

18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. 20 And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. 21 ¶ Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; 22 Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; 23 And ye are Christ's; and Christ *is* God's. I Corinthians 3:18-23

We said last week that the church is God's garden and God's building. While both figures emphasize the truth that the church belongs to God, yet the figures differ from one another as far as imagery is concerned.

The figure of a garden emphasizes the spiritual fruit that is offered to God, which pleases Him a great deal. To an agricultural people, this figure would have been most apt. Jesus spoke of the wheat and the tares, the wheat being gathered into His garner, and the wicked being burned in the fire. He spoke of the parable of the fig tree, and emphasized the importance of bearing good fruit. He also said that our hearts are like soil with received the good seed of the Gospel and brings forth fruit.

There is an important passage in Hebrews 6: 7 For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: 8 But that which beareth thorns and briers *is* rejected, and *is* nigh unto cursing; whose end *is* to be burned.

On the other hand, the figure of a building emphasizes the duty of the church to worship God. God is not pleased to receive any sort of sacrifice, nor does He overlook the spirit in which offerings are offered. We are forbidden to offer the blood of bulls and goats to God, for Jesus the Messiah has come who was foretold in the law and the prophets. But the temple of God is still of critical importance to the people of God. There is no more offering for sin, for that was completed by the offering up of the body of Jesus Christ once for all, but we still offer our gifts of love, praise, and thanksgiving to God. We still come before his presence with singing and we acknowledge that He has made us and not we ourselves, that we are His people and the sheep of His pasture. We still enter into His courts with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise. We are thankful unto Him and bless His name, just as they did in the times before the coming of Christ, but now our temple is not made of stones or wood, but of living stones, people transformed and renewed by the grace of God through the Gospel of Christ.

The church at Corinth had forgotten these things. They had forgotten that they belongs to Christ, and that the men who ministered to them were servants of the church, and the people who ministered forgot that they were called by Christ to be servants of the church. But let us look at the Scriptures:

Vs. 18. Don't deceive yourselves. The worst intoxicant in the world is worldly pride. The Corinthians had been puffed up in their fleshly minds and had deceived themselves. As a result they gloried in men, and a party developed around each of the ministers that God had sent to them. There is probably little that Paul could have said that would have so abased the Corinthians if they had listened to them. A man must turn aside from the wisdom of the world in order to find the wisdom of Christ. This is why Isaiah cried, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts..." [Isaiah 55]. You cannot think the mind of Christ until you abandon your own thinking. Now don't be deceived on this, either. God certainly expects you to think, for His worship must be in spirit and in truth, not just ceremonies performed by the body. Therefore we are called to try the spirits to see if they are of God. Paul even subjected himself to this scrutiny by the church for he says in I Cor.10:14-16 "Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say. The cup of blessing which we

bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?”

Even Paul expected the church to evaluate what he said, and not be as blind people being led by blind people.

But there is an important consideration here. Paul is saying that the ministers are the servants of the church, and their work is to be evaluated by the people of God. The people are not servants of the ministers. The party strife that existed in the church of Corinth was the result of pride, the kind of pride that glories in men and boasts in superior knowledge and discernment, the very pride that James condemns in his third chapter.

Vs. 19 is a quotation from Job. 5, which shows how deep and devious are the counsels of the wisdom of the world. Eliphaz is accusing Job of being crafty in the wisdom of the world, when in reality, it is Eliphaz himself who is condemning Job, and falling into the same pit that he warns Job of.

Vs. 20. This is a quotation from Psalm 94:11. Often quotations in Scripture are signposts that point us to an entire passage, not just one phrase or verse. So it is here, for this whole Psalm is important to our understanding of Paul letter. God knows our thoughts—and He knows that they are vanity—empty, without force or relevance.

Vs. 21. We are not to glory in men: for all things come from God. The teachers in the church belong to you, you do not belong to the teachers.

Vs.22. This shows the scope of the “all things.” Paul is arguing from the greater to the lesser. The whole creation of God, and all that happens to us, is given to us by our Heavenly father for our good and benefit. If this is true, then the teachers that He sends to us are for our good. Jesus said that the “meek inherit the earth.” This means that the humble, who hear the word of God and believe the promises of God inherit what the earth was created for. It was never created to be the final dwelling place of the people of God, for God always intended that we be with Him. Jesus said, “I will come to take you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.” It is too bad that a carnal, Jewish interpretation of these things has occupied the minds of so many churchmen through the years, as if Jesus died on the cross so that this world might be our home.

Paul, Apollos, Cephas, the world, life, death, things present and things to come, all are yours.

Vs 23. It is through Christ that we come to God. God appointed the Word to be the Mediator, and in order to be that Mediator, the Word took to Himself flesh and blood, and became a real, true, and good man, without sin, in the body of the Virgin Mary.

In coming to Jesus Christ, therefore, we are coming to God, for Jesus Christ is both God and man. We must not look beyond Christ, or apart from Christ, for in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. We are not to glory in men, for God has made Jesus Christ to be wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. There is nothing else but Christ that I need. As Charles Wesley wrote in his great hymn:

“Thou, O Christ, art all I want; More than all in thee I find.
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint, Heal the sick, and lead the blind.
Just and holy is thy Name; I am all unrighteousness;
False and full of sin I am, Thou art full of truth and grace.

Plenteous grace with thee is found, Grace to cover all my sin;

Let the healing streams abound; Make and keep me pure within:
Thou of life the Fountain art, Freely let me take of thee;
Spring thou up within my heart, Rise to all eternity. Amen,.