**The Church at Corinth**

**A Church Facing Inner Problems – #11**

**The Church’s Growth**

**1 Corinthians 3:5-17**

***1 Corinthians 3:5***  *What after all is Apollos, and what is Paul? Only servants through whom you came to believe, just as the Lord assigned to each.* ***6*** *I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth.* ***7*** *Consequently, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters amounts to anything, but only God who causes the growth.* ***8*** *The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, but each will be recompensed according to his labor.* ***9*** *For we are God’s fellow-workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.*

***10*** *According to the grace of God granted me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building upon it. But each one should see to it how he builds on it.* ***11*** *For no one can lay a foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.* ***12*** *If someone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw,* ***13*** *the work of each builder will become obvious, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed by fire. Fire [itself] will test the quality of each one’s work.* ***14*** *If the work that someone has built survives, he will be recompensed.* ***15*** *If someone’s work is burned up, he will be deprived of recompense, but he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.* ***16*** *Do you not realize that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?* ***17*** *If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For the temple of God, which you are, is holy.*

**Notes and Study – Taking Sides**

(From last week)

***1 Corinthian 3:4*** “*Whenever someone says, “I side with Paul,” and another says, “I side with Apollos,” are you not being merely human?”*

Paul and Apollos, and perhaps Cephas too, have evangelized the Church. If the Corinthians became believers through such human evangelists, they should not think that they owe allegiance to those who were merely human instruments that God employed in their coming to faith.

Paul’s argument runs thus:

1. First, he corrects a grievous mistake, reaffirming that he and Apollos are only servants (***diakonoi***, deacons 3:5) and God’s fellow workers (***synergoi***, 3:9), carrying out tasks to which the Lord God has assigned them.
2. Each preacher has to see how he builds (3:10), for all the construction is going to be tested (3:12-15). Paul puts all the emphasis on “God” in this section, mentioning Him in verses 6, 7, 9, 10, 16, 17 and 19), with a climax in verses 22-23, “*So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.”*
3. Too make his point clear, Paul appeals to life itself to draw out metaphors. He begins with an agricultural image, changes to an architectural image, and eventually to the kind and quality of the building material being used. Paul depicts himself as a planter (3:6-9), then as an expert builder (3:10-15). In effect, he presents himself as the founder of the Corinthian church.
4. Paul offers the needed correction: God has caused the growth (3:6-7), and Jesus Christ is the only foundation of it all (3:11).

**Conclusion:**

1. Corinthian Christians must realize that they are “God’s field, God’s building” (3:9), “the temple of God” (3:16, 17), and that “the Spirit of God dwells in them” (3:16). All come from God and belong to God. Strife comes whenever ownership is disputed and God is no longer the Owner.
2. As a missionary Paul likens himself to a farmer who has planted seed by his evangelization, and Apollos to a fellow farmer who has watered the seeds. Both have a job to do, but neither of them makes the plants grow. The growth comes from God, who alone causes it. God may indeed reward such “fellow workers,” but the field and the seeds and the water belong to God. That is why Paul ends his first comparison by telling the Corinthian community that it is “God’s field,” a field owned by God.

3. After establishing the ownership, Paul changes the metaphor and adds in the same sentence that they are “God’s building,” the use of the architectural image, leads him to compare himself to a master builder who has laid a foundation by his evangelization. He does not name Apollos as a fellow builder in this comparison, as he did in the first one, but the unnamed person who builds on that foundation so laid might well be Cephas, otherwise unnamed. Paul, however, immediately corrects all that, insisting that the one foundation is none other than Jesus Christ, about whom he has been preaching (1:23; 2:2). Hence, Corinthian Christians must be aware that anyone who proceeds to build on such a foundation must choose carefully the materials with which the further construction is to be made. For in the long run, the work of any such builder will be scrutinized and judged for its adequacy and durability; it will be brought to light and tested by fire. If the construction withstands the fire, the builder will be duly recompensed. So the quality of evangelization is all important. Here, testing by fire was used by the Roman Church for the fire of Purgatory but the whole section has nothing to do with that late doctrine of the Roman church.

4. The image of “building the Corinthians” reflects on their existence as a community. They are “*the temple of God*,” because the Spirit of God dwells in them. Consequently, they are holy, dedicated to God’s service, and because of God’s dwelling they participate in the holiness of the Spirit.

