**YOU ARE GOD’S FIELD, GOD’S BUILDING**

***1 Corinthians 3:1-23***

***“For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.” (9)***

In last week’s passage, we learned about God’s hope and vision for His people. God’s vision was for His people to receive the Holy Spirit and to be Jesus’ witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Today’s passage is about unique aspects of the church. To witness about Christ to the world, God uses His church. Therefore, it is fitting that we go from Acts chapter 1 to 1 Corinthians chapter 3. Apostle Paul teaches about how the Corinthians should view God’s work and about the church as God’s field and building. Based on this correct point of view, may the Spirit help us grow as mature Christians and be effective gospel workers for God’s glory!

1. **Paul’s rebuke (vs. 1-4)**

Let’s begin this passage by looking at verse 1, ***“Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ.”*** Apostle Paul opens this chapter with a scathing rebuke about the immaturity of the Corinthian church. Throughout the remainder of this study on Corinthians, we will see that they have many problems. But especially, what seems to have drawn Apostle Paul’s rebuke is the division in the church. Many in the church said they “followed Paul” or some said they “followed Apollos”. The result of these divisions started to sprout jealousy and quarreling. I can picture it now, some were saying to others, “my Bible teacher is better than yours.” While others retorted back, “Well, my Bible teacher has gone to seminary and yours has not!” Back and forth it went.

To Apostle Paul’s chagrin, they had not grown up. Look at verse 3, ***“You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?***  Their jealousy and quarreling revealed that the believers were still worldly. Here the word for “worldly” is “fleshly’ in the Greek. Therefore, someone who is still worldly, after he or she has received the Spirit, is one still dominated by the thinking of a natural man or woman. The Corinthian believers were still governed by their sinful nature. In the case of this passage, they were governed by their jealousy and quarreling. Rather than living by what the Spirit desires, the Corinthians lived based off what the world is doing. Thus, instead of acting as mature adults, they were mere spiritual infants in Christ. Spiritually they were childish and self-centered. They could not digest spiritually solid food.

Compared to the spiritual infancy, what does a mature Christian look like, according to the Bible? A mature Christian is one who is led by the Spirit through prayers. He put his priority on God, humbly submits his own desire to God’s will and carefully follows guidance of the Holy Spirit. The mature Christian has the mind of Christ (1Co 2:16c). He or she grows in the image of Christ and reflects Christ’s image in their thoughts, speaking and actions. Also, the mature Christian is the one who can obey the word of God, not just listen to it (Ja 1:22). And lastly, the mature Christian understands what God has freely given us (1Co 2:12)—the gospel of which is Christ crucified. “The message of the cross” firstly concerned our forgiveness of sins and justification through Jesus’ suffering and death. Apostle Paul mentions this basic doctrines as milk. But “the message of the cross” also contains more deep spiritual principles and doctrines like sanctification. Sanctification is to learn from Jesus Christ and grow in him. In a word, a mature Christian lives a Christ-centered life.

The Bible urges us to continually grow to in Christian maturity in our mindset, attitude, as well as our lifestyle. The growing Christian learns to deny himself, take up his or her cross and follows Jesus (Mk 8:34). The growing Christian learns to give thanks rather than complain. The growing Christian learns to love others and see others with a compassionate heart. The growing Christian encourages his or her fellow brothers and sisters instead of competing and quarreling with them. Finally, the growing Christians works with his or her brothers and sisters in unity with the Spirit. May the Spirit guide us to grow in spiritual maturity.

1. **You are co-workers in God’s service, God field and God’s building (vs. 5-9).**

Because of the Corinthian church’s immaturity, they had an unhealthy view of their leaders and themselves. The Corinthian Christians elevated their Bible teachers to almost a god-like level. And because of this immature view, they had caused quarreling and divisions among the church. Now Apostle Paul helps the Corinthian believers to correctly view themselves and the church leadership.

First, God is the one who makes things grow. Let’s look at verses 5-7, ***“What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.”*** Paul first begins by telling them that Apollos and Paul are just servants who were assigned by the Lord tasks. For Paul, he planted. And for Apollos, he watered. Paul and Apollos were mere servants. Because the work belonged to God. So how did Apostle Paul want the Corinthian Christians to mature in this area?

