

## 1 CORINTHIANS 3:16-23

### INTRODUCTION

As we said last time the foundation on which the church is built is Jesus Christ. We who are builders must concern ourselves with building on this foundation using the right material. However, having Christ as the foundation is no guarantee that the building will be as it should be. According to Paul there are three dangers that threaten the building of Christ's church.

One is building on the foundation using the wrong materials as we saw last week. Now Paul draws our attention to the other two elements that affect the building work of the church.

#### 1. THOSE WHO SEEK TO DESTROY RATHER THAN BUILD THE CHURCH (vs. 16-17)

Not only will building with the wrong materials affect the building work of the church but the fact that there are those who are actively seeking to destroy the church will also affect the building work. In other words even if we are using the right materials to build on the foundation of Jesus Christ either in our own lives or in the life of the church there will be others who are seeking to destroy God's church. Perhaps Paul is pointing out that there were some in the church at Corinth who were destroying God's church by their teaching by the fact that they were not building with the right materials. There are some that are not using the right materials because they are lazy and careless about spiritual things.

But there are others who are not using the right materials because their aim is destruction of the church not building it up. Paul highlights the fact that the church is the temple of the living God. Paul is not thinking of individual Christians here being the temple of God although that is true and he says that in 6:19. The word used for 'temple' here is not the whole complex but the inner temple the place where God resided, the place where he met with his people.

There is no temple today because individual Christians are God's temple and the church collectively as a body of His people is the temple because God indwells his church through the Holy Spirit. So we can rightly say that God is here today in the midst of his people. We have gathered as a body of people to meet with God, we long for God's holy presence to be with us and to bless us. That makes coming to church an awesome experience for we are meeting with God today. This building is not the temple of God but we are, for we are His church. Now if this is true then it is no wonder that God views the destruction of the church as a great sin. God's temple is holy and therefore if anyone by teaching or believing false doctrine destroys his church then God will see to it that he will be destroyed.

The word 'destroys' means to corrupt spoil or ruin it does not necessarily mean total destruction. Paul is thinking about the preachers and members of the church at Corinth. There are those who are careless about the things of God, those who are building with the wrong materials and therefore are not building at all. In fact the opposite is the truth; such people are actually destroying the church making the church less effective.

You see false doctrines can corrupt God's temple the church. If you have Elders and preachers who believe error and are preaching error then you can see how the church soon begins to believe error and therefore it becomes corrupted and is being hindered in its building work. But those in the congregation who do not know what they believe and who do not honestly take the time to explore God's truth are actually harming the church. Those who do not discipline themselves to adhere to the means of grace like bible study and prayer and church attendance are actually not only doing themselves a great deal of harm but are doing the church harm. Why because we (plural) are God's temple and someone said that the church is only as strong as its weakest member.

That is why we should never be content with the fact that there are professing Christians who are so careless about spiritual things and are so shallow in their thinking. We must encourage, urge and rebuke such people because such people are having a destructive effect upon the church. Such people generally are blind to the fact that they are so careless and even those who are pricked in their conscience about it often reason that they are doing no harm.

But such thinking is wrong for those people are corrupting the church of Jesus Christ they are sinning against the Lord. So when some people chose to stay at home when they should be at church or when people chose not to attend the meetings for prayer or when they neglect their reading of God's word they are actually having a corrupting affect upon the church. They are actually destroying God's church even if they do not realise this.

We have all seen this happen. It only takes one member to be neglectful of the means of grace in the church and it soon rubs off onto others and before long that begins to have a corrupting affect upon the church, the temple of God.

But God gives a very clear warning here. Even if we are prepared to stand back and watch the church be destroyed and corrupted God is not. Even if we are indifferent to it, God certainly is not. This is why Paul says God will destroy such people. In other words God will not allow his church to be destroyed for it is his temple. He will deal with such people.

His disciplining hand will come upon any whom by their beliefs or their lifestyle or their apathy is corrupting God's church. Now I don't know exactly how God does this, for some people it may well mean eternal destruction in hell because they actually are not true believers at all. For others it may mean the withholding of blessings, for others it may mean many frustrations and difficulties in every day living because God's hand is against them.

