

## **1 Corinthians 3:5-17**

**5** What then is Apollos? What is Paul? They are servants through whom you believed, and each has the role the Lord has given. **6** I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. **7** So, then, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. **8** Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. **9** For we are God's coworkers. You are God's field, God's building.

**10** According to God's grace that was given to me, I have laid a foundation as a skilled master builder, and another builds on it. But each one is to be careful how he builds on it. **11** For no one can lay any foundation other than what has been laid down. That foundation is Jesus Christ. **12** If anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw, **13** each one's work will become obvious. For the day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire; the fire will test the quality of each one's work. **14** If anyone's work that he has built survives, he will receive a reward. **15** If anyone's work is burned up, he will experience loss, but he himself will be saved—but only as through fire.

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

## **Introduction**

Is church just a concert - a place people go to hear live music that encourages them in their faith. Is it just a place to come and hear an inspiring, motivational message delivered in a way that might hold your attention for about 5-10 minutes (if we're lucky). Is it a place to come and sit next to (making sure to leave at least one seat between you and a stranger, of course) a bunch of other cleaned up, smiling people who may have all sorts of other things going on in their life but they are going to sit here and smile for an hour and fifteen minutes because this is church and that is what you do.

Is that all that church is?

Paul has just finished telling the Corinthians that although they think that they are really spiritually mature, and they think that they've "made it," they actually are infants when it comes to the faith. He says, "you haven't even gotten the basics right yet." And one of those *basic* things that they don't understand is the nature of the church and its leadership. They believe that they've "made it," but Paul says - you don't even know what a church is supposed to be!

So, he is going to educate the Corinthians by using three images to illustrate the nature of the church and its leaders.

## **The first image he uses is that of a...**

### **I. Garden (5-9)**

#### **A. The church is God's garden that he alone causes to grow.**

B. Pau begins here in order to correct their view of teachers/leaders - uses himself and Apollos as examples

1. They are servants
  - a) Servants of God
  - b) Paul wants the Corinthians to have the right view of the church's leaders and teachers
    - (1) Paul compares himself and Apollos to farm workers, the kind of person the elite in Corinth despised (Rosner 145)
2. They have different roles
  - a) Given by God - not taken for themselves
  - b) Planting, watering
    - (1) Different stages of the Corinthian church

#### **3. They do not grow the church - God does**

- a) God is the only one who has ultimate significance in church growth
- b) Because they are not the ones who grow the church - the servants are "dispensable"
  - (1) Servants are necessary - God has chosen to work through humans. They are called, and gifted - but the individuals themselves are not important. God can use anyone.
- c) Leaders are needed but the individuals are not essential
  - (1) God has organized the church a certain way - it is clear from the NT
  - (2) He has given the church structure, leadership, and has chosen to work through human beings
    - (a) Where the Corinthians got tripped up, and where we get tripped up, is thinking that the specific individuals that God has called are essential, or form the backbone of the church - when it is Jesus Christ who is the foundation
  - (3) There has never been anyone who is "essential" to God growing people or his church
    - (a) Heroes of the faith
  - (4) Paul himself says that HE is dispensable
  - (5) What it looks like to think that leaders grow the church

- (a) Don't start seeing servants as indispensable - can get you into trouble

**“Ministers do have value. But when respect or fondness leads to an exclusive loyalty, and when this causes division or detracts from a proper theocentric or christocentric orientation, Paul wishes to point out that *only God, who makes things grow, is worthy of our undivided gratitude and adoration.*” (Rosner 147)**

- 4. They are united in purpose
  - a) Paul speaks against the contrived competition the Corinthians had been trying to cook up
- 5. They are ultimately rewarded by God - not by the Corinthians, ultimately accountable to God, not the Corinthians
  - a) Nature of reward - eternal results of one's work, enduring nature recognized by the Lord (Rosner 148-149)

## **II. Building (10-15)**

**A. The church is God's building and it must have the right foundation and must be built with the right materials.**

B. The quality of the foundation

- 1. Was laid with talent and care by Paul
  - a) Paul was talented, he was gifted!
  - b) Remember, quality leaders *are* important - they are just not the *most* important
- 2. Paul was careful for a reason - precisely to make sure that Jesus is the foundation - not himself or other servants
  - a) No other foundation can be laid
  - b) Paul was certain that *he* had laid a foundation of Jesus Christ, but was concerned that some might be trying to re-lay the foundation with something else
  - c) Any church or movement without Jesus at the center is nothing - nonsensical

C. The quality of the building

- 1. Paul realizes that although the foundation was Jesus Christ, others would build on that foundation
  - a) This metaphor would make sense to them - buildings took a long time to build in that time - different generations would work on them (Rosner 152)
  - b) How scary is it to turn over something you love and care about to someone else? To trust them to "build it" in the right way?