5. Paul’s affirmation of judgment of “*the work of each builder*” that is to take place on “the Day” (the day of judgment), when “*it is revealed by fire*” (3:13). It is important, however, to realize that Paul is not discussing the deeds of individual Christians, as is often supposed, but the evangelistic work of Christian missionaries, especially those who have sought to erect a superstructure on the foundation that Paul has laid, or better, on the foundation “*already laid, which is Jesus Christ*” (verse 11)

**VERSE 3:5** *What after all is Apollos, and what is Paul? Only servants through whom you came to believe, just as the Lord assigned to each.”*

“*What after all is Apollos, and what is Paul?*” In verse 3:4, Paul mentions only two people by name., Apollos and himself. They were both well known as preachers in Corinth, but Paul seeks to correct the Corinthian Christians’ understanding of their (Apollos’ and Paul’s) role. In these verses it is clear that Paul never blames Apollos for the rivalry and does not regard him as a rival; both are coworkers, servants, and stewards.

*“Only servants through whom you came to believe.”* Apollos and Paul are called deacons, ***diakonoi***, not of the community itself, but of God (or Christ, as in 4:1; compare 2 Cor 6:4; 11:23). ***Diakonos*** in the Greek language denotes a servant or even a slave. Josephus describes Rachel, who brings Jacob to Laban (Ant. 1.19.6 §298) and Elisha who follows Elijah (Ant. 8.13.7 §354). Paul says (2 Cor 3:6), *“deacons or servants of a new covenant”*); meaning deacons, ***diakonoi***, through whom Corinthians came to faith in God and Christ Jesus (cf. 2:5). Their work was ***diakonia***, what Paul calls his ministry, “a ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18).

*“Just as the Lord assigned to each,”* or *“and to each as the Lord gave.,”* Paul insists that he and Apollos were merely performing the task for which they had been called by the Lord and commissioned with a certain authority. He further develops this notion of his own commission (15:10; 2 Cor 4:5). “The Lord,” ***ho kyrios***, refers to the Christ.

**VERSE 3:6** “*I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth*.”

So Paul describes his work, he sowed the seed which Apollos later watered, but neither of them was responsible for the growth. That growth is clearly God’s work alone, which is consistent with his theology of grace (Rom 9:16; 2 Cor 9:10). This means that allegiance of the two groups of a Paul-group or an Apollos-group in the Corinthian community is not part of God’s work and only destructive of the unity it should have.

**VERSE 3:7** *“Consequently, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters amounts to anything, but only God who causes the growth.”*

In verse 6, Paul reflected on what Apollos and he had accomplished; now he concludes, in the present tense and putting it emphatically, God alone is the one who brings growth.

**VERSE 3:8** *“The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose (or, are one at work), but each will be recompensed according to his labor.”*

*“The one who plants …”* The use of “one” may refer to their status and responsibility. “Are equal” (as in the RSV), or “the two” are not opposed, but complement each other.

*“but each will be recompensed according to his labor*” or “*each will receive his own wages* (***ton idion misthon***) *according to his own labor*.” In other words, the remuneration for Apollos and Paul will come from God who has assigned them to their individual tasks, and not from the reputation or glory that they might enjoy among those who might side with them or show them allegiance in some way. Although Paul and Apollos have no merit by which they might claim recompense, they realize that in the end God will reward graciously those who serve Him in this special way. This part of v. 8 may sound like a parenthetic remark, but Paul is stating briefly what he will develop in 3:14-15, and again in 4:1-5, especially in an eschatological (end times) sense.

Paul speaks of, “his own labor” or “toil,” a term chosen to denote “the work done” in evangelization. Paul is adopting an OT term: “*where wisdom rewards the labor of holy ones*” (LXX Wis 10:17; see Ps 61:13; Prov 24:12)

**VERSE 3:9**. “*For we are God’s fellow-workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.”*

“*For we are God’s fellow-workers*”, this verse, and the whole verse contrasts “we” that is Paul and Apollos with “you “Corinthian Christians to that all belongs to God. Paul regards both Apollos and himself as “fellow-workers,” a title that he used also of Timothy in (1 Thess 3:2). This title has been understood in two ways:

1. “*God’s fellow-workers*,” i.e., those who work together with God and are engaged in a common endeavor with God himself, who is the principal worker. It is so understood by the KJV, RSV, NIV, NAB. This interpretation takes the Greek phrase for what it says, and means what is suggested by 2 Corinthian 6:1, “*working together with Him, we entreat [beg] you. . . .”* It may sound like synergism, putting human and divine energy in union.
2. ”*Fellow workers in God’s service*,” or “*God’s servants, working together*” (NRSV), or “*fellow workers who belong to God*,” In other words, Paul and his colleagues are those who work together and thus serve God by such shared labor. This implies that God’s coworkers, Paul and Apollos, are coworkers who work with one another and for God. They belong to God just as the field and the construction in verse 9 belong to God.

