

21<sup>st</sup> February 2021

## Spiritual Maturity Creates Unity

### 1 Corinthians 3

Pastor Greg Wooley attended an annual training institute hosted by the Crystal Cathedral in California back in 1998. The speaker that afternoon was a man named Millard Fuller, but he was introduced not by name, but simply as “President and Founder of Habitat for Humanity.” Mr. Fuller came out on stage, surveyed the murmuring crowd and said, “this is one disappointed looking room – y’all thought you were going to see Jimmy Carter, didn’t you?” And then he continued, with words that frequently cross my mind: “I’m fine with not being a household name, because years of house-building with Habitat has proven to us what others have said before us – that great things can be accomplished when nobody cares who gets the credit”.

**Great things can be accomplished when nobody cares who gets the credit.** What a great line, and so reminiscent of what Paul said about the insignificance of Paul and Apollos compared with what God was accomplishing.

#### 1. A Good leader v1-9

In our reading the apostle Paul is warning his dear friends in the church of Corinth in Greece. A certain bishop in a rural part of Australia once jokingly said that the job of an Archdeacon was to make the Bishop look good.

Sadly, this is what those friends of Paul in Corinth wanted more than anything else from their leaders. Someone to make them look good. They wanted to be famous as those who were led by Paul, or his close missionary friend Apollos, or even the apostle Peter. And some even wanted to be one up on everybody else. They wanted to be famous as those who were led by Christ!

So, Paul does not mince his words. “*You are being childish,*” he says. Listen to verses three and four: “*you are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings?*”

They had everything upside down. It was so sad, and a terrible demonstration of what not to do. On the outside this church of about 30 to 40 people was pretty impressive. When you went to church as a visitor you would be stunned by some of the spiritual things that went on. The wow factor was pretty big. God appeared to be doing great things among them. The joint seemed to be jumping. But all this only made them proud, envious and divided.

Now, it’s not as if they did not know what leadership among God’s people should be like. They had experienced the best of it, according to Acts chapter 18 as Paul taught in the synagogue and then in homes for over 18 months. Paul had taught them about the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus who in speaking of his own leadership said in Luke 22 “*the kings of the Gentiles lord it over them;... But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves... I am among you as one who serves.*” V25,26.

And so, it is that Paul reminds his friends and us of God's truth about leadership among God's people. He wants us to change our way of thinking about leaders to God's point of view. And as we will hear as we continue our study in 1 Corinthians there are a number of very important points we need to get straight. The first two are here:

a) God is the one in charge.

Now that may sound so simple and elementary that you think it's extraordinary I should even mention it. But listen to the apostle Paul in v5: *"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 made it grow. So, neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow."*

Notice that he says that he himself did not choose to become a Christian leader, but God the Lord assigned him this task. Notice that he says God is the one who gave the growth.

Now of course he is using the picture of a farmer planting and watering seed to speak about pastors and others telling people the message about Jesus. And even though humans are involved in that, it's God's work. God is the one in charge. He makes and keeps people as followers of Jesus. Pastors and others may help us in all kinds of ways to learn and hear of Jesus. But it is God who is in charge. We are God's fellow workers!

"You are God's field. You are God's building" v9.

b) Leaders are servants not celebrities.

Pastors, elders, ministry leaders and others who speak the message of Jesus to people are servants not celebrities.

"What is Paul? What is any pastor or teacher of the message?" Only servants.

Like a waiter in a restaurant, like a butler in government house, like a cleaner in a school, like a mechanic at the service station, like a barman in a pub, the focus is on their boss, not themselves. Yes, like the ministry of Jesus, what they do is important. But they are NOT the focus. They are there to make the boss look good!

**Signs Immaturity:** (Allow me to digress just for a moment!)

Whether or not we want to admit it, everyone can be a little immature from time to time; playing a dumb, harmless prank on a friend, or careless words that put others down to make ourselves look better. But there's a huge difference between having occasional moments of immaturity and being immature as a person.

That being said, we're all constant works-in-progress, and there's always the opportunity for emotional growth, no matter what age we are. And if our goal is growth, it helps to be aware of the traits that are commonly signs of immaturity — that way, we can be on the lookout for them in ourselves (and in others).

1. Not taking responsibility for our actions
2. Needing to be the centre of attention
3. Not admitting we're wrong
4. Irresponsible spending habits
5. Being unaware of how we affect others
6. Name-calling others

7. Enjoying aggravating others
8. Over-sharing on social media
9. Not taking criticism well
10. Being a sore loser

Ultimately, we're all immature in our own way, and have different areas that we need to improve on. It might be hard to admit that we have need of emotional growth. But trust me: being in Christ the spirit conforms our lives to reflect the likeness of Jesus, and it is worth it!

## 2. Good Foundations: v10-15 (Back to our text)

**Building Foundation:** A building is only as strong as the foundation it is built on. Paul says that because of God's grace, he is a wise master builder who has laid the foundation, which is Jesus Christ (v10-11). The church is built on Jesus. We can do nothing apart from the grace of God. Paul says he's laid the foundation, and we should "*take care*" how we build on it (v10).

