

Supremacy Of God And The Church

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February 21, 2018

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1 Cor. 3:1-23

“And I brethren could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ”. (V.1). The simplicity of Paul’s instruction had given occasion to the false apostle (2 Cor. 11:12-15) to criticize him as a shallow teacher. (2 Cor. 10:10, rather than as one who had **“the mind of Christ.”** To this the epistle replies that their own immature condition up to the time when he left them, rendered them incapable of any fuller instruction; for, far from being mature disciples (ch.2:8; Eph. 4:13), they were still swayed or taken by the prejudices and passion of the unregenerate life out of which they had been but lately born, and to which they were not wholly dead. This is how some Christians are, they don’t stand in the truth, they are partially cold and at the same time hot. *“I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bare it, neither yet now are ye able.”* (v 2). Paul grounded them in the first principles, and had not enlightened them as to those higher doctrine which lead on to perfection, because they could not grasp them. Most people pretend to have known God’s word, but when you see them they don’t act like those that have been grounded in the truth. (Heb. 5:11-6:2; 1 Pet. 2:2; Mark. 4:33; John 16:12) *“For ye are yet carnal: for where there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, (Gal. 5:19-20; James 3:16) and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? (vs.3-4).*

Someone today claims to have been baptized and attend to the Lord’s services every first day of the week, but still he/she envies others. The same case was with the Corinthians because they had no ground to argue with Paul as to their condition of faith when he was among them, for their present condition was not better, since they were still swayed by the same prejudices and passions, and knew themselves worldlings, rather than Spirited Christians. (Gal. 5:25). *“Who then is Paul and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.”* (vs. 5-6) (Acts 6:2; Col. 1:7; Luke 22:25-26; Rom. 12:6). *“So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are non: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor.”* (vs. 7-8). (2 Cor. 12:12; John 5:4-5, 16). Paul brought these people into the

vineyard or kingdom, Apollos instructed them; but God gave the results, causing them to live and grow, and so to God alone was due the honor and praise (Psa. 115:1). Paul regarded it as his especial duty because of his apostleship to tarry in no territory already occupied, but to press into new fields and plant churches, leaving others to help water them. Rom. 15:20; 2 Cor. 10:15-16). Personally, I believe that Paul respected their purposes, or the ends for which they labor; hence, not rivals. Since God gives the increase, Christians must know that the reward will be proportioned to fidelity rather than to results.

“For we are laborers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon his foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble. Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.” (vs 9-13). The supreme ownership of God is here emphasized, as is shown by the three possessives. Paul and Apollos were not fellow-workers with God, but fellow-workers with each other under God. The Corinthians were God’s field in which they labored; just as we do, or his building which they reared but workers, field and building all belong to God. In v.10, we see the apostleship with its attendant gifts – Rom. 1: 5; Gal. 1:15-16; Eph. 3:8. We have the obligation to preach Christ as the foundation of the church. In Corinth Paul had preached Christ as the foundation of the church and of each individual Christian, and this foundation admitted no mixture of philosophy and no perversion which could produce sects (Gal. 1:9). All this Paul asserts without any shadow of boasting, for the skill or wisdom by which he had done it had been imparted to him by God.

Paul laid Christ as the foundation (Matt. 16:18; Acts 4:11-12; Eph. 2:20), and others each being individually responsible, hence the singular had been building carnal, worldly minded faction upon it, and these are warned that the superstructure should comport with the foundation, for so worthy a foundation should have a correspondingly worthy structure. The argument that Corinthian Christians should build the spiritual temple of God, the church, with as good spiritual material as the relative earthly material employed by their fathers in constructing idolatrous shrines. The church should be built of true Christians, the proper material; and not of worldly minded hypocrites, or those who estimate the oracles of God as on a par with the philosophies of men. The day of

judgment will reveal the true character of all who are in the church, as a fire reveals the character of the material in a temple structure. The Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory which is rampant our country, is in some measure founded here in the passage; but the context shows a purging of all evil men from the church as an entirety. There is no hint that the evil in the individual is purged by fire, leaving a residuum of righteousness. Our sins are not purged by fire, but by the blood of Christ, and without the shedding of the blood there is no remission; (Heb. 9:22).

“If any man’s work abide which he has built thereupon he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. Know ye know that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defiles the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are. 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. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, the Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s.” If a teacher’s disciples endure the test of judgment, he shall receive a reward, of which his converts will be at least a part (1 Thess. 2:19; Phil. 2:16); but if his disciples do not stand that test, he shall of course lose whatever property he had in them, and perhaps more (2 John 8). The teacher may of course be saved independently of his disciples, for salvation is a gift not a reward; but he will be saved as a steward who has lost the things of his stewardship; as a tenant who has had his harvest burned, or as a contractor whose structure has gone up in flames.(v. 9). In verse 9 he had called them God’s building; he now reminds them of what kind the building was, and how exalted were its uses. History shows that the Jerusalem temple was honored by the Shecaniah, but the Bible tells us that the church was honored by the very Spirit of God.

The factions are plainly made aware of the magnitude of their sin, and the severity of their punishment. They were destroying the church by their divisions (Eph. 5:27), maiming and dismembering it by their discordant factions; (2 Pet. 2:1). *“Let no man deceive himself”* by thinking himself wise enough to amend or modify God’s truth. Let such a one become a fool in the world sight, as Paul was (Acts 26:24; 4:10), that by preaching the so called foolishness of God he may learn the real wisdom of it. How foolish to modify or adapt the gospel to make it palatable and acceptable to sectarian

spirits or worldly minds! Man is to be adjusted to God and that is our obligation, not God to man, for he is unchangeable (Jas.1:17; Heb. 13:8). (Matt. 5:5; Mark 10:29-30). *Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life; with its possibilities, or death with its gain Phil. 1:21, or things present, or things to come; all are yours;* These words are an echo of the prayer of the master at John 17:21-23.

Therefore, the Church must have perfect unity in Christ that Christ may maintain His unity with God. Christ must of necessity quiet all contentions between the members of His body (1 Cor. 12:12); for if he is at variance with himself, how can he have unity with the Father? Variance is an infallible proof of imperfection, and imperfection cannot have unity with God, who is perfection. (Matt. 5:48).