*“You are God’s field, God’s building*.” Paul calls the Corinthian community “cultivated land, field.” That explains why he has spoken of his own evangelical work in Corinth as a planting of seed, and of Apollos’ work as a watering of it. The field so cultivated, however, belongs to God, not to Apollos or Paul. Cultivated land, or a field, occurs a few times in the LXX meaning a real field. Hence as “God’s field,” Corinthian Christians manifest God’s activity among them, who are the spiritual fruit of His farming.

To this description, Paul adds another, as he mixes his metaphors: for the Corinthian community is also “*God’s building*”. So Paul introduces an important second metaphorical argument, which he applies to the community also in 2 Corinthians 12:19, which he will use later fully in chapter 14. Here it is important to notice that the Jewish background of the idea of the community as a plantation and a temple of God was spoken of in Jeremiah 1:10 “*to build and to plant*” (see also 18:9; 24:6; Ezek 17:5-8; 36:9-10; Deut 20:5-6). God dwells in and with his community.

**VERSE 3:10 *10*** *According to the grace of God granted me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building upon it. But each one should see to it how he builds on it.*

*“According to the grace of God granted me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder or wise builder”* Paul is “a skilled master-builder,” a phrase he borrows from LXX Isaiah 3:3. Paul’s evangelization was God’s special grace and call. Here, Paul is not referring to the grace that made him an apostle but to the grace that made him the founder of the new church of Corinth. Paul’s preaching has led what he calls, “a foundation,” for what he achieved thereby was fundamental for the Corinthian church, but he does not call himself the foundation. Paul’s awareness of God’s grace in his life is often mentioned (15:10; Rom 12:3, 6; 15:15; Gal 2:9).

*“And someone else is building upon it.”* Paul recognizes this further work that Apollos did there after he had laid the foundation by beginning the evangelization of Corinth (3:6), but Apollos is not mentioned in vv. 10-17. The “someone” raises a question that is hard to answer. This may or may not be a specific individual or a specific group. “Someone else” could be a covert reference to Cephas. This has been a mere speculation.

*“But each one should see to it how he builds on it.”* The metaphor has been shifted from planting to building. This idea of building the house of God will become very important later in this letter, when Paul will use the word no longer to mean “building,” as verse 9, but in the sense of “edification” or the “building up” of the community as God’s house (see 14:3, 5, 12, 26)

**VERSE 3:11** *“For no one can lay a foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”*

Paul returns to the fundamental conviction of Christian Faith that the entire structure of the Christian church is based on Jesus Christ, on his person (2 Cor 11:4), and on his gospel (Gal 1:9).

**Christ the Foundation**

1. He is the only source of the new life
2. He is the only mediator between God and humanity; he is humanity to God, and God to humanity.

**VERSE 3:12** “*If someone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw*.”

Paul again says “someone;” referring neither to a specific individual nor a specific group, but this should be applied to all. He means any person or persons who may build on a structure other than Christ and using materials other than that of Christ. These possible materials are given in two sets of three. The first threesome – the fire-resistant gold, silver, and precious stones – is found also in 1 Chronicles 29:2; 2 Chronicles 32:27; Proverbs 8:10-11).

**VERSE 3:13 “***the work of each builder will become obvious, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed by fire. Fire [itself] will test the quality of each one’s work.*

“*The work of each builder will become obvious, because the Day will bring it to light.”*

“*The work*” and the structure, the quality of both will be made known. The term, “*the Day*,” is being used absolutely as the Day of Judgment, when the Lord will be revealed (1:7-8; 5:5), or as in (1 Thess 5:4), referring to “the day of the Lord” 5:2; cf. 1 Cor 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14; Phil 1:6,10; 2:16), which is usually a day of salvation or condemnation, whereas in Romans 2:5-6,16) it is a day of judgment, as it is here. “Day of the Lord” is derived from OT usage (Mal 3:19; Isa 13:6, 9; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11). Here once more Jesus is Yahweh the Lord. On that Day the quality of the structure, i.e., the further evangelization, and consequently the quality of the rivalries dependent on such evangelization, shall be revealed. Since Jesus Christ is the foundation of the building, those who build on it with materials like gold, silver, and precious stones will find their work tested by fire, and it will survive; but those who build with wood, hay, or straw will suffer loss of their structure, even if they themselves manage to find deliverance and rescue.

