can deal with human things, physical things. So we have just tremendously intelligent people and tremendously creative people, people who understand things that most of us do not, who work with numbers, who work with engineering principles, who work with all kinds of different things, and they can build and do wonderful works on this earth, and we

think of them as the great, the wise, the intelligent of this world, and they are. I do not want to take any of that away from them. But they have no idea about spiritual things, only what they can glean from the rest of the world.

And so he says, at the end of verse 11:

I Corinthians 2:11 Even so, no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.

So only those with, actually, two spirits can know the things of man and the things of God. There has to be an additional Spirit given by God so that we can understand spiritual things, the things of God.

I Corinthians 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

So the additional spirit was not the human spirit, the additional spirit was God's Spirit, and it has given us the chance to know all the gifts and things that God has done for us, and why they should be used, and where they are headed, in all the little details that we can glean from Scripture about that journey.

I Corinthians 2:13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

It works a little differently with God's Spirit. Humans learn through words, through language, through being taught, and we learn in the church that way too. It is not like God shuts that off. But he says, when you have the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit teaches you something different. It is a spirit and it deals in spiritual things all the time, and it helps us to compare spiritual things with other spiritual things. It helps us to evaluate them. It helps us to inculcate them into our lives. It gives us not only intellect and wisdom beyond human intellect and wisdom, because it opens another part of human intellect that we can understand, that is, godly intellect, once we have the Spirit. But it also guides us and gives us strength as we go through life and

experience life, and so we begin to make all these comparisons and learn and grow in wisdom, because now we have a full toolkit, and we can then compare the spiritual things of God with the falsely spiritual things of this world, and make proper decisions.

I Corinthians 2:14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

They do not have the right equipment. It is like they do not have the right receiver to catch the signal, and so they cannot "play" what God is saying and what God is telling them. They cannot hear it. It is just like sssssss—that is the snake that Trentan was talking about last week. All they can hear is that, they cannot hear God, they are not on His wavelength. So God's way, which they cannot fathom, is foolishness to them. They just reject it offhand. It does not make sense, and it does not make sense to them because they do not have the equipment to make it make sense to them.

I Corinthians 2:15 But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.

That is, an unbeliever cannot rightly judge you for what you know through the Spirit of God, because he has no basis for judgment. They *do* judge us, but Paul is saying here that they really have no reason or no justification for judging us, because they do not understand even the least of what we are doing, or what we are thinking, or where we are going.

Verse 16 is very important:

I Corinthians 2:16 For "who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

And this is the big thing that makes us different. It is like he ends this chapter just like he ended the last chapter: we end up with Christ. There He is shown to be the wisdom of God. Here He is shown as being our mind. We have the mind of Christ to work with, because He is in us through His Spirit, and so we have access to the wisdom that He has given us through that mind.

We share a mind with Christ! Is that not incomprehensible? But it is true, if we believe Paul's words. We have been given a link to that mind. We can access that mind and make proper decisions through the wisdom of God.

So church members, because they have the Spirit of God, should be able to make correct judgments if they properly exercise their faculties to determine good and evil, as it says in Hebrews 5:14. We should be able to make proper evaluations of situations, circumstances that come before us, because we have access to the mind of Christ. How would He have judged this, and what would be the proper way to go?

Now, I say *should* because it often does not happen that way, unfortunately. Why? The chief reason, at least as I have experienced it, is that we actually do not access the mind of Christ. You know what we do? We do the same thing that the Corinthians did. We fall back on our own knowledge and experience and the thinking of this world to solve our problems, rather than the mind of Christ.

We do not seek the hidden wisdom—we go with what we know, and what we know is the wisdom of this world. We do not exercise our faculties to know good and evil. And I am not talking about noobs, as the word is, I am not talking about babes in Christ here. I am talking about mature Christians who have lived a little and should know better. Most of us are in that latter category, because we have been around for decades in the church, and we should know better. We should be accessing the mind of Christ better, but we are too much in this world, and we need to do something about that.

Let us go on. Let us read the first four verses here in chapter 3:

I Corinthians 3:1-3 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as spiritual people, but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food, for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there is envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like men?

