

CHAPTER THREE

Analysis

- A. The apostle turns his attention to the spiritually immature converts to Christianity at Corinth (1-4).
1. He addresses them as "brethren." By so doing he prepares them to accept the correction he is about to give.
 2. The problem he faced when he was at Corinth (1-2a).
 - a) He could not speak to them as to spiritual, that is, mature Christians.
 - b) He had to speak to them as unto carnal (made of flesh).
 - c) They were babes in Christ, that is, just barely beginning their Christian life.
 - d) He fed them with milk, not meat. He taught them the elementary things of the gospel, but they were not able to advance to the more mature things of the Christian life.
 3. They were in the same state as he writes to them in this letter (2b-4).
 - a) "Ye are not yet able," that is, to accept the advanced teaching. They were still like babes after all the time that had elapsed since their conversion.
 - b) Evidence that supports this charge (3).
 - (1) They were still carnal (belonged to flesh) as shown by the jealousy and strife among them.
 - (2) They were conducting themselves as mere men, not like spiritual beings, that is, "new creatures in Christ."
 - c) An illustration of what he meant by this charge is suggested by his question, "When one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not men?"
- B. He explains the relation of himself and Apollos to the brethren at Corinth (5-9).
1. The questions that were designed to make them think: "What then is Apollos? and what is Paul?" They knew, of course, who they were, but they needed to be reminded of what they were.
 2. The answer to the question:
 - a) As to the church, they were ministers (literally, deacons) through whom they had believed on Christ.
 - b) As to the Lord, each was doing the task the Lord gave to him: Paul planted, Apollos watered.
 - c) As to God, it was He who gave the increase.
 - d) As to each other, they are one thing, that is, servants of

CHAPTER THREE

God. Each of them shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. This dispels any notion that Paul or Apollos approved their saying, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos."

3. A summary of these relationships shows the reason for what he has just said (9).
 - a) Paul and Apollos are fellow-workers who belong to God.
 - b) The church at Corinth is God's field to be cultivated and God's building which He builds through His servants, one of whom lays the foundation (Paul) and another (such as Apollos) builds on it.
- C. He calls their attention to a very significant fact: The church is the temple of God (10-17).
 1. Laying the foundation and building on it (10-11).
 - a) As a wise master builder, Paul laid the foundation. He did this by preaching the word of the cross.
 - b) Another (such as Apollos or some other faithful teacher of the Word) builds on the foundation.
 - c) A word of caution to each who builds on the foundation:
 - (1) "Let each man take heed how he buildeth thereon."
 - (2) The reason for the warning: There is no problem about laying the foundation, for that foundation is Christ; there is no other. The problem had to do with the kind of disciples each teacher had.
 2. Paul explains what he has just said about building on the foundation (12-15).
 - a) There are two kinds of building materials: gold, silver, costly stones; and wood, hay, stubble. One is fire-proof; the other will burn. These building materials represent the disciples that teachers like Apollos will have—some will be faithful, some will not.
 - b) The test that will show which one of these two classes will represent each man's work will be:
 - (1) The day in which each man's disciples face the trials of the Christian life.
 - (2) The trials are like fire that can destroy the wood, hay, and stubble; but not the gold, silver, and costly stones.
 - (3) The fiery trials will show just what sort each teacher's work is, that is, whether his pupils will stand the test or fail.

I CORINTHIANS

- c) The effect of the result of these trials on the teacher (faithful men like Apollos).
 - (1) If his works remain, that is, if his disciples prove faithful, he will receive the reward of work well done. That will be the joy of seeing those whom he taught remaining faithful to the Lord.
 - (2) If any man's work burns, that is, if his disciples fail in the fiery trials of the Christian life, the teacher suffers loss. His effort is wasted; he has only grief over those who did not remain faithful to the Lord.
 - (3) The teacher, that is, the faithful one like Apollos who teaches the truth of the gospel, shall be saved. If he is faithful, he does not go down with his unfaithful disciples. But he has to endure the same tests in his life as a Christian that his disciples face, that is, "as through fire."
- 3. Paul asks the question that compels the Corinthians to see that all this applies to them (16).
 - a) The two-fold question: Don't you know that you are God's temple? Don't you know that God's Spirit dwells in you?
- 4. Then he points out the fate of the one who destroys God's temple, the church (17).
 - a) God will destroy that one.
 - b) He will do so because God's temple is holy, and "such (that is, holy persons) are ye."
- D. His earnest exhortation (3:18-23).
 - 1. Let no man deceive himself about the question of wisdom (18-20).
 - a) This is directed to the one who thinks he is wise in this age: Let him become a fool, that he may become wise, that is, let him accept the wisdom God has revealed through the inspired apostles and prophets.
 - b) The wisdom of this world, that is, of the people who live in it, is foolishness with God. He is able to cope with their craftiness; the Lord knows their reasonings are vain.
 - 2. Let no one glory in men (21-23).
 - a) The reason for this exhortation: "All things are yours."
 - b) This includes:
 - (1) Men in whom they were boasting, whether Paul, Apollos, or Cephas.