“*It is revealed by fire*,” means the work, not the Day, be revealed. The fire of this Day is recognized as a means of testing of the quality or purity of materials (cf. Rev 3:18). Judgment by fire is an OT motif (Isa 31:9; 43:2; 66:15–16; Zeph 1:18; Mal 3:2–3, 19; Isa 66:15–16; Joel 3:3; Sir 2:5; Zech 13:9). Gold or silver would stand the test, but the wood, straw, or hay would not. For the joint use of “fire” and “revelation,” see 2 Thess 1:7–8 (“at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire”; 1 Pet 1:7).

***14*** *If the work that someone has built survives, he will be recompensed.*

If the result of the testing fire is positive, then the builder will be “recompensed” (**misthos**). This does not mean salvation, because (verse 15) it is clear that if it is lost, the builder can still be delivered. Hence it must be something other than eternal salvation. The theme of compensation is not declared in the NT.

***15*** *If someone’s work is burned up, he will be deprived of recompense, but he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.*

It has been translated as “he will suffer loss” (RSV), but that is already implied in the first clause. The verb “saved” has to be understood as a contrast to “he will be recompensed” (3:14); so it must mean, “will be deprived of recompense,” i.e., the potential reward.

**Historical Note – Doctrine of Purgatory**

From at least the time of Gregory the Great (540–604 A.D.), this verse and all of verses 11–15 have been cited in the teaching of the Western Church about the “purifying fire” of purgatory (Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* 4.41.5: *de igne futurae purgationis,* “about a fire of future purification”, 4:41,5). These verses are quoted explicitly in the letter, “*Sub catholicae professione,”* of the First Council of Lyons, in 1254 and the Council of Florence, in 1439-1445. In the fifth sitting (June 4) Cardinal Julian gave the following definition of the Latin doctrine on purgatory:

"From the time of the Apostles the Church of Rome has taught, that the souls departed from this world, pure and free from every taint – namely, the souls of saints – immediately enter the regions of bliss. The souls of those who after their baptism have sinned, but have afterwards sincerely repented and confessed their sins, though unable to perform the *penance laid* upon them by their spiritual father, or bring forth fruits of repentance sufficient to atone for their sins, these souls are purified by the fire of purgatory, some sooner, others slower, according, to their sins; and then, after their purification, depart for the land of eternal bliss. The prayers of the priest, liturgies, and deeds of charity conduce much to their purification. The souls of those dead in mortal sin, or in original sin, go straight to punishment.”

The Greeks demanded a written exposition of this doctrine. When they received it, Mark of Ephesus and Bessarion of Nice each wrote their remarks on it, which afterwards served as a general answer to the doctrine of the Latins. It is only in the West that such teaching was known, not only in the metaphorical sense but in a real sense that gave rise to the teaching on Purgatory, but this teaching is based only on tradition, not Sacred Scripture.

In the East, the authentic writings of the fathers of the church knew no “fire of purification” or “refining by fire.” Some chapters speak an eschatological fire that would consume the world as one of purification (*Contra Celsum* 5.15; *Hom. in Exodus* 6.4). It is found also in Augustine (*Enchiridion* 18.69).

**A Way Station?**

The idea of "toll-house" or hold-over point was presented in patristic language (early church fathers) and it signifies that short period after death when the Christian soul must account for its moral state. Here is a quotation from Basil (4th century):

"Let no one deceive himself with empty words, for sudden destruction cometh upon them (I Thess. 5:3) and causes an overturning like a storm. A strict angel will come; he will forcibly lead out your soul, bound by sins. Occupy yourself therefore with reflection on the last day... Imagine to yourself the confusion, the shortness of breath, and the hour of death, the sentence of God drawing near, the angels hastening towards you, the dreadful confusion of the soul tormented by its conscience, with its pitiful gaze upon what is happening, and finally, the unavoidable translation into a distant place" (St. Basil the Great, quoted in "*Essay in an Historical Exposition of Orthodox Theology*," by Bishop Sylvester, Vol. 5, p.89).

