

"Future Hope Encourages Present Faith"

1 Corinthians 3:10-23

Before we look at our passage here in 1 Cor. 3:10-23, we need to know we're in the middle of something important Paul is challenging the Corinthian believers here with. While his letter began with thanksgiving for all their gifts and the small ways their faith was growing (1:4-9) he quickly needed to confront them about their spiritual immaturity. In 3:1 he wrote,

Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. ³ You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? ⁴ For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men?

The church was divided over personal preferences, particularly their preferred bible teacher. Some liked Peter, while others preferred Apollos. some Paul and others only listened to Jesus. The main battle was over Paul (the founding pastor who planted the church) and Apollos (who came after Paul and watered what Paul had begun). Part of the problem was the way the Greek world of their day assessed public speakers. They enjoyed eloquent and philosophical lecturers like Apollos more than the Jewish rabbinic teaching style of Paul.

Paul quickly reminded them that everything they taught was rooted in the gospel of Jesus. In 1:23-24 he stated,

²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God

'You're acting like the world does, thinking you are superior because you think one person's ideas are better than others.' Paul says in Ch. 2 all human ideas that oppose God is foolishness to God. And the foolishness of the cross is what God deems wise. Paul will point out later the ridiculousness of their thoughts here when he'll tell them he, Apollos, and Peter are all on Jesus' team. No one's better, just different.

So here in Ch.3 he points out their spiritual immaturity of comparing and arguing over preferences. We're all here to serve you, Paul says in 3:5, doing different aspects of the God-glorifying task of building God's church. He introduces the thought in v.8 that he'll expand on vv.10-23 when he writes,

⁸ The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. ⁹ For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

Paul is now going to explain that we are all part of this process of building God's temple, the place where God's presence dwells. While he talks about the concept of future rewards, all of these verses point out what we already have because we're in Christ and what we have in store for us in Christ. Knowing this should change the way we think and live and not get divided over our preferences. Look at the big picture. Examine how you are living and if it's wrong, change it now. Paul issues three warnings in these verses.

Warning # 1 – Build Up the Body of Christ with The Truth Not Human Wisdom (3:10-15)

There are no shortage of ideas on how to plant or grow a church. The world's way is to get people's attention so they react or respond. But that way usually means a sacrifice somewhere and it's usually the truth is watered down or even absent. That's worldly wisdom, not God's wisdom. Paul reminds them in v.10

¹⁰ By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

The phrase "expert builder" means 'wise architect'. Paul started the work and those who came after him built according to the plan he received which was

Jesus is our foundation (vv.10-11)

They preached Christ crucified and that the gospel is the power of God for salvation.

^{1:27} But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him. ³⁰ It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹ Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

By the grace of God he did it and Apollos did it and now Paul challenged the church, are you building on this foundation? Or are you focusing on the teachers about Christ and not the teaching of Christ? "He issues a warning: Each one should be careful how he/she builds."

Sometimes we can get imbalanced. We're involved in different ministries in the church. If we're not careful, we can let those consume us and start to think that this is the most important aspect of what we do here. Everything we do here is only important if Jesus and God are being glorified. If we make it about ourselves or a preference, that's glorifying us and not God. Paul reminds us in vv.12-14

Our service will be evaluated based on whose glory we seek (vv.12-14; 4:5)

¹² If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴ If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward.

Paul's listing of building materials is not meant to be exhaustive nor is there an allegorical meaning to each one. He is describing two types of materials; valuable vs. valueless. Long-lasting versus temporal. One that requires work and effort to obtain, while others are easily accessible and require little effort on our part. Essentially, the easy way is our way and the more difficult way to build is God's way. Again, the easier materials produce quick reactions. But eventually over time when you build on a faulty foundation, the building will collapse. Poor workmanship will always become evident over time.

Paul is reminding us that our service for Christ will be examined on 'the day'. This is not for unbelievers but for believers. Unbelievers are only judged by whether they accepted Christ or not. We however who know Christ are responsible to serve Jesus with our lives. V. 15 reminds us

Salvation by grace does not remove our responsibility to serve (v.15)

¹⁵ If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

Paul already stated in 3:1 that there are Christians who are immature and don't use their life wisely for God's purposes. They are clearly saved, v.15 states, but because they put little effort into walking with the Lord and serving Him they will enter heaven, but smelling of smoke.

Paul does not expand on what the rewards are nor does he explain what we lose when we don't serve Christ. There are a few passages that talk about receiving crowns yet we're also shown a glimpse of glory in Revelation when we see the 24 elders laying down their crowns at the feet of the Lord. Jesus mentioned rewards a few times:

Matt. 5:11 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

^{19:28} Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. ³⁰ But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

Everything will be better in eternity. Everything we lose here will be replaced hundredfold. Everything we do for God and His glory will not be done in vain. A few verses from here in 4:5 Paul gives a better idea what he means by building with gold, silver, precious stones or wood, hay and straw.

