

By having factions the Corinthians had mistaken the wisdom of the world for God's wisdom. The teachers of the Gospel should not be elevated in the manner which the Corinthians were doing. It was inconsistent with God's wisdom since teachers were only servants, tools of God, through whom God has worked. Paul uses two illustrations of the significance of his ministry and then exhorts them to proper action which is more in accord with the wisdom of God.

I. Cultivation illustrates four characteristics of the diversity in teachers of the Gospel (3:5-9).

1. There are different workers who have different functions.

Three times Paul directly cites the diversity of function (vv 6, 7, 8). In chapter 12 he will develop this diversity within the Body as normal and essential. → While some things are good to imitate (see ch. 4), remember that we are given different tasks.

2. All workers are equal – equally insignificant, when compared to God.

They were (mere) servants with assigned tasks (v 5) and with no input into the growth of the “plant” (vs 6 & 7), since only God gives the growth. The leaders of the Corinthian factions were in essence “nothing.” All credit belonged to God. → When we elevate a teacher to some special level, we demonstrate that we have lost the correct perspective. Only God is revealing truth and working change.

3. God's servant-workers have one purpose (v 7).

All those who work a field are working toward one goal, a good harvest, without being rivals or competing. So also those who serve God. But the Corinthian factions would have tended to be in competition. This contradicted the unity of purpose that all of God's true workers would have. → Competition in ministry can develop easily. We should not forget that we share a common purpose.

4. God's servant-workers had distinct responsibilities and reward (v 8).

In accord with his own efforts the worker will also be rewarded or paid. In Corinth the varied “accomplishments” of an individual's ministry would not be the basis of reward, since all growth came from God and not from His servants. → We also may struggle with the appearance or absence of apparent “accomplishments”, but God will reward according to effort and not the results which we see.

Paul and Apollos worked together and belonged to God. Similarly the Corinthians belonged to God. They were both His field and His building, the next illustration.

II. Construction illustrates their responsibility to be careful (3:10-17).

1. Workers should build carefully because of the unique foundation.

Paul, like a general contractor, assured that a good foundation was laid for the church, Jesus Christ Himself. Another foundation of this quality was impossible. Any who build upon it must be careful how he builds. The building materials were “living stones” (cf. 3:16-17; 1 Peter 2:5) into whose lives other believers and especially teachers have input. The carnal Corinthians were turning out poor building material which were not worthy of the foundation. → Churches today may similarly neglect the quality of the building materials when correct belief and correct living are minimized.

2. Workers should build carefully because of testing which will come in the future.

When Christ returns, believers will appear before the judgment seat of Christ and their works will be judged (2 Cor 5:10). The building which is the Church will one day be totally purified. The Corinthian factious spirit would be burned away. It would be judged as wasted effort and no reward would be given for it. → Consider carefully the durability and value of that which you are putting into the lives of others.

(To be continued)

3. Workers should build carefully because of the special character of the building.

III. Craftiness demonstrates a failure to appreciate God's wisdom (3:18-23).

1. Avoid self-deception (3:18-20).

2. Avoid boasting about men (3:21-23).