- (2) The world with its supposed wisdom.
- (2) Life and death.
- (4) Things present and things to come.
- c) A most important matter which they were evidently forgetting: "You are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

His Spiritually Immature Converts (1-4)

Text

3:1-4. And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk, not with meat; for ye were not yet able to bear it: nay, not even now are ye able; 3 for ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you jealousy and strife, are ye not carnal, and do ye not walk after the manner of men? 4 For when one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not men?

Commentary

And I brethren.—Paul continues his rebuke of the sin of division. When he was at Corinth, he found some who were more interested in their own wisdom than in the word of the cross. Some of his converts were spiritually immature. They were divided over loyalties to men. They had evidently failed to heed the plain message of God's wisdom which Paul preached to them. But he calls them "brethren" for they were in Christ even though they were only "babes" so far as development was concerned.

not spiritual, but carnal.—"Spiritual" implies inadequate appreciation of what it means to be a new creature in Christ (II Cor. 5:17). It is not to be equated with mere emotionalism. It begins with an intelligent grasp of the facts of the gospel as proclaimed by the inspired apostles. It is conviction and determination to act in accord with the teaching of Christ. It also implies the stirring of the deepest emotions of which the human heart is capable, that is, Christian love, joy, and peace. See Rom. 14:17.

"Carnal" in this context refers not to the man of the world but to the spiritually immature "babes in Christ." There are two words translated "carnal" in this section. In verse two, the word means "made of flesh." In verse three, it means "belonging to flesh." The distinction is interesting. Think of Christians who should live in the realm of spirit being made of flesh and belonging to flesh. This was the result of following the teaching of men rather than the word of the cross.

Neither of these terms suggests the depravity of human nature inherited from Adam. Both "made of flesh" and "belonging to flesh" are used with reference to the state of arrested development which characterized those who failed to make progress in the Christian life.

A similar situation is described in Heb. 5:11-6:8. Some had been Christians long enough that they should have become teachers, but they needed some one to teach them the A B C's of the gospel. They were like babes who had to be fed on milk, not solid food. They were without experience in the word of righteousness. There is solid food in the gospel for the mature Christian, but the people at Corinth were not able to appreciate it.

In chapter two Paul contrasts "the natural man" with "the one who is spiritual." The context shows that this distinction referred to the uninspired man in contrast to the inspired apostles. In chapter three, however, the contrast is between the one who belongs to flesh and the one who is spiritually mature. It is the contrast between arrested development and normal growth in Christians. To equate "carnal" with "natural" and to assume that all men by nature are incapable of responding to the teaching of the Holy Spirit which was revealed through the apostles is to completely ignore the context in which the two terms are found.

Paul proves his charge that they are carnal by reminding them of their jealousy and strife. This is the very opposite of love which, if followed, will overcome strife, faction, division, pride, and jealousy in the church (I Cor. 13:1-13).

babes in Christ.—According to Heb. 5:13, the one who is inexperienced in the word of righteousness is a babe. He is the one who is fed on milk, that is, who is to be taught the elementary things of the gospel. Solid food is for the mature Christian. It includes such things as the teaching about Christ our high priest; the necessity of pressing on to perfection; the issues of faith, repentance, and the possession of the promises of God. See Heb. 6:1-12.

