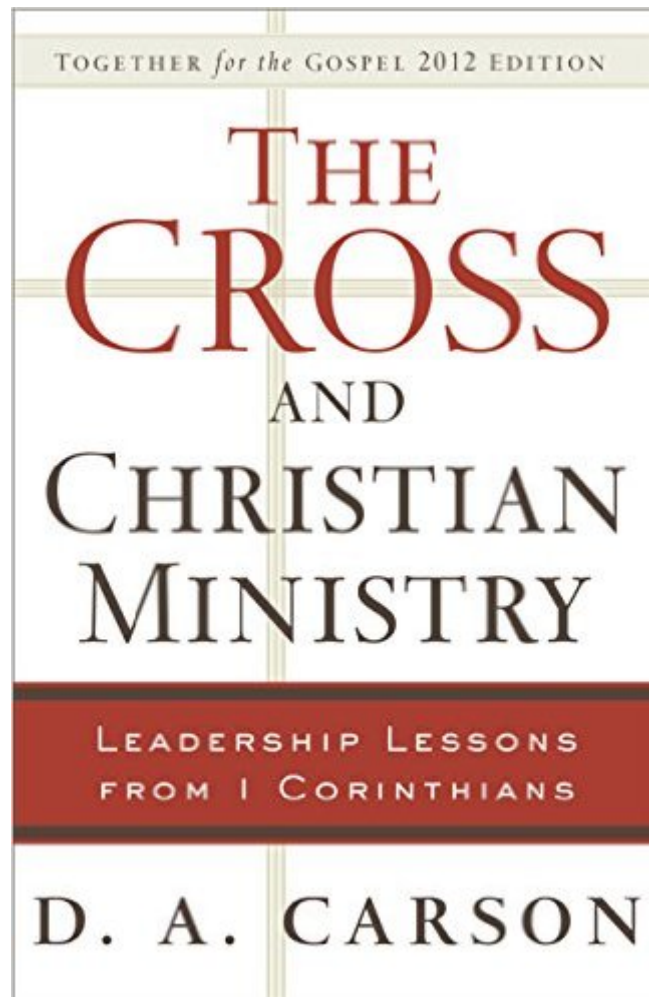


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# The Cross And Christian Ministry: Leadership Lessons From 1 Corinthians



## Synopsis

First published by Baker Books in 1993, *The Cross and Christian Ministry* presents a comprehensive view of what the death of Christ means in preaching and pastoring God's people. It sets forth workable principles for dynamic, cross-centered leadership. Now available in paperback.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I first read two books by Carson in undergrad- *Exegetical Fallacies* and his *Exposition on the Sermon on the Mount* taken mostly from his very good commentary on Matthew in the *Expositor's Bible Commentary*. I have also read a number of his other books, had him for two graduate classes and have profited immensely from his teaching also available from Crossway Media. I have his most recent on the *Emerging Church*, and it is a fine volume, with a few limitations no doubt, but of the kind of Biblical clarity and conceptual precision I have come to expect from Carson. This is one of several smaller volumes Carson has written as expositions of parts of NT epistles. He has written one on discipleship from a part of *Philippians*, and *Showing the Spirit* is also from *1 Corinthians*, but covers chapters 12-14. This book has become something of a modern classic among certain readerships in the evangelical Reformed tradition, often recommended by people like Mark Dever, C.J. Mehanney, and the like. This is NOT a normal Christian book on leadership. It is a biblical exposition of *1 Corinthians* 1-4, 9 with an eye to Christian leadership as it relates to and is formed by a theology of the Cross. Yet it is a book on Christian leadership, since the first epistle to the *Corinthians* is much a defense by the apostle of his theological thinking undergirding his

unorthodox leadership style- a style thought asinine and foolish in first century circles of Greek Rhetoricians (of which Paul was considered one since he was a traveling "preacher") and apparently to the Corinthian church also. Its lessons are more contemporaneous than one would expect from a 2000 year old text given certain showy and factional trends in American evangelicalism.

Dr. D.A. Carson has become one of my favourite Christian authors, not only because of his great command of the English language (not to mention his familiarity with a dozen others), but because of his precision of thought. He has the ability to use his pen as a surgeon does his or her scalpel. The Cross and Christian Ministry is a small book (137 pages) that offers a commentary on chapters one through four and nine of 1 Corinthians. As the title implies, Carson is concerned with how the cross of Christ is central to Christian ministry, whether the topic is preaching, the role and function of the Holy Spirit, factionalism, leadership, etc. Though this is one of Carson's smaller works, it is packed to the hilt with intense theological reflection, cutting questions, and convicting applications. What I really connect with in many of Carson's writings is the maturity and wisdom with which he addresses many sensitive issues. This is manifest in his ability to view issues from both sides, even when those sides give the appearance as polar opposites. For example, in 1 Corinthians 4 when addressing whether a Christian is to judge others, Carson remarks: "...on the one hand we find Jesus saying, 'Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you' (Matt. 7:1-2). On the other hand, he says, 'Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment' (John 7:24). This running tension is very strong throughout the New Testament. There is much that condemns what might be called 'judgmentalism.

In this book, Carson presents an exposition of the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians, as well as 9:19-27. The book started its life as a series of five talks, each concerning Paul's preaching on the cross: the cross and preaching (ch. 1), the cross and the Holy Spirit (ch. 2), the cross and factionalism (ch. 3), the cross and Christian leadership (ch. 4), and the cross and the 'world Christian' (ch. 5). Although Carson's ability to synthesise Paul's teaching is admirable, he is perhaps stretching the point somewhat in his chapter headings - Paul only uses the word "cross" twice, in 1:17-18. He also uses the word "crucified" in 2:8, but by chapter 3 it would seem that Paul is no longer talking about the cross. There seems to be no particular reason why the cross should be seen as the over-arching theme of these passages. Carson counters this by saying that in the first

four chapters Paul is addressing the 'bitter factionalism' of the Corinthian believers, and that behind this factionalism lay a misunderstanding of the gospel, "and in particular the centrality of the cross" (p. 70). Carson is correct in his view that in order to deal with the factionalism present at Corinth, Paul had to address several misconceptions related to the nature of genuine Christian leadership (p. 93). In this way, Carson strives to bring out the unity of these chapters: the issues of factionalism, leadership, and wisdom are all closely related, and are intertwined throughout the first four chapters of the epistle. He says, for example, that the Corinthians love of pomp, prestige, rhetoric and so on, "demonstrated that they had not reflected very deeply on the entailments of the gospel of the crucified Messiah." This raises the question, however, of why Paul does not make more of this connection.

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