So also, Gregory the Theologian, who guided a large flock only for short periods, limits himself to general words, saying: "each one is a sincere judge of himself, because of the judgment-seat awaiting him."

There is a more striking picture found in St. John Chrysostom:

"If, in setting out for any foreign country or city we are in need of guides, then how much shall we need helpers and guides in order to pass unhindered past the elders, the powers, the governors of the air, the persecutors, the chief collectors! For this reason, the soul, flying away from the body, often ascends and descends, fears and trembles. The awareness of sins always torments us, all the more at that hour when we shall have to be conducted to those trials and that frightful judgment place."

Continuing, Chrysostom gives moral instructions for a Christian way of life. As for children who have died, he places in their mouths the following words:

"The holy angels peacefully separated us from our bodies, and having good guides, we went without harm past the powers of the air. The evil spirits did not find in us what they were seeking; they did not notice what they wished to put to shame; seeing an immaculate soul, they were ashamed; seeing an undefiled tongue, they were silent. We passed by and put them to shame. The net was rent, and we were delivered. Blessed is God who did not give us as a prey to them" (St. John Chrysostom, Homily 2, "On Remembering the Dead").

This idea is totally unchristian and based on the denial that our union with Christ is not eternal.

A Jewish tradition, known from later rabbinic writings, attributed to the school of Shammai, is a belief in the existence of an intermediate Gehenna, one of an atoning and purifying nature. It interpreted Zechariah 13:9 “*I will put this third* [i.e., human beings, neither righteous nor godless, but those whose merit and guilt hung in the balance] *into the fire and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on my name, and I will answer them*” and 1 Samual 2:6 (Hannah’s prayer) “The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up,” and concluded to such an afterlife purification. See Str-B, 4/2:1036-49.

**The Temple of God**

***16*** *Do you not realize that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*

This question implies that the Corinthian Christians should be familiar with their new state of being and their new identity. This is the first time we meet the use of the name “temple” for a Christian community. It was used in 5:6; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19; 9:13, 24; also Rom 6:16.

The phrase, “God’s temple,” is an OT term found in LXX (Dan 5:3 and Judith 4:2) for the actual Temple in Jerusalem, but Paul used this for Christian congregation no longer just for building belonging to God (3:9), but is God’s very dwelling place, “the temple of God,” the place where God’s presence with Christians is to be found. It is called by this title also in (3:17; 2 Cor 6:16 (quoting Lev 26:11; Eph 2:21). What Paul means by it is explained in the second part of the question: “The Spirit of God dwells in you,” i.e., in their corporate being.

Paul speaks of the indwelling Spirit as the life-giving presence of God in the midst of the Christian community, making it in a special sense the place where God is present to Christians in their corporate being. Behind Paul’s use of this name is not only the imagery taken from OT of the one place, Jerusalem, where Israel was to worship Yahweh, but also the promise made by Jesus to dwell with the believers until the end of time.

In Rom 8:9, Paul says the indwelling Spirit makes each Christian an individual Temple of God, this will appear again in 1 Corinthians 6:19.

**VERSE 3:17***If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For the temple of God, which you are, is holy.*

*“If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him.”* See Genesis 9:6 for a parallel: “*Whoever sheds the blood of a human being, by a human being shall his blood be shed*.” The future tense of the apodosis *[main clause of a conditional sentence, here, the first half of the sentence]* introduces the divine action on the Last Day. Paul is warning everyone of the consequences that would flow from all activity that would damage the oneness of the community. In the present context, the “destruction of the temple” would mean the undermining of the Corinthian community by perverse or poor preaching and by rivalries. Such undermining would invoke appropriate reaction of God.

“*For the temple of God, which you are, is holy.*” The Corinthian community is like the temple of Jerusalem holy (Ps 11:4; 65:5; 79:1; LXX Num 3:38; Ezek 45:18). What was true of the sanctity of the Jerusalem Temple must be true also of the Corinthian community. Whoever violates the community, violates what pertains to God, which constitutes sacrilege. The Corinthian community is also “sacred,” because the Spirit of God dwells within it (3:16). As “the temple of God,” its sacred character must be respected.

***Pope’s Notes***

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