⁵ Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

Is our motive for doing ministry to be noticed or for God to be noticed? Every one of us needs to have the attitude of the psalmist in Ps. 115,

^{115:11} Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.

That's Paul's first warning to these disciples divided over preferences. His second warning comes in vv.16-20

**Warning # 2 – Be Careful How You Treat
God's Holy Presence
(3:16-20)**

¹⁶ Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

¹⁸ Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a "fool" so that he may become wise. ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"; ²⁰ and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile."

It's important to note the difference between this passage when he's talking about the church being the temple where God's presence dwells and in 6:19 when he says your physical body is a temple in which God's presence dwells. Here his focus is on the church and how it exists as the centralized place of worship in which God's glory resides. The glory left the Jerusalem temple and now God is doing a new thing individually, when now every believer has the Spirit dwelling in them but also that every local church is to demonstrate by the way they live that God dwells here. That we are about reflecting the glory of God. If our motives are right, our service is pointing God to others. But if it isn't, Paul says we'll be destroyed.

Paul said to the Corinthians don't deceive yourself by building the church on the foundation of one teacher or a style of ministry or a favourite bible translation or a specific doctrinal bent and not on the gospel of Christ. When we do that Paul says we actually destroy the church and God will destroy us. That's very harsh language. What does he mean by this? Let's first assure ourselves of what he doesn't mean. He already has told us in v.15 that a believer can't lose his salvation. That's clear. So that's not what destroy means. It's interesting that he uses the same word twice. If we destroy God's church where we live God will destroy us. At the very least it means

God will treat us accordingly (vv.16-17)

The word for 'destroy' has the idea of loss, ruin or corrupted and stained. I think what Paul is saying here is that whatever ruin we do to God's church God will bring ruin to us. When churches abandon God's truth eventually the church ends up abandoned; it loses its ability to be a witness for God's glory. If we try to make a name for ourselves God will bring ruin to our name. When we damage His reputation, He will damage ours.

Don't be deceived. Don't treat God's holy presence lightly. He removed the light of the temple a few times and He can do it again in our local temples. If a church persists in pursuing an agenda that is not centered on the foundation of the gospel of Jesus and the glory of God, then God won't let us continue.

God builds His church in His way and not the world's ways (vv.19-20)

The Corinthians were influenced greatly by pursuing wisdom apart from God. They loved to debate philosophies and various opinions on everything under the sun. We see this when Paul arrives in Athens in Acts 17:16-21 and he is invited to Areopagus where he can share his 'new teaching' and they wanted to hear these 'strange ideas to our ears.' Paul reminds them here not to be deceived by human wisdom that contradicts the word and ways of God. The cross seems foolish to the world but it is wisdom to God. The world calls us fools but God calls us wise.

Paul was warning the Corinthians not to build their local house of God's glory based on their preferred teaching style or preferred worship style but to build their local house of God's glory on God's truth. Let that guide all that we say and do. Every church is different because they have

different gifts and people. But the foundation of all that we do needs to be rooted in Christ and the Word of God. Don't 'run God's church' based on human business principles or personal preferences.

We know Paul is still addressing their preferences for one leader over another by another warning:

Warning # 3 – Stop Boasting in Your Preferences **(3:21-23)**

²¹ So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, ²³ and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

Paul reminded them and reminds us too that,

All God's people & all our preferences should serve Christ (vv.21-22)

The irony was that these people were dividing over Paul, Apollos and Peter when Paul says we're not divided. We're unified in serving you so you grow in Christ. Every bible teacher in the world is ours because we can learn and grow from them.

We all have personal preferences of who we like to listen to, but all those who love the Lord are here to serve all of us, not just those who like them. Paul makes us see how the future truths that are for us change the way we live in the present. How is the world ours? If we lose our house because of fire or persecution what will we receive one day?

Ps. 37:5 Refrain from anger and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.

⁹ For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.

¹⁰ In just a little while, the wicked will be no more; ^{though} you look carefully at his place, he will not be there.

¹¹ But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.

When we lose, we still win. How is death ours?

Rom. 8:38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

When we die we still win. We have a great future. Don't spoil the present by living for your own selfish interests, even in your local house of God's glory. We can't lose no matter what

Because everything belongs to Christ (v.23)

all are yours, ²³ and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

Paul was pleading with the Corinthian church, don't divide over people or ministry preferences because all those things and people are to work together for God's glory. If you want to ruin your life even as a Christian, God says I can bring ruin into your life. You're still saved but you won't have the joy you're looking for because it's about you and not Me.

Paul reminds all God's people, if we're in Christ we win. Everything Jesus has will be ours. Nothing bad here can take away anything good there. Build on the foundation of Jesus alone, not yourself. Serve together with God's people so that they will see the glory of God emanating from us.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
contact us at olivet@rideau.net