Every new Christian is in a sense, a babe in Christ. Some, of course, begin this experience with greater understanding and appreciation of what it means than others. But all start with the basic elements of the gospel—belief in Christ based on the resurrection (Rom. 10:9-10); a determination to forsake sin and to live for Christ (repentance); entering into the agreement with Christ to acknowledge Him as prophet, priest, and king (the good confession); and, as the culminating act of being born into the family of God, being immersed in water in the name of Christ for the remission of sins (bap-

tism). How well one grasps the significance of these things may well determine the rate of his spiritual growth in Christ.

The writer of Hebrews chides his readers for still being babes when they had been Christians long enough to have become teachers. Although this condition at Corinth had been produced by jealousy and strife, it is possible that some spiritual immaturity today may arise from other causes. It may be produced by a failure to provide an adequate program of Bible instruction for the whole church. It may be the result of indifference and lack of a real desire to know the rich things of the Word. Too often people have assumed that all the Bible should be as simple as kindergarten lessons. If that were true, it is doubtful if there would ever be such a thing as a fullgrown Christian. Probably one of the greatest causes of spiritual immaturity is the failure of the leadership in the church to provide opportunities for all to share in the Lord's work. Merely attending worship services and training classes will never do it. Each one, if he is to become a mature servant of the Lord, must be led to share in spreading the gospel by at least making friendly, Christian calls that will demonstrate that the church is interested in others. The very finest of diet without exercise will produce weaklings. There is a crying need today for programs that will help people take an active part in spreading the gospel. The usual Sunday morning scolding which the church receives for not doing this will only make the situation worse. Those who can make calls should take the inexperienced along until they too have learned the value and blessing of actually doing something for the Lord. Putting money into the church treasury to hire a paid caller won't accomplish the desired end. There are millions of Christians who have never been directly responsible for the conversion of one soul to Christ. I believe this is largely because they have not been shown how and what to do. It will take some organization, planning, and specific information about when, where, why, and on whom the calls are to be made. With adequate Bible teaching and actual work in sharing the gospel with others, there is no reason why churches cannot be filled with mature Christians.

not yet able.—It was bad enough that Paul encountered them as spiritual dwarfs; it is a worse tragedy that they remained like that. In view of what is said about them in First Corinthians, it would be necessary for them to get rid of their divisions, immorality, lawsuits before pagan judges, factions that prevented them having the Lord's supper, and all other things contrary to the gospel before they could be looked upon as mature in Christ.

I am of Paul.—In spite of all the effort Paul made to exalt Christ, it is strange that some were saying, "I belong to Paul." This is the sort of thing that one would expect in the realm of politics, not the church. But because these things were present, the apostle asks, "Are ye not men?" Evidently the Christian who has God's revealed wisdom in the Bible should stop conducting himself according to the standards of men. If they were Christians of the sort they should be; that is, proving by their lives that they really belonged to Christ, they would be "glorifying God in the body" (I Cor. 6:20).

The Relation of Paul and Apollos to the Church (5-9)

Text

3:5-9. What then is Apollos? and what is Paul? Ministers through whom ye believed; and each as the Lord gave to him. 6 I planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. 8 Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: but each shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9 For we are God's fellow-workers: ye are God's husbandry, God's building.

Commentary

What then is Apollos?—The Corinthians had made men (Apollos and Paul are mentioned to illustrate the point) heads of the parties that divided the church. But what had God intended men to be in relation to His church? "Ministers through whom ye believed." There is no possible suggestion in this term that God approved the claim of the Corinthians to belong to Apollos or to Paul or to any other man. The human tendency is to strive for greatness by exalting one man above another. Christ, however, showed that the way to true greatness is the way of humility and service. He said, "the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:45). The word which He uses in this statement is the verb form of the word *deacon*. For Paul and Apollos to be called ministers or deacons of Christ was all the honor a faithful servant of Christ could ask for. *Brethren* expresses the relation between members of the church; *deacon* expresses the relation to Christ of those who are engaged in performing a service under His direction.

It should be noted that Apollos who was not an apostle was called

a minister (deacon) just as Paul was. The tendency of some to make a distinction of rank between the elder and the deacon violates this principle. Both of these terms refer to functions to be performed under the Lord and not to rank. Note that the apostle Peter, in addressing the elders, calls himself a fellow-elder (I. Pet. 5:1).

