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1 Corinthians

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? 1 Corinthians 3:16

In a smooth transition from his thoughts about having "laid the foundation," and then us as workers continuing to build on the foundation, Paul asks rhetorically, directly, and with an exacting purpose the question in this verse. He starts with, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God?" If thought through logically, the answer necessitates us to think on what he has said about us being builders. If we are the temple of God, then why would we build in a way which our efforts would be of no value and thus be burnt up.

This thought is reflected in Jesus' parable about building a house upon the sand or upon the rock in Matthew 7:24-27. Why would someone build a house that would crash down around them? But this is what we tend to do in our spiritual walk and this is what Paul asks us to consider. In this, he uses the term "temple of God." The Greek word for temple is *naos*. It is equivalent to the temple in Jerusalem where the glory of God dwelt. And specifically, it is referring to the Most Holy Place where His glory was manifest.

This is now the state of the believer in Christ. God is dwelling within us and so our efforts, our conduct, even our whole demeanor should be reflective of this high and exalted position. And to show that this is a true and accurate analogy, he says that "the Spirit of God dwells in you." This confirms that God is residing with man in a unique way and that what once occurred in the temple in Jerusalem is now occurring in each believer.

In Ephesians 1:13, we are told that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit upon belief in Christ. This in-dwelling then is different than God's interactions with others. God is everywhere (omni-present) and therefore our in-dwelling is a special act of God which is not available to others. Just as His divine glory was seen in the temple in Jerusalem, He is now revealed in us. Because of this, our actions take on a new significance.

When the people of Israel defiled the temple, God destroyed the temple and His presence departed. What then would be the consequences of our disobedience? Paul will continue with his thoughts on this in the coming verse.

Life application: If you have called on Jesus, you are sealed with God's Holy Spirit. If you are so sealed, then you have an obligation to that special honor. As you conduct your daily affairs, be prepared to act in a manner which acknowledges your exalted state and which will bring eternal rewards, not the fire of judgment and loss.

If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which *temple* you are. 1 Corinthians 3:17

Paul has been speaking consistently in this chapter concerning right instruction, especially about the building up of the church upon the foundation of Jesus Christ. In writing to the Corinthians, he made the analogy of building upon the foundation with various materials, some would last at the judgment and some would not. After this, he noted in speaking to them collectively that "you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you."

Because you (the individuals believers) are the temple of God, he now makes a sobering statement concerning that position. "If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him." He has not introduced a new group of people; he is speaking to believers within the church - saved people. This context needs to be maintained in order to understand what is being referred to.

As he has been speaking of the building of the church, the intent is that those who build in an inappropriate manner, therefore, defile the temple. (Some versions say "destroy", "violate", "waste", or "ruin"). In taking such a course of action, retribution from God can be expected. In a literal rendering from the Pulpit Commentary, "God shall ruin the ruiner of his temple."

Too often this verse is used by interpreters concerning an action, such as suicide or some other personal harm. If we so act, then God will destroy us. This is illogical and doesn't fit with the context, nor with the fact that if someone has committed suicide, they have already destroyed their personal temple. This is not the intent of this verse. Rather, if someone is engaged in habits contrary to the truth of the gospel such as sexual immorality, divisions (the very thing which Paul has been addressing), backbitings, etc, they can expect a penal judgment for their actions.

Likewise, if an instructor of doctrine, a pastor, elder, teacher, etc, is engaged in either consistently false teachings or in inappropriate behavior which will defile the temple of God, then God will also bring ruin upon them. A sad example of this is the long list of preachers and evangelists who have been caught up in adulterous affairs. When their actions come to light, they are brought to ruin, losing all credibility and usually they are banned from further preaching or teaching.

This verse then is not speaking of a loss of salvation. It is also not speaking of suicide. Instead, it is speaking of actions which bring discredit and defilement upon what God is doing. In such actions, God can be expected to bring the offenders to ruin for what they have done. This is certain because he finishes this verse with, "For the temple of God is holy, which *temple* you are." If these people are God's temple, then they are believers, not unbelievers.

As always, care in evaluating context must be given in order to avoid making a pretext. We are God's temple; set apart as holy. Therefore, let us endeavor to live up to that position and bring glory and honor to God.

Life application: Proper conduct is a requirement for holy living. If someone is engaged in improper behavior and nothing happens to them in regard to their downfall or chastisement, then they are probably not saved at all. As Hebrews 12:7, 8 says, "If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons."

