

1 Corinthians 3:5-23

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In the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians, Paul's dealing with this one issue of division. Later on, he's going to begin in chapter 5 to talk about questions that they had about issues in the church, but they were divided. Remember, they were divided over ministers, "I'm of Paul," "I'm of Apollos," "I'm of Peter," "I'm of Christ," and they were actually doing this kind of personality cult thing where they were identifying with the preacher rather than what was preached. Paul started off talking about his preaching of the cross, that the cross of Christ is what he preached, and that would bring them together in unity. He said, "I don't want to know anything among you but Jesus Christ and Him crucified." Paul said, "I didn't baptize any of you. I didn't baptize you in my name, I just want you to be focused on Jesus."

In 1 Corinthians 1 and 2, Paul used the message that he preached to bring about unity among them. In 1 Corinthians 3 and 4, Paul wants to talk about the ministry that God gave him and Apollos, so it kind of unified the church there in Corinth. We're going to get some insight to Paul's ministry as we've already gotten insight to Paul's message that he preached the cross. There's also some really cool information in this third chapter, as well as in the fourth chapter but especially this third chapter, about the Church. That may not sound that exciting, the idea that we're going to learn about ministry and the Church, but the Church is what God is doing today. What God is doing in the world today is building His Church. We actually live right now in what's known as the Church Age. You could use the word "dispensation," if you choose, would be a fitting term, but the period of time we live in right now is all about the Church.

The Church is universal, it doesn't just exist at Revival Christian Fellowship or First Baptist this or Presbyterian that or Methodist this, the Church is everyone universally in the world who has been born again. The minute you are born again, you are actually placed in the body of Christ—the Church. He's the living head, and you are connected to Him. It's really important for us to know both what is the Church and what are the ministers of the Church to be doing, what are they to be.

I'm going to give you an outline of what we cover tonight. In verses 1-4, we're going to see the Church is a family and the minister is a father, a spiritual father, and that he wants to bring the family to maturity. The Church is a family, and we are to be brought up to maturity. He doesn't want us to be left to spiritual carnality.

Begin with me in verse 1, Paul says, "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal,"—or fleshly—"even as unto babes in Christ. 2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. 3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife,"—by the way, that 'envying' in my King James Bible could be translated jealousy—"and divisions, are ye not carnal,"—or fleshly—"and walk as men?" Lest I forget, that "walking as men" means basically even though you're believers, even though you're saved, you're living like unsaved people. There are aspects to the way you're living that you would be living just like the men of the flesh.

At the end of 1 Corinthians 2, he mentioned that there is the natural man and the spiritual man. The natural man is the unsaved, unregenerate individual; the spiritual man is not only the person that's been born again or saved, but is living in the power of the Spirit and not walking dominated by the flesh.

He goes on to say that these envying, strivings, and divisions are all evidence of the fact that you are carnal and you're walking as men, verse 4, "For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?" They're grouping after different ministers, and they kind of placated to their personality and weren't really thinking about what they were preaching, the content of their message, so Paul says, "It's the result of you being carnal."

Again, I did do a lot of exposition on it last week so I don't want to go into too much depth, but we have the natural man, unsaved; we have the spiritual man, saved and Spirit-filled, walking in the Spirit; and then we have the Christian that is saved but he's not growing, he's not maturing. There's nothing wrong with being a "babe in Christ," if you are newly born in Christ, you're a young believer. But if you've been born again for some length of time and you're not growing and you're not maturing, that's tragic. In Galatians, Paul says, "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary . . . so that ye cannot do the things that ye would,"—want to.

Don't get discouraged if you still struggle with sometimes some of the desires of the flesh and you wrestle with the world and the devil attacks you—the three enemies of the believer: the world, the flesh, and the devil—and the world and the devil wouldn't be a problem if it wasn't for my flesh. That's kind of that difficult part, our flesh that we have to deal with, but this is where we need to die to the old man. We need to read the Word and feed on the Word and grow in our knowledge of the grace and knowledge of God, and we need to be filled with the Spirit and try to yield to the Spirit so that we will not be controlled by or dominated by this carnal, sinful nature. Again, they were "brethren," verse 1, they were also, " . . . babes in Christ," and one of the indications of their carnality in this family of God here, the local church at Corinth, is that they could not feed on the meat of the Word, they were fed with the milk of the Word. They did not develop a palate or an appetite for the Word of God.