God gave the increase.—As God servants, men are under obligation to do His will, but it is God who gives the increase to their efforts. God gives the increase when the Word is planted by faithful preaching and teaching. Paul, who first preached the gospel at Corinth, is likened to the one who sows the seed. Apollos, who followed him and taught the new converts, is likened to the one who did the irrigating. Each did the work the Lord gave him to do, and God gave the increase. There is, therefore, no occasion for strife, jealousy, and division over any man. Let the glory be given to God; let Christ and His Word be exalted in the church; then will the sin of division that is causing the church to be like "babes in Christ" be overcome.

Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one.—That is, they are one thing: ministers or deacons of Christ. And as ministers, each is to receive the reward for faithfulness to the Lord.

For we are God's fellow-workers.—Paul and Apollos were fellow-workers who belonged to God. Since they were partners, there was no reason for anyone to say, "I belong to Paul" or "I belong to Apollos."

ye are God's husbandry, God's building.—The field and the building are God's. The church belongs to God, not men. Since the workers also belong to God, why divide the church over them?

The Church is the Temple of God (10-17)

Text

3:10-17. According to the grace of God which was given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder I laid a foundation; and another buildeth thereon. But let each man take heed how he buildeth thereon. 11 For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 But if any man buildeth on the foundation gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, stubble; 13 each man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire itself shall prove each man's work of what sort it is. 14 If any man's work shall abide which he built thereon, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as through fire. 16 Know

ye not that ye are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? 17 If any man destroyeth the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, and such are ye.

Commentary

According to the grace of God.—Paul looked upon his ministry as a favor God had extended to him. His attitude was one of humility. His example would have helped the church to see the error of dividing the body of Christ through exalting one leader above another, *a wise masterbuilder.*—Paul had spoken of himself in relation to the church as a minister (deacon) of Christ. In 4:15, he refers to himself as a teacher and father. The figure of masterbuilder fits this context since the church is presented as a temple. But he is a wise masterbuilder. As the apostle of Christ, he spoke the revealed wisdom of God rather than the wisdom of men. The foundation of the temple of God could not be laid in any other way, for it was God who was building the church through His workers.

I laid a foundation.—The Corinthians are reminded that the foundation of their Christian life was laid by one who knew how to lay a proper foundation. Their spiritual immaturity could not be blamed on the foundation or the one who laid it. Paul laid the foundation by preaching Christ and Him crucified (2:2); by showing that it was necessary to believe the word of the cross in order to be saved (1:21); by instructing the believer to be baptized, not in his but in the name of Christ (1:14; 10:1-2; 12:13).

another buildeth thereon.—This is a reference to Apollos and other faithful teachers like him who instructed the new converts at Corinth. It has nothing to do with false teachers or to building on a false foundation.

let each man take heed how he buildeth thereon.—It was just as important for the builder of the superstructure to exercise every care in his work as it was for the one who laid the foundation. The foundation that Paul laid was the true foundation. That, however, did not guarantee the success of the building that was to be erected upon it. Consequently, the apostle warns other faithful teachers to take heed as to kind of building materials (disciples) they use.

foundation . . . is Jesus Christ.—The temple of God can have only one foundation, Jesus Christ. The rock upon which Jesus said He would build His church is the truth that He is the Christ, the Son of

the living God. Peter's own statement should be considered when interpreting what Jesus said to him (Matt. 16:18). He speaks of the Lord as "a living stone, rejected indeed of men, but with God, elect, precious" (I Peter 2:4-8). See also Isa. 28:16 and Psa. 118:22 from which Peter quotes. In the light of these remarks, it is difficult to see how Peter could be considered as the foundation of the church. The reference to the foundation of the apostles and prophets in Eph. 2:20 is to the foundation which they laid by preaching the Word.

gold, silver, costly stones; wood, hay, stubble.—These are the two classes of building materials. One is fireproof, the other will burn; one is costly, the other is relatively inexpensive. The point of the apostles' concern, however, is their ability to withstand fire. These building materials represent two classes of disciples a teacher may have. Some are like fireproof materials for they will withstand the fiery trials through which they are to pass. Others are like wood that can be destroyed by fire. They will not stand the trials that come upon them to prove them (I Pet. 4:12-13).