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. 1 Corinthians 3:18

In chapters 1 & 2, Paul spoke in detail about human wisdom in contrast to spiritual wisdom. There we saw that true spiritual wisdom will always be centered on the Person and work of Jesus Christ. In chapter 1 we read this -

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written:

'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.'" 1 Corinthians 1:18, 19

Now returning to this thought concerning wisdom, after having discussed our building upon the foundation which is Christ, he reminds us the importance of the materials we use by beginning with, "Let no one deceive himself." Self-deception is an enormous problem. When people are puffed up with pride and are unwilling to focus on (or properly handle) the word of God, they will delude themselves concerning it.

A great example of this is when a person is asked a question to which they have no answer. Instead of saying, "I don't know" they will often start theorizing in their own mind, looking for anything that sounds acceptable so that they don't sound uneducated. In this, they begin to deceive themselves and thus deceive others in the process. Paul speaks about this type of thing in 2 Timothy 3:13 -

"But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived."

Anytime we depart from the truth of Christ as revealed in Scripture, we head immediately in a perverse direction. However, this isn't limited to Christians with bad theology. It permeates the world of academia. It is more than common to invent fine sounding arguments concerning issues to which the specialists have no idea about and no answer to. Instead, they make up things in their head in order to sound wise and they carry many along in their deceit.

Paul gives a remedy for this when he says, "If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise." Rather than "seeming wise" by professing a wisdom other than Christ, the wisest course of all is to "become a fool." This means that taking the direction of Christ and running with the knowledge of Christ is foolishness to the world. When someone takes that direction, they are counted as a fool. But in reality, they have made the wisest choice of all because their instruction comes from the true Source of wisdom, God. In this, one will "become a fool that he may become wise."

What seems contradictory to the rest of the world is the soundest course of all. In Christ, there is an eternal fount of wisdom, reason, intelligence, and splendor. Apart from Him, there is only vain imaginings and self-deceit which results in the deceiving of others. It is an eternally sad choice to make.

Life application: New religious expressions pop up daily. Old religions are revived and reinstated as supposed sources of enlightenment. Philosophies are held in high esteem because they question reality or the ability to truly know anything. All such things seem wise to the world, but they are foolishness to God. On the contrary, the gospel of Jesus Christ is the true wisdom of God and in it all other machinations of man are made utterly foolish. Stand firm on the gospel of Christ and know that God is pleased with you looking "foolish" to the rest of the world!

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their *own* craftiness"; 1 Corinthians 3:19

As has been noted time and again in this epistle, care needs to be taken to ensure context is maintained. Without considering the surrounding thoughts, incorrect ideas about what is being discussed will naturally arise. The verse begins with "for" which asks us to consider what has been said in order to make the connection with the rest of the initial thought. Paul has been speaking about building upon the foundation, which is Christ, and that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

"For" then asks us to consider that in context with "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." This has nothing to do with appropriate studies of science, medicine, astronomy, geology, or any other discipline which God gave us the intelligence to pursue. For example, because of botany, we have grafts of hearty fruits which can withstand drought-like conditions and attacks by insects or other pests. We have flowers that bloom in a wild array of colors and durations that are not found in the natural world.

God is not asking believers to set aside their brains in this world. Cults and misguided sects ignorantly don't use medicine which has been developed by man and thus they bring on themselves prolonged sicknesses and even premature death. This type of bad analysis is inevitable when context isn't considered. But it is not what Paul is speaking of.

The "wisdom of the world" is speaking of that wisdom which *excludes* Christ in any of its considerations. If a scientist looks for natural explanations to the ultimate questions of life, science, or philosophy, then he will never find the correct answers to his questions, because God is the Source of all such wisdom. Johannes Kepler wisely said, "Science is thinking God's thoughts after Him." This then is wisdom. Without such an attitude, any pursuit of wisdom "is foolishness with God."

To build upon and validate this notion, Paul turns to Scripture and cites a portion of Job 5:13. "For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their *own* craftiness.'"

The word "catches" conveys the idea of grabbing with the fist. It is intended to express the notion that no matter what they pursue, apart from including God in the equation, they will never truly get away from the bonds which shackle them. They are pursuing ultimate knowledge, but they are bound by limitations which hinder their ability to discern it.

Life application: When contemplating anything of substance, include God in your thoughts. He is the purpose, hope, goal, and end-point of all we could ever consider. Keep Jesus Christ in the equation and the numbers will always add up as they should!

Daily I rise and go about my life

But without including the Lord, no true purpose exists

Instead of peace, my soul only finds strife

As I attempt to accomplish my scholarly lists

...and again, "The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

1 Corinthians 3:20

Again, Paul returns to Scripture to confirm the point he has been making. This is a citation from Psalm 94:11. Directly quoted, it says this -

"The LORD knows the thoughts of man,
That they *are* futile."

