

Sunday, January 10, 2015—I Corinthians 3:9-11: The Wise Masterbuilder

Introduction/Review

- Last week we resumed our study of I Corinthians 3 by looking at verses 4 through 8. In doing so we observed the following points.
- I Corinthians 3:4—Paul cites their man follow factions as further proof of their carnality.
- I Corinthians 3:5—according to Paul, he and Apollos were simply ministers through whose ministry the Corinthians believed.
- I Corinthians 3:6—Paul says that he planted (note the past tense). Paul planted the seeds of the gospel when he was with them in Acts 18. Apollos came along after Paul in Acts 18:27-19:1 and watered (again note the past tense) the seeds the Paul had previously planted.
 - *But*—note the strong contrast in verse 6 that sets apart God’s role from that of Paul and Apollos. The increase or the growth was given by God. God caused the seed to germinate thereby making them new creatures in Christ. Likewise, whatever growth or increase that seed experiences is the result of God’s working not the human agents.
- I Corinthians 3:7—serves as the conclusion (*So then*) to this argument Paul has been making regarding “planting” and “watering.” Neither Paul, the planter, nor Apollos, the waterer are anything.
 - *But*—the strong conjunction emphasizes the fact that God is the one who gives the increase and produces growth.
- I Corinthians 3:8— Paul’s point here at the beginning of verse 8 is to state emphatically that he and Apollos are not at variance with one another with the goal of establishing rival sects but that they are one in the spiritual growth process of the saints in Corinth. The fact is both “planting” and “watering” have a single object i.e., the production of fruit. Both Paul and Apollos had the same object in mind as they ministered in Corinth. Namely to produced spiritual fruit-bearing believers.
- *And every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour*—not only are they one in terms of planting and watering but they are also equal in terms of their reward for service. Each minister will be rewarded according to the actual energy he has expended. There is no discrimination on the basis of who they are. Equal labor output results in equal pay.
- The end of verse 8 introduces the reader to the next theme/topic Paul is going to tackle in I Corinthians i.e., the issue of reward and labor. To this discussion we will now turn our attention.

I Corinthians 3:9

- **For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.**
- *For we are labourers together with God*— given the context we have been studying, I take the first part of verse 9 to be a reference to Paul and Apollos. Paul describes himself and Apollos as being “labourers together with God.” This follows from Paul’s statement in verse 8, the “he that planteth (Paul in verse 6) and he that watereth (Apollos verse 6) are one.”
 - Verse 5—Paul and Apollos are both ministers.
 - Verse 6—Paul and Apollos are both involved in spiritual growth process via planning and laboring.
 - Verse 7—neither of them is anything with respect the process of spiritual growth because God gives the increase.
- The underlying Greek word translated “labourers together” is used many times in Paul’s Epistles when he described his fellow-laborers in the work of the ministry.
 - Romans 16:3—Pricilla and Aquila are described as Paul’s “helpers in Christ Jesus”
 - Romans 16:21—“Timotheous my workfellow. . .”
 - II Corinthians 8:23—“fellowhelper”
 - Philippians 4:3—“fellowlabourers”
 - Philemon 1—“fellowlabourer”
- I Corinthians 3:9—the “ye” in the second half of verse 9 is a reference to the Corinthians. Here Paul describes the Corinthians as “God’s husbandry.” The Greek word translated “husbandry” means a cultivated field or tillage. According to *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary* the English word “husbandry” means: “the business of a farmer, comprehending agriculture or tillage of the ground.”
- Notice that verse 9 explicitly calls the saints in Corinth “God’s husbandry.” God was tilling the ground in Corinth through the ministry of Paul and Apollos. The Corinthian saints are the field into which Paul and Apollos had planted and watered.
- The field is described as belonging to God in verse 9 because He is the one giving/providing the increase in verses 6 and 7.

- *Ye are God's building*—at the end of verse 9, Paul introduces a second example by referring to the Corinthians as God's building or edifice. That this building represents the greater body of Christ of which the Corinthians are a part seems apparent when one considers Ephesians 2:19-22. The Corinthians are part of the building that God seeks to inhabit through the Spirit i.e., the body of Christ.
- The illustration of the building is new to the flow of the context of chapter 3 and Paul is going to explain it in the following verses. That being said, given that the field and building are figures of the body of Christ it follows that Paul and Apollos were “labourers together” in cultivating/building Christ's body.

