

The Beauty of Christian CommUNITY

Studies in the First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians

1 Corinthians 3:1-23

“Fireproof Saints”

Introduction: Paul continues to address the problem of factions in the Corinthian church. Paul began the letter by reminding them of their status in Christ and their status as spiritual people. Paul has made it clear that the Corinthians have assurance of salvation. He confirmed their reception of the Spirit with evidence of their lives. Now Paul explains the distinction between mature and immature Christians, corrects their perspective on the role of ministers in the Gospel ministry, and reminds them of who they belong to.

I. Carnal Behavior is Evidence of Immaturity (1 Corinthians 3:1-4)

- a. The Corinthians are classified as spiritual people (born again saints who have the Spirit of God). The church was young but this is not an excuse for the type of immaturity Paul will describe. The food illustration is related to the depth of teaching they were able to stomach. Some people have not grown enough in the Lord to receive solid food. One sign of maturity is the ability to know right from wrong based on the principles of the word of God (Hebrews 5:12-14).
- b. Envy, strife, and divisions are signs of immaturity. Paul is telling them to stop behaving like worldly people and start behaving like the spiritual saints of God. Causing division based on favorite preachers is immature. This is not an exact parallel to contemporary denominations. This was a small community of Christians living in the same city.

II. The Proper Perspective of Christian Leaders (1 Corinthians 3:5-11)

- a. The Lord allows ministers to participate in the process of people coming to faith (Romans 10:14). Paul was the first to sow the seed of the Gospel in Corinth (Mark 4:14). Apollos continued to proclaim Christ among the Corinthians (Isaiah 58:11). God causes seeds to produce fruit (Mark 4:26-29).
- b. We must view other believers as united in mission to accomplish God’s purpose. Paul and Apollos were both ministering in the same field before they met (Acts 18). They were united in mission but distinct in labor and reward (Matthew 25:14-30). We are saved from sin and saved for good works (Ephesians 2:8-10).
- c. The community is God’s field where the harvest is reaped. The church is God’s building project (not physical building but the people). Paul had a grace gift of a wise master builder (construction site manager/architect). God used Paul to lay the foundation for the Corinthian church. Apollos and others built on it. We must be careful how we build on the foundation laid by the apostles. Jesus Christ is the only foundation for the church (Romans:15-20). The structure stands or falls based on the quality of the foundation (Luke 6:48).



III. Grace Produces the Labor that Earns Rewards (1 Corinthians 3:12-23)

- a. Evaluation day will expose the durability of the materials used (2 Corinthians 5:10). Fire- God's judgement/discernment is the testing factor. The fire will expose the work. Can your labor stand the test of fire? If your work endures the fire, you receive a reward in addition to salvation. If your work does not endure fire, you will suffer loss but still receive the benefit of salvation.
- b. The church is the temple of God. The Spirit of God dwells in believers. The penalty for defiling God's temple is destruction because God's temple is holy. Bad leaders make flammable disciples (Matthew 23:15).
- c. Paul warns of self-deception (Matthew 7:21-23). The solution is let go of confidence in worldly wisdom. Be willing to be labeled a fool by the world because you live according to the word of God.
- d. Just like the message of the cross is foolishness to the world, the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God (Job 5:13; Psalm 94:11).

“And God will provide rest for you who are being persecuted and also for us when the Lord Jesus appears from heaven. He will come with his mighty angels, **in flaming fire**, bringing judgment on those who don't know God and on those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with eternal destruction, forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious power. When he comes on that day, he will receive glory from his holy people—praise from all who believe. And this includes you, for you believed what we told you about him” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 NIV).

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February 4, 2024*