The substitution of "wise" instead of "men" is intended for those he has been speaking of who hold to the wisdom of the world without including God in their

thoughts. The word he uses for "thoughts" is comparable to "reasonings." In other words, the search for the knowledge of things is futile when people do it apart from understanding that God is the ultimate Cause of all things.

A perfect example of this in the 21st century is the scientific study going on at CERN - the Large Hadron Collider which is on the Franco-Swiss border near Geneva. At this immense facility is a 27 kilometer long ring of superconducting magnets with accelerating structures to boost energy. These are used to bring matter close to the speed of light and smash it into other matter going in the opposite direction. In their research, they are attempting to find "the God-particle."

They believe that by finding a particular particle which results from this type of collision, they will be able to answer all of the questions concerning the creation of the universe. On their website, they begin by asking this -

"What is the universe made of? How did it start? Physicists at CERN are seeking answers, using some of the world's most powerful particle accelerators."

Rather than approaching their studies from the presupposition that there is a God and their research will help us to understand how God does things, they leave Him out of the equation. The ultimate answer, therefore, will always elude them and they will be kept from what they desire most. Someday, at the judgment of man unless they call on Christ first, they will be eternally separated from Him, but they will know that He exists. Thus, they will spend eternity lacking contact with what they now realize to be the truth. It is a sad thought, but it is the state of unregenerate man.

Life application: Without God, the smartest person is just a dolt, but with God, the least intelligent chap is a true genius. Be really smart; call on Christ!

Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: 1 Corinthians 3:21

"Therefore" is now stated for consideration of what he has been considering throughout the entire chapter. Paul is moving from his argument into an exhortation to those in Corinth (and thus to us who read this epistle). However, his following words are some of the most disregarded in the entire letter - "let no one boast in men."

It is with the greatest note of sadness that this simple sentence has gone almost completely unheeded in Christianity. Catholics boast in the pope; Lutherans boast in Luther; Calvinists boast in Calvin; modern followers of prophecy boast in individual analysts; people cling to TV evangelists and preachers as if they possessed the source of wisdom and knowledge. And yet... they are just people serving in a limited capacity for a limited time and their analyses are merely attempts to explain what has already been given.

Paul exhorts each of us to not boast in any man. Instead, let him who boasts, boast in the Lord. Anything other than this merely diminishes what should be the sole and complete focus of our attention, Jesus Christ. In order to explain this, he follows up with an argument for his exhortation by stating "For all things are yours." This will be expanded upon in the verses ahead; it is not a stand alone thought that we can run with and claim all-knowledge or all authority in and of ourselves. Instead, it is a precursor to what he will next explain.

Life application: It is commendable to recognize a sound theologian, commentator, preacher, evangelist, etc. But Paul warns us that we are not to boast in that individual. Be careful to heed these words lest your eyes be misdirected away from the Lord.

... whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come—all are yours. 1 Corinthians 3:22

This verse is dependent on, and explains, the preceding verse which said, "Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours..." Included in "all things" is the list he now gives beginning with, "whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas." Interestingly, Cephas (Peter) hasn't been mentioned since 1 Corinthians 1:12, 13 when Paul said -

"Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?"

In the interim verses, he speaks about the work of Apollos and himself, but not Cephas. The reason why is clear when one understands that the Corinthian church is a predominantly gentile church. Whatever effect Cephas had on it was directed to the Jews as he is the "Apostle to the Jews." However, Paul laid the foundation of the church at Corinth as a gentile entity and Apollos then continued on in that respect.

Cephas did his part, Apollos, did his part, and Paul did his part, but those in the church are the recipients of all of their labors which were united on the proclamation of Christ. The division of these into differing factions is pointless. And as the work of these three all belong to those at Corinth, so do -

- 1) the world, meaning all the created order that we can experience and search out in our attempts to know our Creator better;
- 2) life, which is speaking of the fullness of life in Christ rather than the vain and empty pursuits of life separate from Christ. Solomon, long before Paul, noted that "all is vanity" apart from God. Life ultimately has no meaning or purpose without Christ, but in Him there is the richness of knowing that we are but pilgrims on a journey to a far better place. It is a place which transcends even....

- 3) death, the termination of this earthly existence is not a foe to the believer, but rather it is a part of assuming our inheritance. As Paul says in Philippians 1:21 - "For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain." Peter explains it as "a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:3, 4);
- 4) things present, is the life we have been given. This is parallel to "life" noted above. Parallelism is used to reinforce a thought and asks the reader to reflect on it a second time. We are living in our present reality, but we have a hope in this reality which is beyond what we can fully grasp. And that will be revealed in the...
- 5) things to come, which is our heavenly inheritance and the fullness of eternal life granted by God through His Son, Jesus Christ. Without this hope, all life is futile and factions are the norm. But in Christ, there should be no such divisions. All these things are united in Him for our benefit and in anticipation of that great Day.

