

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).
 - A. There are different workers who have different functions.
 - B. All workers are equal – equally insignificant, when compared to God.
 - C. God's servant-workers have one purpose (v 7).
 - D. God's servant-workers had distinct responsibilities and reward (v 8).
- II. **Construction** illustrates their responsibility to be careful (3:10-17).
 - A. Workers should build carefully because of the unique foundation.
 - B. Workers should build carefully because of testing which will come in the future.
 - C. Workers should build carefully because of the special character of the building.
 1. The building which is being constructed is not just any building. It is the Temple of God.

Although the body of the individual believer also is the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19), here it is the corporate Body of believers. The exact word for temple used in this case refers to the actual sanctuary. It implies the presence of God which also reinforces the fact that it is sacred. It belongs to God and should be treated as such. Everyone should build in it carefully.
 2. The Corinthians seemed to have lost sight of the sacredness of the church. They were not treating it as if it were set apart for God, as if the Spirit Himself were living within it. (Cf. 1 Cor. 11: 17-34).

→ We hesitate to think of ourselves as sacred but lose an important insight when we fail to do so. We should treat the church, i.e., other believers individually and as a body, as sacred, set-apart for God.
- III. **Craftiness** demonstrates a failure to appreciate God's wisdom (3:18-23).

These verses link the discussion concerning the messenger to the larger discussion about divine wisdom versus human wisdom. Craftiness, an OT term which Paul used to describe the wisdom of the world, demonstrated a failure to appreciate God's wisdom. Paul gives two commands in this regard.

 - A. Avoid deception (3:18-20). "Do not deceive yourselves."
 1. There were Corinthians that thought themselves to be smart, imagining that they had good reasons for supporting the faction of their choice. But such elevation of leaders was based on human and not divine wisdom. They deceived themselves.
 2. Deception by definition misleads a person by false appearances. They are not aware that what they believe is wrong. The Corinthians, by using human standards, became convinced that what they were doing was right.

→ We face a continual danger of being deceived, especially when we have seen something, read it or reasoned it ourselves. But that which we see and hear has been edited, carefully selected, and possibly even falsified. We may end up being deceived. If we have convinced ourselves that a certain preacher, teacher or author, really is worthy of being elevated to a special position (like Paul, Apollos and Peter were being elevated in Corinth), then we have deceived ourselves.
 - B. Avoid boasting about men (3:21-23).
 1. Boasting about men in this case was elevating them to represent the leadership of their groups, so similar to philosophical schools. By doing so they were actually cheating themselves. Their submitting exclusively to the teaching and perspective of one man, limited what God had given to them. All things are theirs, whether teachers (who belonged to the church and not the church to them), or the very world (which was created for man and not man for the world), or even life, death, the present and the future (over which Christ, in whom the believer is placed, had ultimate victory).
 2. These multiple possessions come to the believer because the believer is in Christ. As we submit to Christ, we follow Christ who submitted to the Father and who obtained our salvation through His death on the cross. (Cf Ephesians 1:3.)

→ When we follow one person to the exclusion of others, we are actually cheating ourselves. Christ has given to the church a wealth of people to equip us. Limiting ourselves to one person is not a mark of God's wisdom, but a mark of human wisdom, so-called.

It is okay to have teachers. God gave them. It is okay to imitate godly men and women (cf 1 Cor 4:16). It is also necessary to reject false teachers who could arise from within the church or come from outside the church (cf. Acts 20:29-30).

The Corinthians were taking teachers who were essentially in agreement with one another and giving each their own following. Paul, Apollos and Peter were unified. But the Corinthians had preferences and from their preferences developed factions. We make the same mistake if believers choose one teacher over the other within their church and fail to appreciate all that God has given them.

The Bible is the standard against which we test every teaching. Allow yourself to be challenged by more than one teacher to guide you in your understanding and application of Scripture. We are one field, the workers have one purpose though differing tasks. We are living stones built upon one foundation, Jesus Christ, growing into a building that is the Temple of God. Take care how you build.