

1 Corinthians 3: 1- 17. Gonerby and Barrowby July 2012

(Luke 22:24-30)

Problem of Division

in this letter St Paul is writing to a church with problems. No church is perfect, but Paul is particularly concerned for this Corinthian church.

In his writings Paul divides humanity into two camps. Those who do not know God -- the unspiritual; and those who have received the Spirit and who therefore appreciate the Gospel message.

There is however a third group which Paul uses for some in the church at Corinth, -

"the worldly" [NIV], "not yet spiritual" [CEV]

Read v1-3 These are Christians in whom the "world", or the old nature still retains the upper hand and dominates their behaviour.

Paul says you are Christians who are still behaving like non-Christians, v3

"mere men" [NIV], "people of this world" [CEV]

What is the evidence of this immaturity which characterise their childish and worldly ways.

Again v3: there's quarreling & jealousy among them. How can they say they're spiritually mature if they show that sort of worldly immaturity? Rather than being directed by love for one another they're driven by competitiveness. They're constantly comparing one with another to see who's the best, who's the smartest, who's got the right answers, or the best pedigree.

The presenting issue in this divisiveness is the issue of leadership. They each have their favourite guru that they place on a pedestal. They may not have had TV or the mass media that we have today, but they still had their favourite stars. So what's wrong with them having their favourite guru?

The problem is that the status that these leaders are being given, seems to set them even above Jesus.

[NIV] So, in verse 5, he asks What is Paul, what is Apollos?

Not who, notice, but what?

You see, this isn't about personalities, it's about function.

What are these leaders there for?

Well, in the Christian economy they're there as servants.

[CEV] So in verse 5 Paul reminds them that these leaders, himself and Apollos, are just all servants. (**Read**)

And Paul has to explain to them that Christian leadership and Christian service for everyone, leader or not, is not about groups and divisions but about learning to work together.

We are all servants together of Christ -- with different gifts and functions.

Paul uses 2 pictures from everyday life to illustrate what he's saying: one from farming and one from building.

Planting and Watering (v 6-9a)

First, (v 6-9a) he says, one person plants another person waters. (*I planted the seed, Apollos watered it*)

So which is the one that matters most? Well, neither.

What matters is that God gives the growth.

Will the plant grow if it isn't planted? No.

Will it grow if no-one waters it? No.

What if the waterer waters a different piece of soil and ignores the bit where the seeds are? The seed won't grow then either.

Both are vital tasks. Neither is more important than the other. They are in fact fellow servants of the one God. Equal in importance and value, working with each other and with God ultimately gives the results.

If we look around here today. What do you see?

Not just an odd bunch of people... but a team of workers called by God to work together to grow his church.

You see, we're all important members of God's workforce.

There are no part-time Christians in the Church; at least there shouldn't be.

Some of us are the ones who plant the seed of the gospel, through our words or our actions.

Some are those who make the last connection for someone when they finally take the step of faith in Jesus Christ.

Others nurture the plant after it's sprung into life through encouragement or discipling in small groups or one to one.

But without all of those tasks being accomplished by you and me the plant won't thrive. In fact it could wither and die.

Building the Building The Only Foundation (v 10-12)

Secondly in verses 10 -- 12, we move on from an agricultural to an architectural picture.

We are God's building, we're told. -- a picture that's used in lots of places for the God's people.

So what does a building need if it's to be well built?

Well, first we need a good architect to design the structure, to make sure that the structure will be sound and especially to make sure that the foundations are sound and the design is solid. Then we need a good builder and tradesmen who'll follow the design correctly, who'll use the right tools and materials. (We've all had bad)

And this is an picture of the way the church is built up. Paul says he laid a foundation like an expert builder and now someone else is building on it.

Again teamwork as together we build God's Church.

Worldwide, where the Christian Church is concerned, there've been many builders involved, over 2000 years, and it's still being built.

Like that cathedral in Barcelona.

But the test of each successive builder will be whether they follow the original design or try to change it, whether they build on the foundation that's been established or try to modify it.

Paul says we have to be careful how we build -- and not use poor materials-- as it were.

If we build our church on God's word, -- then it will last.

But what if we take our church forward based on worldly ideas or secular public opinion -- then Paul says, when our building is tested it will not survive. *Read verses 12 and 13.*

Some people try to reinterpret the scriptures to make them more palatable. There are things in this Book that they don't like, that they think sound foolish or unfair or unpalatable to our modern minds. So they reinterpret them, they water them down so they don't have to worry about them.

(Morality - OK with 10 C's - but Christian Sexual Ethics!)

Or maybe they try to blend Christianity with some other religious system.

Booked again all that does is to dilute or undermine our faith to the point where it's likely to merge into every other faith that you can find.

Another poor building material is the idea that human thinking, human endeavour can achieve anything, so we don't actually need God to send his Son for us. We just have to work harder at bringing peace to our world, follow the golden rule. (explain)

Of course that particular path has been a bit of a failure of late so it's not as popular as it used to be.

So the warning is there for us. Be careful how you build your church -- used true and tested materials. God's word.

So we use our different gifts and work together as servants, building on the one foundation, Jesus, so as to build up the church in unity according to God's word and wisdom and guided by his Spirit.