All the years I've taught the Bible, I'm not really sure I totally understand what the "milk" is defined as and what the "meat" is. In Hebrews, it indicates that the "meat" of the Word is what Christ is doing now in heaven for the believer—interceding for us. There's also indication that the "meat" of the Word are the doctrines of Scripture. I believe that as Christians we should have a hunger for, a desire for, the Word of God.

The word "doctrine," by the way, scares some people. They think of theology and stuff that's really intellectual and hard to know and understand and impractical, but the word "doctrine" actually just means teaching. We want to know what the Bible teaches about God, about Jesus, about the Holy Spirit, about salvation, about the Church, about future things, about heaven and hell, angels—good and bad. Doctrine is just what the Bible teaches.

A lot of times baby Christians that don't grow and don't mature, they don't want the doctrine of the Scriptures, they just want a pep talk. They want stories or Bible stories which are great, it's the Word of God and we can learn examples from them, but they don't want an in-depth series in the book of Romans, or in-depth series in the book of Hebrews, or an in-depth series in the book of Colossians. Just, you know, give me a Bible story. Give me some practical application, things that apply to my life and a little sermonette for the Christianette, and let me kind of go my way. I believe that when you grow and mature, you're hungry for the Word of God, you want doctrine. You want didactic teaching found in Scriptures.

So, they were saved, but they were fleshly, they were babes, and verse 3, they were acting like men. A picture of that was, "I am of Paul . . . I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?"

The second picture, as we get into verses 5-9, is that the Church is a field. First, the Church is a family, let's grow up. Let's mature. Let's not stay spiritual infants, and God has given to the Church pastor-teachers, which is one word that's hyphenated in the book of Ephesians. God has given to the Church pastor-teachers, and He's given them, "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry." But the picture here is that of the Church is a field and the goal is not maturity now but quantity, that the field has to have the receiving of the seed, the Word of God, and God wants the Church to produce fruit. The minister here is a farmer. So, first the pastor is a father bringing the children to maturity. The second image is that he's a farmer. This image fits me pretty well because I could be Farmer John. I've always thought that when I taught this passage I should put on my overalls, wear a cowboy hat. So, there's a field—that is the Church—and we're sowing the seed of the Word of God, and it is to bring forth fruit for the glory of God.

Let's read verse 5, "Who then is Paul,"—literally, this is, what then is Paul? Remember, verse 4, as well as other verses in chapter 1, "I am of Paul; and I am of Apollos," so "Who then is Paul"—or what is Paul and what is Apollos?—"but ministers" You could stop right there, and that's pretty great stuff that tells us what a pastor is, what a minister is. I'm speaking in March in Texas at a pastor's conference, and having been meditating on these passages here, I'm tempted to take it with me to speak to the pastors there that are in the state of Texas and Oklahoma about what is a minister? What is a pastor? Who are they?

So, what is Paul, what is Apollos? ". . . but ministers" We get from the Greek word translated "ministers," we get our word deacon or *diákonos* from it. It's not talking about an official office of the church—deacon—but it's talking about the servant aspect of a pastor. A pastor or an elder is a servant of the church; and the pastor, and the elder, and the bishop, and the overseer, those are all synonymous terms. When the Bible uses the word "elder," that's what a pastor is, a pastor is an elder. A pastor is also a bishop or overseer. They're all the same individual. But it speaks of a servant. You could almost translate this a slave, a *diákonos*, a slave or a servant.

". . . by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?" He's hinting at the fact that Apollos and Paul, he says, "We're servants. We're slaves. Don't glory in us. Don't follow us.

Don't elevate us. Don't worship us. Worship Jesus. We're here to be servants to the church, and we brought the Word of God to you and you believed, ' . . . even as the Lord gave to every man?' Notice, he breaks it down and says, verse 6, "I have planted,"—Paul speaking—"Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." He's pointing them to God. "I planted, Apollos watered, we're one, we're working together, but God is the One that gives the increase."

Write down the word "diversity." In the Church there is to be unity as well as diversity or diversity within the unity of the Church. God raises up men to teach the Word of God, and they're all diverse in their focus or their emphasis, but they still have one goal, that is, to preach the Word of God. Paul says, "I have planted." Paul was the one first to preach the gospel in Corinth. Think about that. Paul went to cities who now had never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ, and he was able to share for the first time the good news and see the Church start up in Corinth. Apollos came along and was the great orator, a great theologian. He was eloquent and very intelligent, highly trained, there were those who really liked Apollos, and Apollos did the watering; but it was God that actually gave the increase. Again, the whole picture still is that the Church at Corinth was depicted by a field, and we're going to see that clearly in just a few verses.