the day will declare it.—Of course, each one will face the Day of Judgment and give account of the deeds done in the body (II Cor. 5:10). But in all probability, the day to which Paul is referring is the Christian life with its fiery trials. In Paul's time, many were called upon to give their lives for their faith in Christ. Some were burned at the stake; some were tortured to death; some fought with wild beasts in the arena to the amusement of heartless spectators. The ancient martyrs, of course, were not the only ones to face persecution for the sake of Christ. The test that comes to most Christians today is the test, not of dying, but of living for Christ. We are reminded of the trials of Israel in the wilderness that caused many of them to fail to enter the Promised Land (I Cor. 10:5-10). For a list of the sufferings of Paul, see II Cor. 11:24-28 and I Cor. 4:9-13.

the fire will prove each man's work.—The trials of the Christian life will demonstrate what sort the teacher's disciples are. Will they be destroyed like wood, hay and stubble, or will they withstand the fiery trials like gold, silver and costly stones? This was the problem at Corinth. The foundation had been laid by Paul. Apollos and others like him had continued to instruct the new converts. But they had not grown to maturity; they were filled with jealousy and strife; they were a disappointment to their teachers; they were not standing the test.

if any man's work shall abide.—The task of the faithful teacher is not

completely discouraging. Apollos and others like him could look with confidence to the faithful endurance of trials by some of those who had been instructed in the gospel by them.

God's Word is complete in matters pertaining to life and godliness (II Pet. 1:3). It tells how to become a Christian and how to live the Christian life. It furnishes the Christian with "the whole armor of God" that he may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil (Eph. 6:11). It equips him with the shield of faith with which he is able to "quench all the fiery darts of the evil one" (Eph. 6:16). Paul warns against overconfidence, but he also shows that the way of escape has been provided that the man of faith may be able to endure the trials of the Christian life (I Cor. 10:12-13). Peter points out the course to follow to make sure of entering the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (II Pet. 1:5-11).

he shall receive a reward.—The reward that the faithful teacher receives is the joy of knowing that he has been faithful to the Lord and the joy of seeing those whom he has instructed serving Christ, remaining true to Him through the trials of life (Phil. 4:1).

if any man's work shall be burned.—Even faithful teachers cannot be sure that those whom they instruct will withstand the "fiery trials." Jesus faced this in His ministry. Judas betrayed Him; Peter denied Him. At one time, the crowds who had been fed on the loaves and fishes deserted Him to such an extent that He said to the apostles who remained with Him, "You wouldn't go away also, would you?" (John 6:66-69) Paul wrote with an evident note of sadness of Demas who had forsaken him because he loved this present age (II Tim. 4:10). The writer of Hebrews warns of the peril of those who were once enlightened and then fell away (Heb. 6:4-8).

he shall suffer loss.—The teacher should do everything possible to help those whom he instructs to stand the trials of the Christian life. Nothing short of declaring "the whole counsel of God" will accomplish this (Acts 20:27).

Perhaps teachers should ask themselves if they are like the father Jesus mentioned who, when his son asked for bread, gave him a stone (Matt. 7:9-10). But the teacher will suffer loss if the pupils fail. That loss may be the grief over the unfaithful one as opposed to the joy over those who remain true; it may be the loss of time and effort that could have been spent on others who might have responded more favorably. It is a hard thing for a teacher to know when to apply the rule Jesus gave when He said, "Give not that which is holy

unto the dogs; neither cast your pearls before swine, lest haply they trample them under foot and turn and rend you" (Matt. 7:6).

he himself shall be saved; yet so as through fire.—The teacher's own his own faithfulness to Christ. He too faces trials and hardships, dis-salvation does not depend on the faithfulness of his disciples, but on couragements and heartaches. Thus he is to be "saved as through fire" just as anyone else.

ye are a temple of God.—All that the apostle had said about builders, foundations, and buildings is suddenly focused on the Corinthians themselves. "Don't you know that you are God's temple?" Evidently they were not aware of it. The church to them was more like an ordinary political assembly. They had failed to see that it was the assembly of those who had been called out of the world of sinners by the preaching of the gospel to enjoy the rights and privileges of free citizens of the kingdom of heaven. How could they have missed this when they had been taught the revealed wisdom of God by His inspired apostle? But they did.