- D. The testing of the quality
1. Are the “materials” you are using to build the church matching the foundation of the church?
    - a) Gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw
    - b) Example: what does church growth mean?**
      - (1) “When Christ measures the health of the church, he doesn’t count people, he weighs them.” - Robby Gallaty**
      - (2) An unhealthy focus on numbers is the wrong measurement, the wrong “materials” to build with**
  2. Reveal - *apokalupto*
  3. It is possible to labor your whole life believing that you are working “for God” but to have everything you do be devoid of spiritual significance
  4. Nothing of spiritual significance will happen apart from God “showing up”
    - a) Danger of ascribing something to God that has been accomplished through human effort
  5. Parable of the talents
    - a) Matthew 25:14-30
      - (1) 21 and 23 “Well done, good and faithful servant”

### III. Temple (16-17)

- A. The church is God’s Temple, a group of people made holy by God’s presence in them personally and among them corporately.**
- B. Not really a metaphor - God is present among us
  1. So many Old Testament connections
  - 2. Jeremiah 32:38-40**
    - a) “They will be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them integrity of heart and action so that they will fear me always, for their good and for the good of their descendants after them. “I will make a permanent covenant with them: I will never turn away from doing good to them, and I will put fear of me in their hearts so they will never again turn away from me.”**
  - 3. Shadows of Eden where God once again dwells among his people**
  4. God no longer dwells in one place, but he dwells in us and among us
- C. All of the “yous” are plural
  1. Later in chapter 6 Paul will talk about the Holy Spirit being present in individuals
  2. For right now he is focusing on God’s presence in the church
  3. There is no category in Scripture for a Christian that is separated from a local church
    - a) Hyper-individualism of our culture

- D. Warning to those that would attack the unity of Christ's church
1. Paul is very clear that the rivalries at Corinth were dividing God's church and thus profaning his temple
  2. Does not mean all criticism
  3. Those that would try to divide up the church by following different leaders, creating factions, rivalries, and competition
  4. Also those that would say the church isn't important

**Transition: how is all of this brought to bear on your life, specifically?**

**Application**

- Reminder of your identity: You (plural) are the Temple of God. God now dwells in and among his people.
- The Temple - especially Holy of Holies.
  - Now we have that privilege as followers of God - the curtain has been torn and God dwells among his people
- Of course, the Spirit of God dwells in you individually if you've put your faith in Christ. This is a true, objective statement.
  - But, with our emphasis on a "personal relationship with Jesus" we have lost something. We have lost the wonder of a communal faith. Of being the temple of God not just personally but corporately.
  - We might come to church if we aren't too tired, and we'll sit there quietly with at least one seat between us and the next person over, and then we'll walk out and get in our cars and wait until next week to the same thing all over again.
  - THIS IS NOT HOW THE CHRISTIAN LIFE WAS MEANT TO BE LIVED.
- When you isolate yourself from the church - you are missing what it means to be a follower of Christ.
  - You can't make it on your own - you were not meant to. The Christian life was meant to be lived in community.
  - That is why Paul can say that the church is the "temple of God," because God's presence should be able to be felt here real and tangibly.
  - Example: you struggle, but you are not alone
- Prayer, teaching, baptism, communion are all ways that the Holy Spirit can use to exhort, encourage, and enliven you
- This is why it is so important that the foundation of the church, and the building which is on top of that foundation, would be done with care and be led by the Spirit. It must be done in a proper way because it is God's very temple that we are building up. He has invited us into this work and we must do this work on his terms.

- Again, one last time, the norm for a Christian, according to the New Testament, is that you would be connected and submitted to a local church. I don't care if that's Northstar or another church, but it is the norm.
  - If you're one of these lone ranger Christians, these mavericks that like to be all independent and float from church to church can I just say - it's time to settle down. Find a church. Plug in. Serve. Give. Wrestle. Grow. Live with those people and grow with those people together as the temple of the Most High God. Stop being satisfied with a half-lived Christian life. You *need* other people.
- I know that there are some of you that have been hurt by a church. You've experienced something painful as a result of a church that was not following God the way they should have been and thus you were wounded by them.
  - I can relate to this.
  - The church can get things wrong. We do get things wrong. Because of our flesh, we are messy, and sometimes "messy" is an woefully inadequate word for the dysfunction that is part of some churches.
  - There are some churches that you do need to leave.
  - But in spite of the mess, the hurt, the brokenness, the fact still remains that the church is what we have been given. The global church with local expressions. It is where God wants us to be connected and where he wants us to grow. So hold out hope, even if at times it feels like that hope is misplaced - because you aren't putting your hope in people, you are putting your hope in God. God who is growing, building, and maturing his church using imperfect, broken servants. And ultimately, the church is a people who have been set apart - a holy people - who God dwells in and among.