There are hosts of ways that God deals with people but one thing is clear that God sees this sin as so serious that he has to take action against those who are committing it. Perhaps you have never seen false doctrine or indiscipline over spiritual things as sin. Could it be possible that there is someone here who is actually destroying our church because you believe the wrong things or you are living the wrong way or you are simply careless and lazy when it comes to Christian disciplines?

You may say you love this church but those who truly love this church and God's church in general are those who are building using the right materials those who are concerned for godliness and for holiness. We all need to heed this warning because we do not want God to oppose us because we know that we cannot fight against him.

## **2. THOSE THAT DECEIVE THEMSELVES ARE IN DANGER OF DESTROYING THE CHURCH (vs. 18-23)**

The church is in danger from those who are building with the wrong material but the church is in danger because of deceived Christians. If Christians are to build using the right materials and therefore not only build godly lives but a holy church then they must not deceive themselves about three things.

**a) Do not be deceived about yourself (vs. 18-20)** – Many of the things that hinder the church from growing would be eliminated if we were not so impressed with our own wisdom. In Corinth wisdom was so important and there was professing believers in the church who had deceived themselves into thinking they were wise but their wisdom was of this world.

They were comparing themselves with the wisdom of the people of Corinth rather than with God's wisdom, which we have seen in this book is completely different from man's wisdom. Anyone who

is so self-deceived needs to become a fool that is he needs to embrace God's wisdom and understand that the world's wisdom is foolish.

Those in Corinth considered the Christians foolish because they rejected the wisdom of Corinth but those who do so are actually wise in God's eyes (v 18). Now there is nothing that will destroy God's temple like applying worldly wisdom to the church. The world says we need to make our message more acceptable if people are going to believe it. We need to present it using more modern means rather than simple preaching.

We need to entertain and make our services more attractive. Nobody wants to listen to preaching for 30-40 minutes. Well using worldly wisdom will ultimately destroy God's temple, the thing that we need in the church is God's wisdom and its application in every aspect of the church's life.

Do our neighbours and friends not think that coming to church is foolishness? Look what we could be doing, walking through the Dales, or doing jobs around the house or enjoying television or a good book. The truth is that doing all those things instead of coming to church to worship God is foolishness in the eyes of God. So do not be deceived by the wisdom of this world.

Do not be taken in by it; do not be taken in by the views of this world, trust God and know that applying the wisdom of this world to the church is a disaster.

The wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. This is why Paul quotes Job 5:13 (v 19). God eventually uses worldly wisdom in his providence to trap those who believe in it. You can never know God or run a church by human wisdom if anyone attempts to do so eventually they will be trapped in their own wisdom and their thinking will be proven to be futile (Psalm 94:11).

This may be one way that God will destroy those who seek to destroy the church he will allow them to see where worldly wisdom leads and let them live a life that is futile. So do not be deceived. Understand that this world and its wisdom have nothing to offer God's church. It might like to tell us how to run our church, the temptation to listen to its wisdom we must resist such a temptation and live simply by the word of God.

Anyone who wants to introduce worldly wisdom and ideas into God's church is deceived and is in danger of destroying God's church. So let us get to know God's word and his principles so that we can apply them in every aspect of our own lives and in our church. We need to increasingly spend our time reading and listening to God's wisdom for we all spend too much time reading and listening to the world's wisdom.

**b) Do not be deceived about others (vs. 21-22)** – We are not to be deceived about ourselves but we need to be careful that we are not deceived about others. We have discovered that people in the church at Corinth took sides over the teaching of Paul and Apollos and Cephas. This favouritism probably developed over the subject of wisdom. Some found Paul's wisdom more appealing than Apollos and so on. In truth they all preached the same message and God used each man to help the church. The division probably had more to do with the preaching style and personalities of each man. Therefore Paul says don't be deceived over leaders that God sent to help the church, do not boast about them, do not give honour to one over the others.

No instead the church should appreciate and rejoice in and profit from the teaching and preaching of all these men whether it is Paul, or Apollos or Cephas. They are all sent from God for the benefit of the church and they all come to preach and proclaim God's wisdom. There is nothing like factions in churches for destroying God's church. This can often evolve around personalities and leaders.