Verse 7, "So then neither is he that planteth"—Paul referring to himself—"any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." The end of verse 6, " . . . but God gave the increase;" the end of verse 7, " . . . but God that giveth the increase." So, write down the word "diversity" and then write down the word "humility." Paul was humble. He knew that God was the One who gave the increase. So, you can sow the seed, you can preach the gospel, but God has to be the One that blesses that preaching of the gospel and bring increase. "So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase."

Verse 8, "Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one"—he's talking about he and Apollos were one, 'We're not divided. Don't be dividing over us.' For verse 8, write down the word "unity." So, you have "diversity," verse 6; you have "humility," verse 7; and then "unity," verse 8. "Now he that planteth and he the watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour." He's hinting at something he's going to talk about in a little more depth in just a couple verses, but basically God is the One who will reward His servants. So, don't focus on them, focus on God. He's the One who brings the reward. But there was unity of purpose. Notice he says in verse 8, "and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. 9 For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry;"—this is where he actually says in verse 9, 'we are God's field,' and the phrase is actually "tilled field," a plowed field where the Word of God has been sown and it's producing fruit.

When he says in verse 9, " . . . labourers together," that's an unfortunate translation. The Greek phrase conveys the idea of that we are God's fellow workers, that we're both workers for God and we're in unity and harmony together. It doesn't mean that we partner together with God, though there is an aspect I guess we could say that we do, but basically it's God's work from beginning to end and we're just fellow workers working for God and with the desire to glorify

God and edify and build up the Church.

Paul says, “. . . ye are God's husbandry”—field—“ye are God's building.” That's my next point, so I didn't want to read the end of verse 9, but we are first a family, the goal is maturity. Secondly, we are a field, the goal is quantity—sow the seed, pray, sacrifice, serve so that God will bring the harvest and produce the fruit. I love the picture of the Church as being a field where the seed is sown and it brings glory to God.

Here's the third, and last, picture which will take us all the way down to the end of the chapter, verse 23, that is, the Church is a temple. You could put “building,” but it's actually used in this text as a temple, from verses 9b-23, and the goal here is quality—using the right materials, having the right foundation, following the right plan. The Church is a building, or in this case, a temple. “. . . ye are God's building,”—I love it, verse 9, and he's going to say that this is the temple of the Holy Spirit, so the minister is now a builder. So, he's a father, he's a farmer, and he's a builder.

Verse 10, they build, “according to the grace of God which is given unto me,”—again, I love that reference to the grace of God. God's grace to Paul, using him; God's grace to us in saving us and using us. That's all about God's grace. “. . . which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder,”—here we go, the Church needed to be built up. The phrase “master builder” conveys the idea of skillful architect. Paul says, “I'm a skillful architect.” “. . . I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon.” Remember I said Paul was the first one to go to Corinth and preach the gospel, and then Apollos came along and built on that foundation, “. . . and another buildeth thereon.” So, he's a skillful architect. He has to have the right foundation.

If you're taking notes, I would write down at the end of verse 10, “right foundation.” We need a church that's built on Jesus Christ and the Word of God. Amen? That's what we want. We don't want a church built on a man or a personality. Churches crash and burn all the time because they're built on people or built on personalities rather than built on Jesus Christ. If the Lord should tarry and in His time He takes me out of being the senior pastor at Revival Christian Fellowship, my prayer, my desire, is that you're being built up on Jesus Christ and on His Word, and this church would continue to go and grow and thrive and be blessed by God because it should not and it cannot be built upon a man. Amen? Jesus is that foundation for the church and for our lives. So, verse 10, right foundation, “But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.” There's a foundation laid on Christ, be careful how you build on that foundation.

Notice verse 11, “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” For either the Church or for our individual lives, my heart's prayer and desire is that the members of this fellowship, through the teaching of the Word of God, get built up, grounded in, solid foundation of the Word of God and Jesus Christ, so that when the wind blows and the storms come, your house will stand because you're built on Jesus Christ.

Verse 12, “Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay,

stubble; 13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is"—not how much it is, but what quality it is. When it comes to building, you want to use quality material, right? You don't want to use junky materials. So, he says, "It's got to be quality building," ". . . of what sort it is."