This rebuke is probably the strongest blow the apostle strikes against the sin of division. What an awful thing that they should desecrate the spiritual temple of God! The desecration of the Jew's temple by Antiochus Epiphanes is one of the outstanding atrocities visited upon ancient Israel. See I Mac. 1:1-64. This pagan ruler dared to change the laws of God pertaining to worship and sacrifice. It was especially insulting to the Jews and to their God for him to order them to use swine's flesh in their sacrifices. The cleansing and rededication of the temple following this incident was commemorated by the Jews in the feast of dedication (John 10:22).

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus went to Jerusalem for the passover feast. There He found that men had turned the sacred area of the temple into a place of merchandise (John 2:13-16). He cleansed the temple and reminded the people that they were not to make His Father's house a house of merchandise. But in three short years it had again been put to the same use. Jesus cleansed the temple again and said to the money-changers, "It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer" (Matt. 21:12-12).

Wicked as all these sinful deeds were, they did not compare with the sin of division that was destroying God's temple, the church. The solution to the problem of division in Corinth begins with the correct view of the church as God's temple. Paul speaks of it as the temple where the Spirit of God dwells. To profane this temple is to deserve the destruction that will surely come to the guilty ones.

the Spirit of God dwells in you.—It will help us to understand this expression if we look at the camp of Israel with the tabernacle in its midst. The tabernacle was called the "tent of meeting" because God met His people there, and through His appointed servant, Moses, He spoke to them, giving direction for conduct that would let the nations about them know that He was the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel. The ark of the covenant which was kept in the holy of holies further emphasizes the presence of God in the midst of His people. Within the ark, among other things, the tables of the law were kept. Through the law Israel was taught that they should love God with all the heart, soul, and mind, and that they should also love their neighbors as themselves (Matt. 22:37-40).

When Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem that took the place of the tabernacle, he made it a thing of splendor, fitting, within the limits of human endeavor, as a house of God. But long after that, Stephen said, "Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in houses made with hands" for "heaven is His throne and the earth His footstool" (Acts 7:48-49).

The church that honors God by exalting Christ; that obeys His Word rather than the doctrines of men; that is transformed by the renewing of the mind so that the members approve the will of God, the thing that is good, complete, and acceptable to Him (Rom. 12:1-2) can truly say that God is in its midst. See comment on 6:19-20 where the body of the believer is called the temple of the Holy Spirit.

If any man destroyeth the temple of God.—In a sense, the church cannot be destroyed because it is divine. Paul said he made havoc of the church, that is, he was attempting to do so by persecuting the church (Gal. 1:13). But it is true that the effectiveness of the church can be destroyed by the sin of division. The sin of division dishonors Christ, the head of the church; it dims the glory of the church, the bride of Christ; it tends to neutralize the message of the church, the gospel of Christ; it weakens the believers who are members of the body of Christ.

him shall God destroy.—For the fate of the Israelites who displeased God, see I Cor. 10:5-10. For the fate of those who trample under foot the Son of God, see Heb. 10:28-31. For the punishment of the sin of Nadab and Abihu, see Lev. 10:1-3. For the punishment of Uzzah who acted with every good intention when he touched the ark in violation of God's law, see II Sam. 6:6-7. For the story of Uzziah the presumptuous king who undertook to perform the task of the priest

contrary to God's law and was punished by being stricken with leprosy unto the day of his death, see II Chron. 26:16-21.

Paul declares that God will destroy those who attempt to destroy His temple, the church. This should make the promoters of division stop and think. God has never permitted man to desecrate holy things and go unpunished.

such are ye.—What an exalted view of the church this is—ye are the temple of God! But how could the apostle refer to people who were so far from the ideal of Christ as the temple of God? Perhaps it was to remind them of what God intended them to be, that is, new creatures washed in the blood of Christ (I Cor. 6:11). Perhaps it also expressed the hope of the apostle that they would respond to the instruction for overcoming their spiritual immaturity.

As to a practical application of this important point, think of the church today with its many divisions often warring against each other rather than carrying on the "good fight of the faith" (I Tim. 6:12). But concerned men are doing much to lead the church toward the goal for which Christ prayed when all who believe on Him through the word of the apostles may be one (John 17:21). Men who have caught the vision of the church as the temple of God are pleading for the restoration of the church that is described in the New Testament in its doctrine, its ordinances, and in its life. A return to "the simplicity and the purity that is toward Christ" (II Cor. 11:3) would present the church, even today, as the glorious church Christ intended it to be.