That word "mere" should not be there.

What is he talking about? He is saying, you guys are still acting like the world. You are still acting like you do not have that second Spirit. You are still making judgments based on worldly wisdom rather than the wisdom of God.

I Corinthians 3:4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?

Of course. So their thinking and behavior, especially the disunity seen in their various factions, belied their professed advanced knowledge, wisdom, and judgment. It was like the Laodiceans. Did they not think that they had need of nothing, that they were—oh, they were spiritual, they do not need to listen to another sermon, they are already perfect. And God says, what? You guys are wretchedly carnal, poor, blind, and naked—you cannot see it, because you have got this big head.

So what they were doing here, in saying they were of Apollos or Cephas or whatever, what they were doing was, in fact, promoting men at the expense of God. See, their vision was all here, they *saw* what was around them. They saw, Oh, Paul was the one that came and gave us the gospel, and Apollos was the one that preached to us as our first pastor, and Peter was the one, back in Jerusalem or in Babylon or wherever he was, that was such a stalwart apostle in the church. They never looked *up* to see who was actually the Head of the church, and who was beyond Him, but God the Father. They were looking at men. They were not being spiritual.

Look what he says in verse 5 here:

I Corinthians 3:5-8 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. [We did our jobs, we did what God wanted us to do, but nothing would have grown except God blessed it.] So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. [Who is the important one here?] Now he who plants and he who waters are one, . . .

Actually, you are trying to divide us, one against the other—I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas. He says, Look, Apollos and I are united, we are a united front, we are doing our work for the same exact reasons. Why are you doing this? Why are you trying to split us apart and make us jealous, one against the other?

I Corinthians 3:8 . . . and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

They both understood this. As well as they worked, they would be rewarded. God would see to that.

Down to verse 11:

I Corinthians 3:11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

He is telling them to shift their focus off of the men that they had chosen to be their leaders, and concentrate on Christ. He is everything to us, he uses the phrase *all in all* in a couple of his epistles. The men who preach to you, or counsel you, or anoint you, they are just servants. The One who is to be glorified is Jesus Christ. He is the One to be served. He is the One to follow after, not men. He is telling them they have got their eyes on the wrong things. They are trying to make judgments about things that are not part of their bailiwick. They do not have the right to judge those things.

Let us go down to verse 18:

I Corinthians 3:18-20 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. [Let us just lay the cards out on the table: worldly wisdom is dumb, it is foolish, it is anti-God, it will not work.] For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness"; and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

They are human, they are temporal, they are not going to work in the long run, whatever it is.

I Corinthians 3:21-23 Therefore let no one glory in men [like Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or any of them, or Timothy who would come along]. For all things are yours [Why are you getting focused on this political partisanship about men when the whole universe is yours, ultimately?]: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present, or things to come—all are yours. [It has already been determined that God's firstfruits will rule with Christ forever. Why are you getting stuck on these stupid partisan political shenanigans? It is stupid, he is saying.] And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

He takes it right to the Source. That is the focus. So he flips the script on them here.

The intellectual, the philosopher, the executive in the church, whatever they may be, if they are in some high office, that person must rate the knowledge and wisdom of God far higher than what he learned in this world, in its educational system, in his experiences in life. It does not matter, those are things that are going to end. Instead, he must put the wisdom of God *first*, and become a fool to the world.

Oh, you believe that? You keep the Sabbath? You do not believe in eating cockroaches of the sea? No! Because I know the hidden wisdom given to me through the Holy Spirit, and there is a life that is coming, in which God has promised me that if I am faithful and I put on the mind of Christ, I will own *everything*. Not the reason why we do it, we do it out of love for God. But that is what he says: all things are yours. You have taken the first steps. Why throw it away by getting deceived by the foolishness of this world?

So we need to think about how much of the world's wisdom we have and that we live by, because it offers us little to nothing that will help us along the path of salvation. In fact, most of this world's knowledge and wisdom is at cross purposes to God's way and to His goals. And if you think about it, we know who ultimately wins those conflicts between the world and God.