Verse 14, "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward." He comes back to that idea that everyone who is serving the Lord is going to be rewarded from the Lord.

Verse 15, "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. 16 Know ye not that ye are the temple"—here it is—"of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? 17 If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." I just want to hint at this now and then go back through the verses, that this "temple of God," which they were, and the Spirit of God indwelt them, in this context is not talking about the individual believer's body, which he used in other places to describe 1 Corinthians 6:19, that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. This "temple" here is referring to the Church, which is fascinating because when you read this, normally you shift gears, and go, "Oh, you're talking about the Christians and our bodies, the temple of the Holy Spirit," but he's talking about the Church. He's talking about the Church, and that the Church is a temple which is inhabited by the Holy Spirit.

Go back with me, and I want you to notice that when you're building on the foundation, verse 12, you've got to use the right materials. Here's how it breaks down: 1) right foundation, 2) right materials, which is gold, silver, precious stones. If you want to build a really good temple, you don't want to use wood, you definitely don't want to use hay, and you don't want to use stubble, right? You don't want to use straw, you want to use gold, silver, and precious stones. You must use the right material, which I believe the reference to gold, silver, and precious stones means that we're building the church by prayer, by the Word of God, and by sacrificial service. God does the addition and the growth and the building, but we pray, we teach, we preach, we sacrifice, and we serve.

Now, Paul's going to be talking about our service here, he is talking about it, "Every man's work shall be made manifest,"—do you know what that means? That means that there will be an inspection. If any of you here tonight you've built buildings, or maybe did a room addition that you had to get permits from the city, it took 20 years to build a room addition or something like that, you had to have inspectors show up, right? It's kind of, "Whoa, man. I hope it'll pass inspection. I hope we did it right." You have to have inspections to make sure you're using the right materials and you're doing it according to code, so the right foundation, the right materials. The right materials, verse 12, I think are indicating that our service should be done in the power and energy of the Holy Spirit, humbly for the glory of God. If you're not doing that, you're not building with gold, silver, precious stones, which is important, you're building with wood, hay, and stubble.

Why is it important that we use the right material, not wood, hay, and stubble? Which I believe is doing it in the energy of the flesh for the glory of man—doing it for wrong motives. You know when you're doing ministry, it's not just that you minister the proper preaching and teaching, it must be done with the right heart and attitude and motive. God sees the heart, and it's important that we do serve the Lord with the right heart, a humble heart that desires the glory of God.

Verse 13, "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it." What does he mean by "the day?" The day is no doubt a reference to when the Lord comes back and rewards His people who served Him. There will be judgment for the unbelievers, but there'll be rewarding for the believers. This is what is often called the reward seat of Christ for those believers who served the Lord. It's known as the Bema Seat. Why "Bema Seat?" Because it's not a judgment for our sin. If you're a Christian, you will not be judged by God for your sin, that was taken care of at the cross. Jesus cried, "It is finished." You're not going to have to give an account for your sin paid for by Jesus on the cross. But we are going to give an account to God for our service. God's given you a gift, did you use it faithfully for His glory, especially if you're called to be a pastor or an elder or a spiritual leader in the church. God's going to require of you that you be found faithful.

In 1 Corinthians 4, one of my favorite chapters there for the pastor, is that a man must be found faithful because God's made us stewards. It's not our message, it's not our ministry, we are just to be faithful to the stewardship entrusted to us to feed the household of God. I'm going to be giving an account to God. I'm not going to be standing in front of you on judgment day, you judging me, and I won't be judging you, but God will be the judge. It's a reward seat. "Bema" means reward, like in the Greek Olympic Games when they would run the race and they would win, they would get the laurel wreath on their head, or we have the Olympics where they have the gold, silver, and bronze, and they stand on the podium and the flag of the country drops and they play the national anthem. They're rewarded. They're given their reward. There are rewards for us as Christians to how we served the Lord and sought to edify or build up the Church.

Verse 14, "If any man's work abide,"—what would make your work abide when you're being tested for your service? If your work is gold, silver, precious stones, your work is going to be tried by fire. That will purify your work and strengthen it, it won't be consumed or lost. But if your ministry were to be wood, hay, or stubble...what happens when wood, hay, stubble comes in contact with fire? It incinerates it, right? It's gone. You're going to go to heaven. You're not going to lose your salvation, but we'll sometimes use the term, "You're saved by the skin of your teeth," "You're saved so as by fire," you just barely get in, there's no rewards for you.