The Apostles Earnest Exhortation (3:18-23)

Text

3:18-23. Let no man deceive himself. If any man thinketh that he is wise among you in this world, let him become a fool, that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He that taketh the wise in their craftiness: 20 and again, The Lord knoweth the reasonings of the wise, that they are in vain. 21 Wherefore let no one 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.

Commentary

Let no man deceive himself.—The rebuke for the sin of division has been clearly stated. The remedy for the condition is apparent: Make

the church what God intended it to be, His holy temple wherein dwells His Spirit.

This appeal is three-fold: (1) "Let no man deceive himself" (18); (2) "Let no one glory in men" (21); and (3) "Let a man account of as ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God" (4:1).

The first is an appeal for clear thinking about the world's wisdom in contrast to the message of the cross. The word of the cross is wisdom for the mature. God is able to adequately cope with the cleverness of the crafty, worldly-wise man. God knows the futility of the thoughts of men when compared with His thoughts.

all things are yours.—This is the reason for the second appeal: "Let no one glory in men." Some had been saying, "I belong to Paul," others, "I belong to Cephas." But the truth was that Paul and Apollos and Cephas were theirs, that is, they were their ministers through whom they had believed (3:5). But more than that, the world was theirs too. God created it for man and placed in it all the things needful for his welfare. The world was theirs as their sphere of activity for God, not a thing to conquer them and make them slaves of sin. Even life and death belonged to them. Life was theirs to be lived for Christ, not to be wasted in endless discussions of man's wisdom and the sinful practices that grew out of them. To the Christian, the apostle said, "Death is yours." It is true that he calls death an enemy to be abolished (I Cor. 15:26). But death belongs to the Christian as a means of release from the trials of life and of entrance into the presence of Christ (Phil. 1:21; II Cor. 4:16-5:1). Both the present and the future are yours in which to serve Christ and praise Him. The apostle rebukes those who had been practicing division in the church and claiming to belong to Paul or Apollos. To whom did they belong? "Ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." Thus the word of God presents the solution to the problem of division.

Summary

The Corinthians were more interested in their own wisdom than in the wisdom of God. They looked upon the message of the cross as foolishness. It is not surprising that some of Paul's converts failed to reach spiritual maturity.

When he was with them, he had spoken to them about the elementary things of the gospel because they were not able to appreciate the things that belong to the mature Christian life. Even as he was writing to them, he realized that they were still unable. His teaching had been like milk for those whom he calls "babes in Christ." Some

CHAPTER THREE

of them were saying, "I belong to Paul" and "I belong to Apollos." Their jealousy and strife clearly shows that they were acting as men and not as new creatures in Christ.

Paul turns now to the corrective measures that were designed to lift the church out of this condition. There are three steps in his plan to correct the sin of division. The first step shows the correct relationship leaders to the church. The apostle asks, "What is Paul and what is Apollos?" "They are ministers through whom you believed." They are not masters; they are not heads of political groups; they are the Lord's servants performing a task for the sake of His Body, the church. They were fellow-workers who belonged to God. Their task was to work in God's field and to build God's building.

The second step in the apostles' plan to overcome division is this: The church is the temple of God. Leaders, of course, have their place in relation to the temple. Paul says, "I laid a foundation and another built on it." After he had started the work at Corinth, another teacher such as Apollos had followed him. His task was to instruct the new converts. He was building on the foundation Paul had laid. That foundation was Christ; there could be no other foundation for the temple of God.

Paul solemnly warns the teachers to exercise care as to the kind of disciples they may teach. This is not a warning to false teachers, but to faithful teachers like Apollos who built on the foundation which Paul had laid. Some of their disciples would be like gold, silver, and precious stones. They would stand the fiery trials of the Christian life. Others would be like wood, hay, and stubble. They would be destroyed in the same fiery trials, and the teacher would lose the reward for his efforts. These are the carnal, factious, jealous ones who remained as "babes" when they should have been mature Christians. The faithful teacher does not share the fate of those who refuse to heed his message of truth, that is, if he conforms to the gospel standard of character and conduct.

After discussing the relation of the leaders to the church as the temple of God, Paul reminds the brethren that they are the temple of God. Its sacredness is indicated by the fact that the Spirit of God dwells in His temple. Paul warns that God will destroy anyone, leader or follower, who through faction or division or other sin, destroys God's temple.