I Corinthians 3:10

- **According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.**
- *According to the grace of God which is given unto me*—the thing that is critical to understand here is that the foundation Paul laid for this building within the saints in Corinth was not arbitrary but it was “according to” something. It was according to “the grace of God that was given” unto Paul. It is important to remember that Paul received his gospel by direct revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - Galatians 1:6-9—notice how Paul uses the terms “the grace of Christ” and the “gospel of Christ” interchangeably in verses 6 and 7. The Gospel that Paul preached was related to the subject matter of the grace of Christ.
 - Galatians 5:1-4—by seeking to place themselves back under the performance based acceptance system of the Law, Paul tells the Galatians that they fell from grace by doing this.
 - Galatians 1:11-12—the gospel of Christ that Paul preached in Galatia he received by direct revelation from Jesus Christ. Paul was instructed in the “grace of Christ” the resurrected, glorified, and ascended Christ himself.
 - Romans 16:25—the first thing that someone needs to understand in order to be “stablished” is what Paul calls “my gospel.” Note again the expression “according to” in verse 25.
- *As a wise masterbuilder*— according to the grace given unto him, Paul served the function of “a wise masterbuilder” with respect to laying the foundation for this building. The Greek word translated “masterbuilder” only occurs one time in the New Testament and means: an architect, the superintendant in the erection of buildings, according to *Strong's Concordance*.

- Hebrews 8:5—Moses was the “masterbuilder” of the tabernacle in the wilderness. Moses like Paul, got his information directly from God and then delivered it to the people and built accordingly.
- *I have laid the foundation*—Paul was not building upon anyone else’s foundation rather he was laying a new one. A new dispensation was ushered in through the salvation and revelation committed to the Apostle Paul. Paul was using the message of the grace of Christ which he received from Christ to lay the foundation for an entirely new building as a “wise masterbuilder.”
- *And another buildeth thereon*—with the respect to the edifice God was building with the saints in Corinth, Paul says that he laid the foundation and “another buildeth thereon.” Following from the context of the passage I take this to mean that Apollos was building upon the foundation laid by Paul. Just as in verse 6, Paul “planted” and Apollos “watered.” Therefore, someone like Apollos was building upon the foundation that had been laid by the masterbuilder Paul.
- *But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon*— note the shift at the end of verse 10, the word “but” at the beginning of the second sentence establishes a contrast. Paul is going to begin shifting the focus away from He and Apollos and onto the Corinthians and by extension ourselves.
- This is evident by the expression “every man.” The Greek word in this case occurs 83 times in the text of the New Testament and is most often translated as follows in the KJB: every man (39x), every one (20x), and every (17x). So in the second sentence Paul is speaking to all members of God’s building (v. 9) i.e., all members of the body of Christ.
- “Every man” is then instructed to “take heed.” The English word “heed” carries the following meanings according to *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary*: To mind; to regard with care; to take notice of; to attend to; to observe. 1) Caution; care; watch for danger; notice; circumspection; **usually preceded by take**. The basic meaning of the expression “take heed” means to proceed with caution or care i.e., to beware of.
 - I Corinthians 10:12—“take heed”
 - Galatians 5:15—“take heed”
 - Philippians 3:2—“beware of”
 - Colossians 2:8—“beware”
- What is “every man” supposed to be taking heed of? How he or she builds upon the foundation laid by Paul.
- The expression “take heed” is in the present tense which means that each individual believer is to be continually and carefully watching how they build upon the foundation laid by Paul.

I Corinthians 3:11

- **For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.**
- The main idea in this verse is that it is impossible for any man to lay a different foundation than the one put down by Paul.
 - Galatians 1:6-9—not even an angel much less another man is capable substituting Paul’s foundation for a different one. However, this does not mean that men will not attempt to do so as the book of Galatians makes plain. This is one reason why the warning is given in I Cor. 3:10 to “take heed.”
- Paul emphatically states that the foundation that he laid was Christ and his finished work.
 - I Corinthians 15:3-4—Christ died for our sins.
 - Romans 1:16—Paul preached the gospel of Christ.
 - Romans 4:25—Christ was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification.
 - Colossians 1:14—we have redemption and forgiveness of sins through the blood of his cross.
 - Colossians 1:20—all things in heaven and earth are reconciled back to God through the blood of his cross.
 - Romans 16:25—we are to preach Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery.
- Ephesians 2:20-21—Jesus Christ is the cornerstone in whom the whole building is fitly framed together.
- Now that we know what the foundation is, next week we can begin talking about how to build upon it.