Verse 15, he says, "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." This is not a reference to Purgatory. Some try to use this to defend the doctrine of Purgatory, but that's not at all what he's talking about. He's talking about saved people that go to heaven, but they didn't serve the Lord in a way that was glorifying and honoring to Him, and their works were wood, hay, stubble, so they're burnt by fire and they're

gone.

Verse 16, “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” That’s a reference to the Church, and that the Church has God’s Spirit dwelling in the Church. “If any man defile the temple of God,”—which is the Church—“him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.” I don’t think we very rarely realize how important the Church is to God. I think we take it for granted. We take a nonchalant, kind of lax attitude. Jesus had to die on the cross and shed His blood for the Church, and we have this cavalier, take it or leave it attitude. Yet, here we see that we “. . . are the temple of God,”—and that if you destroy that temple—“. . . God is holy, which temple ye are.” God will destroy you—those who divide the Church, destroy the Church, pollute the Church, corrupt the Church, who teach false doctrine and divide the Church. I would not want to be in their shoes.

Verse 18, “Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world,”—in a worldly sense, which is one of the problems in Corinth. They wanted earthly wisdom. They wanted the philosophy of the Greeks and the Roman culture. They magnified wisdom. “. . . let him become a fool, that he may be wise.” I love that. So, if you think you’re smart, you’re dumb. If you admit you’re dumb and you’re not smart, you’re not wise, and you come to the Bible with a childlike, humble dependence and submission to the Scriptures, you’re smart. The person that just believes the Word of God and lives by the Word of God is always blessed and miles ahead of anyone else. Don’t get so high and mighty and so intellectual that you’re above the Bible, that you’re over the Bible, that you don’t submit to it and its authority. God said it, I believe it, that settles it. It’s just that simple childlike faith and dependence on the Word of God. It’s so very, very important.

Paul is coming back to that first chapter theme of the wisdom of the world is foolishness to God, and the cross, which they deemed as foolish was the very wisdom and power of God. “. . . let him become a fool, that he may be wise.”

Verse 19 says, “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written,”—here are some quotes from the Old Testament. He first quotes from Job 5:13, “He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.” Verse 20, which is another Old Testament reference, Psalm 94:11, “And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.” I love that.

Here’s the conclusion, “Therefore let no man glory in men,”—which is what they were doing, ‘I am of Paul,’ ‘I am of Apollos,’ ‘I am of Peter.’ Don’t be glorying in men. “For all things are yours,”—in other words, God has given you everything you need for life and godliness. If you’re a believer in Jesus Christ, you have His Word, you’re part of the body of Christ, “. . . all things are yours.” This is kind of like an early version of Romans 8:28, “. . . all things work together for good to them that love God.” Why would you want to follow the wisdom of the world? Why would you want to destroy the Church? God is holy. He’s going to judge you for that. “For all things are yours,”—I love that, verse 21.

Verse 22, “Whether Paul,”—Paul’s yours, God gave Paul to the Church. He’s actually saying,

and I love this, that Paul and Apollos and Peter were gifts from God to the Church. Be thankful to God for the men and the ministries that God gives to the Church. He says, "Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world,"—God's given you all things—"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." Paul wraps it up with this important message of don't follow the wisdom of the world which is foolishness to God, but follow the wisdom of God found in Christ. He's all that you need.

When we are building the Church, the temple, we want a right foundation, we want right materials, we want a right plan, and we want right motives.

Let me repeat what we covered tonight and wrap this up. The Church is a family, the goal is maturity, and that happens through the preaching and teaching of God's Word. In Ephesians 4 God's given to the Church pastor-teachers, "For the perfecting"—for the maturing, that's what it means—"of the saints, for the work of the ministry,"—so the Word of God is involved.

Secondly, the Church is a field, the quantity. How do we produce fruit in the Church? The Word of God, the teaching of God's Word. I never cease to be amazed at how God uses the teaching of His Word to produce fruit in people's lives. You know, Revival actually through our radio ministry, through our online ministry, we're actually seeing people's lives changed all over the world, and it's just simply the teaching of God's Word.

Thirdly, the Church is a temple, quality. We're to build the right foundation, with the right materials, with the right plan, and the right motive. Amen? May God bless the teaching and preaching of His Word. Let's pray.