Apostle Paul mentions twice God makes things grow. This was the most important fact in Paul’s teaching to the Corinthians. What apostle Paul was telling the Corinthians is that God had used Paul and Apollos as gospel servants through whom they came to believe in Christ. Paul planted the seed of gospel faith as a pioneer and founder. But as a co-worker in God’s service, Apollos came and watered the gospel seed among them. He fed the Corinthians the word of God through sermons, Bible studies, and admonitions. Even though Paul and Apollos labored together, it was God who made it grow. God is the one who works by His word and through the Holy Spirit to draw people to Jesus, lead them to salvation and enable them to grow. God works in and through people and churches. In sum, Apostle Paul is reminding the Corinthian Christians that it is God who did all the behind-the-scenes work, and that Paul and Apollos were just instruments.

As the spring semester gets under way, we will begin laboring to plant the seed of gospel faith on the Twin Cities campuses. Not only that, we will also begin watering the gospel truth to those we have begun studying with. In many cases, we plant without seeing the fruit. And other times, we harvest what others have sowed. Whatever we do, we do not labor in vain. Why? Because God works through all our labor, whether small or large. This also should remind us that we are just workers, we must do our best, but we cannot make anyone believe or grow in the gospel truth. God is the one who makes it grow. So, we need to humbly pray to God, and God alone should get the credit.

Second, we are co-workers in God’s service. Let’s look at verse 9a, ***“For we are co-workers in God’s service…”*** Apostle Paul and Apollos were different is character and style, but they were not competitors. Each did his assigned task given to him by God with the same purpose—expanding God’s Kingdom by caring for His people by sowing and watering the gospel truth. Like in the game of football, the purpose for the team is to win, not lose. In order to win the Super Bowl, playing as a team is crucial. I believe the same can be said in not only the Christian life, but in building up and expanding God’s Kingdom in our churches. God’s work is never a one-man show. Paul and Apollos were on the same team. This is where the maturity that Apostle Paul is speaking about. For, the Corinthian Christians, they were taking sides and competing against each other; thus, living like the dog-eat-dog world they were living in. But for the mature Apostle Paul and Apollos, they saw each other as co-workers in God’s service.

Where there is humble and beautiful co-working in Jesus, there is God’s manifold blessing. Psalm 133:1 and 3b say, “*How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity…For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.”* Isn't that amazing? Nothing is more important in all of life than that. Think of the privilege of your being a fellow-worker with God in this day and age. When at last it is all over, and we stand before the King, God will reward each person according to their own labor (8b). Jesus also promises blessing and recognition for good and faithful servants (Mt 25:21,23).

Likewise, when you preach Jesus and the message of the cross, you are a fellow worker in God’s service. Not just with the people here in this church. You are a fellow worker with Paul and Apollos and every other Christian who preaches Jesus around the world. That thought should unite us in one heart and one mind. Isn’t it amazing that we have co-workers in places like India, Belize, Taiwan, and China? The same message you are preaching right here on campus is the same message that is being preached to indigenous peoples in Peru, or to Muslims in Indonesia, or to college students in the Philippines. Even Billy Graham, arguably one of the greatest preachers of our generation who has preached to as many as 200 million people in this lifetime said, “I am just one of many thousands called to be an evangelist.” He too is a fellow worker.

There are many examples of this kind of co-working in our ministry. In my case, I started Bible study with Hannah in Milwaukee. She taught me the Bible for about a year or two. Then I continue Bible study with Pastor Abraham. Their co-working with planting and watering was a blessing to me in different ways. Also, there is Spencer’s case. He was invited to Bible study by our women co-workers at the time, Pastor Abraham began Bible study with him, and then I studied with him for years. In this way of co-working, God has grown him as a mature servant of God now. What a beautiful spiritual team. We all co-worked together for God’s glory, only to see God work in his life abundantly.

Third, you are God’s field, God’s building. Apostle Paul continues his view of a mature community of believers and their view of themselves and the church. Let’s look at verse 9b, ***“…you are God’s field, God’s building.”*** Here are two equally valid views of the church. In the field, Paul is thinking of evangelism, of the increase. As a farmer plants his crop year after year, it increases as he plants, so each year he is able to plant more because of the seed he gets. So, the church spreads and increases numerically as we work within it, building one another up and teaching the truth of God. That, in turn, is imparted to others who are reached by students, friends, co-worker and family members, and thus the church increases. God expects his field to grow and bear much fruit for his glory.