A third corrective step is given in the closing exhortation of the chapter: Avoid being deceived by leaders and their pretended wisdom. Those who think they are wise are urged to become fools by

I CORINTHIANS

rejecting their own wisdom and accepting the word of the cross. Let no one boast in men, for all things belong to the faithful Christian. Instead of saying, "I am of Paul" or "I am of Cephas," they are to remember that Paul and Apollos and Cephas belong to them as the Lord's servants through whom they believed. The world is theirs, for God made it to be used by His people and not that they should become slaves of the world of sin. Even life and death are theirs. But (and here is a thing they were forgetting) they belong to Christ, and Christ to God.

Questions

1. Why does Paul address his readers as "brethren" since he calls them "carnal"?
2. What does he mean by "carnal"?
3. With what does he contrast "carnal" in this context?
4. What is meant by "spiritual"?
5. How does his use of "spiritual" in this chapter differ from his use of this term in chapter two? To whom does it refer in each case?
6. What is implied by the expression "babes in Christ"?
7. How was Paul forced to conclude that they were "babes"?
8. What is meant by "milk" and "meat" in this connection?
9. What is the mark of spiritual maturity?
10. How long should the "brethren" remain as "babes in Christ"?
11. What is the mark of the carnal Christian?
12. How does Paul's use of "carnal" differ from his use of "natural" in chapter two?
13. What does it mean "to walk after the manner of men"?
14. What does Paul mean by the question, "are ye not men"?
15. What was the relation of Paul and Apollos to the Corinthians?
16. What is the word that is translated "minister" in this connection?
17. What bearing does this have on the party spirit in Corinth?
18. What division of labor did Paul and Apollos observe?
19. What was the important thing to remember about their efforts?
20. What is meant by statement, "he that planteth and he that watereth are one"?
21. What is meant by the statement, "we are God's fellow-workers"?
22. What bearing does the remark, "ye are God's husbandry (tilled field) and God's building," have on the problem of division?
23. To what did Paul attribute the privilege he had of serving as an apostle of Christ?

CHAPTER THREE

24. What qualification did he have to work in connection with God's building?
25. How did Paul lay the foundation?
26. What is the foundation of the church?
27. How does this correct the problem of division in Corinth?
28. What evidence is there to show that Jesus Christ is the only possible foundation of the church?
29. To whom does Paul refer when he says, "another buildeth thereon"?
30. Why the warning about building on the foundation Paul laid?
31. What are the two classes of building materials and their characteristics?
32. What has this to do with the warning to the teachers?
33. What is the day that shows what sort each man's work is?
34. In what ways was the early Christian's faith tried?
35. What are some things which try one's faith today?
36. What is the relation of the day of trial to the Day of Judgment?
37. Why does Paul speak of fire as that which will show what sort each man's work is?
38. When he refers to "each man's work" is he speaking of the teacher or of his disciple?
39. On what foundation is this work built?
40. How long must it abide for him to receive a reward?
41. What is the reward of the faithful teacher?
42. Why may the faithful teacher suffer loss?
43. What will that loss be?
44. How can he be saved if his work is burned?
45. What is meant by the remark, "as through fire"?
46. Why does Paul ask, "Know ye not that ye are a temple of God?"
47. What are some of the facts of the history of the Jewish temple?
48. How does this help to understand that God dwells in the temple, His church?
49. What were the Corinthians doing that was destroying the temple of God?
50. What is the history of the desecration of the Jewish temple, and how did that compare with what the Corinthians were doing to the church?
51. What are the characteristics of the church of which it may be said, "the Spirit of God dwells in you"?
52. What is the fate of the one who destroys the temple of God?

I CORINTHIANS

53. How could Paul say to the church at Corinth, "The temple of God is holy, and such are ye"?
54. Why did Paul say, "Let no man deceive himself" (3:18)?
55. How is one to become wise?
56. What is God's view of the wisdom of the world?
57. Why did Paul say, "Let no one glory in men" (3:21)?
58. In what sense did Paul, Apollos, and Cephas belong to the Corinthians?
59. What bearing did this have on the problem of division?
60. What important relationship were they missing by practicing division?

For Discussion

1. What are some of the causes of spiritual immaturity in the churches today?
2. What can you suggest as a practical remedy for lack of spiritual growth?