Paul says that "all are yours" and as we are also the recipients of his letter to the Corinthians, we also are included in the promises found in Christ. This is the wonder of our state and it shows the absurdity of clinging to single teachers or dividing the fellowship in unnatural ways. Our eyes and thoughts are to be focused on the goal; on the prize; on Christ.

Life application: We have a heavenly inheritance, but we also have to work out our earthly existence. Let us therefore do the latter with the former firmly entrenched in our duties and attitudes, to the glory of God.

And you *are* Christ's, and Christ *is* God's. 1 Corinthians 3:23

To finish out his current thoughts concerning our allegiances and also to close chapter 3, Paul notes that "you are Christ's." We don't belong to Paul or Peter,

nor to any other individual, sect, or denomination. We don't belong to a pope, pastor, or priest. Instead, we belong to Christ. He died for us, was resurrected proving that His work was accepted by God, and we have called on Him for salvation. We are His and to Him alone belongs our allegiance.

Understanding this, Paul finishes with "and Christ is God's." Christ is a member of the Godhead - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Because we belong to Him, we belong to God. Jesus is our Mediator to God; no one else can satisfy that role. If we belong to Christ, and He to God, then we are accountable to God and owe Him our allegiance through Christ.

Paul's order of argument and his logic have been exactly laid out to keep us from misguided allegiances and distractions. And yet, we in the church have continuously failed to heed his words. We throw our trust behind a given pastor as if he were the ultimate authority over us in all matters. Some, like Jim Jones, have even taken their flock to their deaths. All of this tragically occurs because we fail to simply heed the words of the Bible.

Life application: Fix your eyes on Jesus.

Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 1 Corinthians 4:1

Paul has penned many words concerning divisions in the church, especially those based on following particular individuals. However, he understood the human proclivity toward this kind of action. And so, having shown that Christ is the foundation and every other person is merely building upon that foundation, he now goes to the task of defining exactly how individual ministers should be perceived. Though they are not to be exalted, they have a particular distinction which is of note.

And so he begins chapter 4 with "Let a man so consider us..." He is referring to Cephas, Apollos, and himself, along with any others who come to add upon the foundation. These are to be considered "as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." Paul elsewhere calls himself a "bondservant of Christ." In Romans 6, he shows that we are *all* slaves to something. We are either slaves to sin (as Jesus Himself noted in John 8:34) or we are slaves to God and to righteousness. Therefore, his terminology that they are "servants of Christ" is inclusive of all believers.

In this state, they are to be regarded as equals by the Corinthians. All are under one Master and therefore all owe their allegiance to Him alone. But he continues by stating that despite their common status, they are also "stewards of the mysteries of God." They, as apostles and teachers, carry the details of the faith for instruction and building up of the body. In this capacity, they are to be noted for their efforts. However, this type of note is to be shared among all who are in such a position. There shouldn't be unhealthy divisions within the category.

And there are many categories within the faith. Paul gives several lists throughout his writings, such as one which is coming up in 1 Corinthians 12:27, 28 -

"Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues."

Life application: The Bible asks us to give honor where it is due. In 1 Timothy 5:17, for example, elders are to be given "double honor" for their service. However, this is a form of respect, not a point of exaltation and division within the body. Be careful to keep the integrity of the body through the exaltation of Christ alone.

There is a place where I can go

At any time of day or night

*When my soul feels worn down
And I need the Lord to make things right*

Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. 1 Corinthians 4:2

Verse 2 begins with "moreover." This builds upon verse 1 which said, "Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." In addition to this, or "moreover," Paul now notes that "it is required..." Literally, this phrase is "it is sought for" or "it is expected." If one is a steward of another, then they are responsible to their master. Certain things must be accomplished, certain qualities are looked for, and certain standards must be maintained.

In such a state it is required "that one be found faithful." His words here certainly reflect the mindset of Jesus' words in Luke 12:42, 43 -

"And the Lord said, 'Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom *his* master will make ruler over his household, to give *them their* portion of food in due season? Blessed *is* that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.'"

The logic is that

- 1) Jesus Christ is the Master;
- 2) He selects His stewards;
- 3) He gives His instructions for proper stewardship (these are found in the Bible);
- 4) He will search out our works, attitudes, and results to determine our faithfulness.

Life application: Have you received Jesus Christ as your Savior? If so, you have become a "steward" or "servant" of Christ. Are you learning His instruction manual? Are you executing your duties according to that manual? This is our one shot at doing these things before we stand before His judgment seat. Make sure to do them diligently and correctly!