You are God's field, but is also God's building, which Paul says in Ephesians 2, *“In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”(Eph 2:21-22).* As we minister according to our gifts, where ever we are, we are learning something about ourselves and others. We are also being changed, brick by brick. We are being shaped and fashioned and chiseled off a little here, and a little there, until the whole temple grows to be a manifestation of the wholeness of God. That is why, as the church functions in the way the Bible outlines, we become more and more like Christ. We manifest his qualities; we become a wholesome, healed people, a community that has learned to live together in forgiveness, friendship, compassion, love and mercy toward one another. As that becomes visibly apparent, the whole world begins to open its eyes and prick up its ears to watch and listen, for it discovers that God is there and that He is living. God is dwelling among His people, and we are built up into God's building.

Therefore, a church is not an ordinary organization. It is a place where God is working in the lives of each individual. And each individual member of the church is like God’s field or God’s building, where God is working in and through people’s lives. If each member had this view of a church community, quarrels and divisions would cease to exist. With a right view of ourselves as individuals and as a body, nothing but respect and love for one another would grow. The end result would be to produce good fruit from God’s field and a strong, beautiful and useful building. This was Paul’s vision of a mature outlook of each person and the church.

1. **The foundation is already laid in Christ (vs. 10-23).**

In verses 10-11, Apostle Paul shifts mainly from a gardening analogy to a construction analogy. The construction of a building always begins with its foundation. The laying of the foundation is that important. If the foundation is not solid, the rest of the structure is vulnerable and weak. If the foundation is properly laid, it can withstand almost anything, including windstorms and floods. Here Apostle Paul is not only teaching the importance of each spiritual leader building on Christ, but each member of the church also having the responsibility for him or herself to build on Christ.

What is the trustworthy foundation which Paul laid? Let’s look at verse 11, ***“…for no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.*** That answer is in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the true and unshakeable foundation for people and for the church. Jesus is the cornerstone of God’s house and God’s redemptive history. The problem lies when people try to build their lives around, money, lust, or their career. Even some will try to build their lives around their education and human philosophies. But none of these are a sound or lasting foundation. The only trustworthy and eternal foundation is in Christ Jesus.

In verses 12-15, Paul likens the building of a sound Christian life or ministry to the construction of a sturdy house. Look at verses 12 and 13, ***“If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their 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 person’s work.”*** A building can be made of cheaply by using wood, hay or straw. Or one can build an expensive building using precious metals like gold, silver or precious stones. So, what does it mean for us to build our foundation with wood, hay or straw? If we look at it from the view point of the spiritual leader helping others build, it could be through legalism or human philosophies. But looking at it through the individual who is building their life, it could be easy-going, self-seeking, fleshly lives. It is a life of avoiding sacrifice and having a compromising spirit. But

Otherwise, building with costly materials is a life time of investing in one’s time, effort and money in building God’s kingdom. A mature Christian builder is one who denies himself, takes up his or her cross and follows Jesus. Also, the mature Christian builder is the one who tries his or her best to obey Jesus ahead of his or her own worldly desires. The mature Christian laborer works to please God rather than his or her sinful nature. From the viewpoint of those who are servants of God, they are the one’s who teach the Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead. They are the mature servants who lead and mentor others to put their faith in Jesus.

In addition to calling the Corinthian church God’s field and God’s building, he now calls them God’s temple. Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians to see themselves as God’s holy dwelling place with God’s Spirit living in them. They were precious to God. They needed to identify themselves and recognize each other as God’s holy people. Then they could live holy lives and respect others. Paul strongly warns that anyone who destroys, damages or defiles God’s temple will be punished by God.

Apostle Paul closes this chapter with encouraging words. Look at verses 21-23, ***“So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephasor the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.”***There was no more need to boast in human leaders because everything even them are theirs in Christ Jesus. Everything belongs to God and we owe thanks and praise to Him. The mature Christian learns to submit himself or herself to Christ, as Christ as submitted himself to God the Father. The solution to divisions in the church is to focus on God by imitating Christ. Let’s grow in maturity in Jesus to be spiritual men and women who have laid their foundation in Jesus.

Through this passage, we learned that Christians should no longer stay in our worldly desires and spiritual infancy. Rather we need to continue to grow in Christ because we belong to God as God’s field, God’s building, and God’s temple. Also, as mature Christians we need to understand that God makes things grow and that we should lay our foundation on Jesus Christ and build our church with costly materials. May God alone be honored and glorified through our spiritual growth and maturity!