## Conclusion

So, is the church just place we come to hear some good music, halfway pay attention to a sermon and then leave, just to do it all again next week? No. First, the church is not a place, it is a people. The Church is the Body of Christ - the worldwide group of people who have been called into relationship with God and exist to know him and make him known, instruments of redemption in this broken world. The Church is holy because God makes it holy - because he inhabits it as he inhabits us.

In his infinite wisdom God has given us local expressions of the global church, local congregations of people where we can worship God together through teaching, song, baptism, communion, and fellowship. **This is a gift from God.** It is not primarily a cultural institution nor is it something optional in the life of the Christian. According to the New Testament it is the normative thing for a Christian to be connected and involved in the life of a local church.

Because the Church is God's holy temple, a people set apart for him, it is of essential importance that no one would try to "divide up" the Body of Christ. There are echoes of chapter 1 of 1 Corinthians here where Paul says "is Christ divided?" (v. 13). Creating division within the church, starting factions and rivalries, and even diminishing the importance of the local church, is "profaning the temple of God," and something that God takes very seriously.

Something you can do, right now, in response to this message is to worship through song. Worship is not a spectator sport, though sometimes we treat it like that in our churches. We sing *together*, lifting up our praise to the God who dwells in and among us.

Worship and as you do so begin to feel the others around you, here for the same purpose, worshipping the same God. Extend out from your individualized shell and experience the joy of a faith that is meant to be lived out in community. You aren't alone in this journey.

### **Ciampa Rosner**

5-9

"the only legitimate allegiance for members of the church is to God and Christ" (142)  
Contrasted with their culture's view of leaders and followers

1. Christian leaders must not be accorded an allegiance appropriate to God alone
2. God hold the church's leaders accountable for how they build it (143)

Paul compares himself and Apollos to farm workers, the kind of person the elite in Corinth despised (145)

God is the only one who has ultimate significance in church growth

"Ministers do have value. But when respect or fondness leads to an exclusive loyalty, and when this causes division or detracts from a proper theocentric or christocentric orientation, Paul wishes to point out that *only God, who makes things grow*, is worthy of our undivided gratitude and adoration." (147)

Reason for "reward" language - Paul, Apollos, and any other teacher are accountable ultimately to God, not other people. (148)

Nature of reward - eternal results of one's work, enduring nature recognized by the Lord (148-149)

Paul does not focus on "who" they are but "whose" they are (149)

Link between agriculture and architecture (150)

10-15

Fire is purifying - not judging

Paul may be comparing the Corinthians to Solomon's garden temple (151)

Buildings took a long time to build in that time - different generations would work on them (152)

Some of the materials will withstand fire - some will not - which is why the builders must be careful how they are building (153-154)

The day of the Lord - it will reveal the quality of work done

What kind of wisdom was used? What were the workers motives? (155-156)

The reward - "well done my good and faithful servant"

God's Holy Spirit dwells among them - corporately (160)

Anyone who damages or threatens God's temple must answer to God (161)

### **Richard B. Hays**

The church belongs to God (51)

"you are God's temple" - not the building but the gathered people (51)

Paul's words should be interpreted corporately - to the group (51)

Paul and Apollos are farmhands with different chores (52) - contrast with hoity-toity rhetoricians

"Both are necessary: without the waterer, the crop would die; without the planter, there would be no crop to water." (52)

Paul laid a foundation based on God's wisdom, not the wisdom of the world (54)

"The Spirit of God no longer can be localized in a sacred building: it is to be found in the gathered community of God's elect people in Christ." (57)

God is there not because of what the community is doing - but because the Holy Spirit is there (57)

"Those who split the community are offending God and calling God's own judgement on their own heads." "...turn the temple/community into a playground for their own arrogance and spiritual vanity..."(58)

### **Anthony C. Thiselton**

"Paul rejects too high a view and too low a view of ministers." (62)

God has assigned a role to each one - it is not an optional task for them (63)

Only because of the Holy Spirit's presence is the church holy

"At the last day such a builder may become aware that he or she has contributed little or nothing permanent to the kingdom." (66)

The rivalry in Corinth was profaning God's temple (67)

"They are playing with forces that threaten the holiness of God's own temple, in effect pitting themselves against the Holy Spirit. By their attitude they also despise the humility of the cross and the love of Jesus." (68)

### **Paul Barnett**

This is an example of the "milk" of the previous section



"Only the teaching which is centered in and true to Jesus crucified and risen will stand the test of the fires of God's judgement on the Last Day."

"...loss of warm commendation from Jesus and the loss of a life's work in ministry, because it has been defective in truth."

**Richard L. Pratt, Jr.**

"The good they received through Paul and Apollos should have made them loyal to God, not to his appointed servants." (48)

Corinthians may have made up conflicts

"Paul implied what he had already stated plainly: some leaders of the Corinthian church had begun to replace the church's true foundation." (49)

"Brings to the light the nature of each leader's work" (50) James 3:1

"Leaders must not serve the church with human wisdom, but with divine wisdom from the Spirit, because the church is holy before God." (50)