You know how it works. One person prefers my preaching someone else prefers someone else's and so on. When we take sides like that we can so easily begin to advance the good points of our

preacher, his personality might be more appealing his style more relaxing or his sermons more simple.

But such attitudes if allowed to develop can begin to destroy God's church and we can do it without even thinking. I have heard of some Christians who don't go to their church when a particular preacher is there because they prefer their Pastor's preaching. O they give all the reasons that seem to justify their actions but when it is examined it has to do with personalities and style rather than content. We should rightly examine the content of sermons and challenge preachers if necessary about their content.

But we need to be careful that our criticism of some preachers and our preference for other preachers is not based on personality and style for we can be so easily deceived and we could be destroying the church by such attitudes.

**c) Do not be deceived about our possessions (v 22)** - Not only has God sent preachers and Pastors to churches to help build up the church and therefore we should appreciate and rejoice over each one. But everything else that we possess is for our benefit. Preachers are for the benefit of his church but so is everything else they are given to us for our sakes and God's glory.

We belong to Christ therefore everything that belongs to him belong to us. The world was made for us and is for the benefit of God's people. Everything that is going on in the world is part of God's sovereign plan for this world and for the benefit of the church and for the glory of God. We who believe can enjoy our world more than unbelievers, we know where it has come from, and we know why it was made why we are in this world and ultimately what will happen to it.

God has given this world for our benefit therefore let's not be deceived into thinking that we own it and that this world is all that is important. Christians who think like this are in danger of destroying the church for this world with all its beauties and attractions will take up our time and talents and our whole lives.

Yes the world is here for the benefit of the church, but we will only rejoice in it and appreciate it as long as we remember that it is God's gift to us, for our benefit and his glory.

It is the same with life; I think Paul is talking about spiritual life, eternal life here. In Christ we have new life, a quality of life that will never diminish. Eternal life is God's gift to us it's given to us for our benefit and his glory. Now again if we are deceived into thinking that we deserve this life or have earned it then that affects the way we live and we will soon be living in a way that will ultimately destroy the church. There are professing Christian who say I am saved now I can live anyway I like. I have freedom in Christ. Such thinking and living will destroy the church so do not be deceived. We have been given the gift of life so use it for God's glory.

Even death is for our benefit if we belong to Christ. The great enemy of mankind has been overcome by Christ's death and resurrection so that through Him we too have conquered death. We who believe will pass through it as its master not as its slave.

Death for believers is the gateway to eternal life with God so whether we live on earth or are removed to heaven through death the believer cannot lose for everything belongs to us and is for our benefit. Some professing Christians can be crippled by the fear of death and such a fear affects the way we live and if left unchallenged it can destroy churches.

Therefore do not be deceived death is the springboard to eternal life it is for our benefit and God's glory.

Finally Paul thinks about the present and the future. Here Paul by using the word 'present' is thinking about everything that we experience in this life. It includes the good and the bad, the pleasant and the painful, the joys and disappointments, health and sickness. It also includes the times of contentment and the times of grief. All things God works for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28).

So don't be deceived everything comes to us from God's good hand and is ultimately for our good and his glory. Unless we see this and understand this then we will let the events of life cripple us and affect our spiritual life. So someone who is going through a tough time suddenly stops coming to church? Why? Because they feel God is being unkind to them.

But a right view of the present will see trouble as something, which is ultimately for our good and his glory. You can see I hope that wrong thinking here can so easily destroy God's church; if we all reacted negatively when something bad happens to us the church would be hindered in its work and witness.

What about the future, what about our heavenly home? Well heaven is for our benefit and His glory and therefore we must live in the light of our future rather than living for the present. You can see how the church is hindered if Christians live for the seen world rather than the unseen world. So as I finish we are not to be deceived by ourselves or about others or about our possessions but we are to remember that we belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God (v 23). We belong to Christ through faith and He belongs to God the Father therefore Paul's point is simple everything serves God through Christ and everything must be done for His glory.

The wisdom we believe and proclaim the people who serve us as leaders and preachers and all that we possess and all that are present or future serve God and his purposes in our world and in eternity.

Therefore do not be deceived. God gives us everything for the benefit of his church and for his glory so start believing and living out this truth so that the church will not be destroyed and so that God in Christ will be glorified.

Amen