So his advice is: do not boast in men. Do not back the wrong side. Do not focus on physical leadership. It is not wise to put too much stock in fallible church leaders, because they are not Christ. And especially do not do that if it is going to cause division and strife, which it will.

God's servants, the ministers that He has ordained, are but fellow servants of the rest of you. God gave those ministers to the church, and they serve the brethren. The ministry is there for the benefit of the brethren. Go read it in Ephesians 4:11-16. The leaders of the church are not here for their aggrandizement, or their glory. If they are, they should get out; they are in the wrong business, they are doing things wrong.

Bottom line: God does not run His church as the world runs a government, or a foundation, or a corporation, or any kind of business. He does things His own way, and that is, He is intimately involved in the life of every person that He has called. Does not Jesus say, in His Passover address to His disciples, that not only would He come to be in them, but the Father would too? He says, We live in you. That is how God does things. He is the One that is working all this out for us through Jesus Christ, and to Him goes all the glory, not to the servants.

Let us go on to I Corinthians 4. Let us start in verse 1.

I Corinthians 4:1-5 Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself, for I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord.

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.

Well, this paragraph continues the thought that he had there in chapter 3. He and Apollos humbly considered themselves mere servants and stewards, and their chief characteristic had to be faithfulness to their Master. That is the only way that they can work properly under Jesus Christ and God the Father. They answer to Him, to Christ, not to the members.

But if they are faithful—and Paul insists that his service to Christ has been all above board—the members benefit, because that is their job. God gave them to the church for the equipping of the saints and for all that ministry that has to be done. So it does not matter very much to him what the Corinthians think about him. He says Christ's judgment will become clear in due time. We will see how it all works out. The only glory and praise that matters is the praise and glory that comes from God. And so he is gonna take all that water off a duck's back and move forward.

Now, this has all been background material, foundational understanding for the correction he is about to administer to the Corinthians. Let us drop down to verse 8, this is the other side of the coin here. Paul is being sarcastic, but by it he exposes what the Corinthians thought of themselves, first of all, as compared to what they thought of Paul and Apollos. Notice the attitude.

I Corinthians 4:8-9 You are already full! You are already rich [meaning spiritually rich]! You have reigned as kings in the kingdom of God without us [you have excluded us]—and indeed I would wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you! For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.

He is talking, actually here, not sarcastically. He is using a metaphor of being in a triumphal procession in Rome, where all the captives and the people that they defeated would be displayed before the people of Rome, and the apostles are so low in that pecking order of defeated peoples that they come last. I mean, who is left but the janitors sweeping the way as evening comes on.

I Corinthians 4:10-13 We are fools for Christ's sake [he is back to his sarcasm], but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished [oh, quite noble, those Corinthians], but we are dishonored! Even to the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure it; being defamed, we entreat.

We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things, until now.

I think you get it. The Corinthians thought of themselves as superior, highly spiritual, and brilliant beyond measure, and so noble.

In other words, they believed that they were already, after just a couple of years since Paul had preached the gospel to them, so spiritually gifted and developed that they no longer needed instruction in righteousness and correction from those whom God had appointed, whom they judged—God's appointees—they had already passed. Meaning, even though Paul and Apollos and Peter had all this education and experience, the Corinthians thought that they had already surpassed them in godly wisdom and knowledge, after two years or so! None of them could come into a room, because their heads were too big, they could not get through the door. He is saying there that they think they had outgrown their teachers in so short a time.

Paul disagrees, of course. Three times in this chapter, verse 6 and verses 18 and 19, he calls them puffed up. They were proud, they were arrogant, as opposed to himself and Apollos, who were faithful and humble, and had gone through a long time of difficult service to God.

And while the Corinthians looked down on the ministers' humiliations, they were actually proof of their faithfulness, humility, and Christlikeness, because they had gone through these things, as Christ had said: if they hated Me, they will hate you; if they persecuted Me, they will persecute you. Paul and Apollos had felt that in their own bodies, but these coddled Corinthians thought they were better.

We know what the Corinthians thought of themselves. We know what the Corinthians thought of Paul, and this was the big problem that he had to solve. How in the world do you get a people who, with so much pride and arrogance, to come around to the truth, to repent? That is for next time.