We must take care to our attitude, what we value as important, how we spend our time, what we read, what we watch and put in our mind, the friends we hang out with, and the words we speak. To build a church or a life on anything other than Christ is to build a sandcastle. Jesus talked about this in Matthew 7:24-27. The house built on a rock withstood the storm, but the house built on the sand fell, "*and great was its fall.*" In an ancient building, the cornerstone was the main foundation stone, the big stone where all the walls met. The cornerstone held it all together. Jesus is the cornerstone. Jesus holds it all together.

**Building Construction:** In v12 Paul lists some materials that we can build with – "*gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw...*" Gold, silver and precious stones are lasting, beautiful, and valuable. You have to dig to find them. Hard work is involved! Wood, hay, and straw are temporary, ordinary, cheap, and easy to find. When building your life, build with things that will last, that have eternal value.

More buildings are destroyed by *termites than tornados!* It is usually not the big things but the little things that tear us down. In v6, Paul says, "*I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.*" In v8 he says that each will receive his own reward. We don't all do the same job or have the same gifts, but each is just as important. God wants to use you and me! Paul and Apollos are humans. God uses human instruments to be His hands and His feet. Jesus used ordinary men and women, and God wants to use you!

**Building Inspection:** Anyone who has built knows what a home inspection is. All the work is examined by an inspector. People have a strange view of judgement. They picture a long line in eternity and a set of scales. All your good works on one side and all your bad deeds on the other. If the good outweighs the bad, you go to heaven. If the bad outweighs the good, you are sent to hell. That is not what the Bible teaches.

There are two great judgements – the Great White Throne Judgement for unbelievers (Rev. 20:11) and the Judgement Seat of Christ for believers (Rom. 14:10, 2 Cor. 5:10). For believers, the purpose of judgement is not to determine whether or not you go to heaven. Your eternal destiny is determined before you leave this earth. The purpose is to give an account for our lives. The things done for Christ will last. The things not done for Christ will burn up v13-15.

Nothing is hidden from God. Every secret will be brought to light and disclosed. Apologizing for sin does not do away with accountability. Confession restores fellowship, but we will still have to answer for how we treated others, used our gifts, abilities, and talents, for the words spoken, how we used our money, time, and how we ran our race. When we build our lives, we must remember inspection is coming! Paul urged us to take care. To be intentional in choosing the building materials, and not choose the cheapest or easiest options.

### 3. Unity in Christ: v16-23

Paul begins this section urging his audience not to deceive, or fool, themselves. He tells them that if they are judging their wisdom by the wisdom of this age, they should change their mindset and become a fool in the eyes of the world by taking on God's wisdom.

In v19 he reverses the statements he made in 1:18-25 by saying that while God's wisdom was foolishness to those who are perishing, the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. And so, he concludes the argument he's been building since chapter 1 by stating, "*So then, no more boasting about men!*" (v21)

Paul wanted them to *stop boasting* in themselves because they clearly weren't wise or spiritually mature. He wanted them to *stop boasting* in mere men such as Paul, Apollos, or Peter. And he wanted them to *stop boasting* in the wisdom of the world, because it was all foolishness in God's sight.

He wanted them to understand their riches in Christ and focus on His kingdom, so he explained that "*all things are yours... [because] you are of Christ and Christ is of God.*" v21-22. Paul's point was that in the end it all comes back to God. It's not about them as church members, it's not about Paul or Apollos, it's certainly not about the temporary things of this world, it's all about God, so the purpose of our lives must be to bring Him glory. The members of the Corinthian church were glorying in men, and that was wrong. They were comparing men (1 Cor. 4:6) and dividing the church by worldly deeds. Had they been seeking to glorify God instead, there would have been harmony in the church.

Paul points out that each believer possesses all things in Christ. What he means is that each one of God's servants belongs to each believer. No member of the church should say, "I belong to Paul!" or "I like Peter!" because each servant belongs to each member equally. We must not permit our personal preferences to become divisive within the body.

Paul says, "*All are yours*" – the world, life, death, things present, things to come! Do you realize how rich we are in Christ?

If believers understand that all things belong to all believers, then there would never be competition and rivalry within the body of Christ! "Get your eyes off of men!" Paul admonished. "*Keep your eyes on Christ, and work with Him in building the church!*"

Paul closes by reminding the church that they belonged to Christ – this balances things. "All things are yours" is Christian liberty. "*You are Christ's*" is Christian responsibility. We need both liberty and responsibility if we are to build a church that will not crumble when the storms hit.

**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, thank You that You have not only made us Your children, but caused us to grow into the likeness of Christ. By Your Spirit, remove our attachment to the sinfulness of this world. Help fix our eyes upon You, and glorify You, that we might grow up to the likeness of Your Son.*