**GOD’S CO-WORKERS**

1 Co 3:1-23 (K. V.: 3:9)

**“For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.”**

Thank God for the blessed 1Corinthians study in which we could learn a lot about our church. Last week, through Sh. Rob’s message, we heard Paul’s resolve to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified. With his knowledge and rhetoric, he could easily win over many people in Corinth, and yet he only depended on God’s power and wisdom to serve the ministry. That’s some important lessons to learn about our church. In today’s passage, we learn Paul’s touching on a specific problem in the Corinthian church, namely, the division in the church. In doing so, he teaches what the church should be like and what attitudes they should have toward each other, particularly, toward the spiritual leaders. May God bless us as we consider ourselves as God’s co-workers and are being built into a holy temple in Jesus Christ.

1. **We Are Co-Workers (1-9)**

Look at verse 1. From this verse, Paul began to touch base with the Corinthians regarding actual issues so as to come to the possible resolution about those issues. Note how Paul addressed them in the first place. He said that they were worldly and infants. In our Friday meeting, one man of God shared how dreadful it would be if the Lord would call him as worldly after so many years of his Christian life. It would be one of the worst and severest rebukes from the Lord. We are called to be holy and blameless in front of the Holy God. Against such divine calling, if we are being called as worldly then, it would be a great let-down to our Lord Jesus. Yet, Paul still rebuked them in that way so that they would be treated as his own children and that later after a moment of discipline they would produce a harvest of righteousness and peace (Heb 12:11).

Look at verse 2. Paul said he gave milk to them because they were not ready for solid food. Surely, all mammals need milk, even lions, tigers, and bears. We all need milk because we do not have teeth or jaw strength yet to chew solid food. Then what is milk to the Corinthians or to us? Some people pointed out that human recognition is milk. Others pointed out that small rewards, like participation trophies, can be milk. But we cannot live on milk forever. We need to grow teeth and strengthen our jaw to chew solid food to be vigorous and full of life. Solid food can be the trials of life, the struggles over how to take up the cross and the persecution within and without.

Look at verse 3. Paul specifically pointed out why they were still worldly and spiritual infants. It is because there were jealousy and quarreling among them. And the reason why they were jealous and quarreling with each other was because of their preference of one specific spiritual leader to others. We heard the same argument in the previous chapters like “I follow Paul” or “I follow Apollos.” Such preference is usually found in politics or sports and is sometimes encouraged (you can like one presidential candidate over others or one professional sports superstar over others). Nevertheless, it is not recommended in the spiritual world. What does Paul say about it?

Look at verse 5. “What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task.” Paul says the spiritual leaders are like servants and are assigned to their unique task so that those who are taken care of by them might believe. In other words, they are not competitors but fellow teammates who work for the same team. Say you are a football player and you either play for offense or defense or special-team but all for the same team. Paul says his task in the gospel ministry is planting the seed while Apollos’ is watering it. Both of them are definitely needed in the farming work, but Paul aptly points out that God is the one who ultimately makes it grow. Truly, God is in the same team! As a seed planter, Paul must have gone through many difficult things like plowing, stone-removing, and weed plucking to optimally plant the seed in the heart-soils of the believers. As a waterer, Apollos also went through lots of hosing work, drenching the bone-dry heart-soils with the heavy-duty hose like that of firefighter. In verse 7, we can see how Paul humbly said neither Paul himself nor Apollos is anything, but God is everything. Paul was one of the greatest evangelists, if not the greatest one. With his care and prayer, many churches were planted during his endless mission trips. And Apollos was one of the greatest speakers, if not the greatest one, who could vigorously refute his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah. With his vigor and fervor, many new believers could be nurtured and edified.

Surely, Paul and Apollos are not anything. What then is the right attitude toward such great spiritual leaders or toward us? Look at verse 9. “For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.” We should take them or us as co-workers in God’s service. And if you think you are not co-workers yet, then, consider you are God’s field, God’s building, which means, you belong to God. And through verse 8, we can be further assured that we have the same purpose together with each other, that is God’s kingdom and His glory, and that each of us will be rewarded accordingly. So, there is no need for jealousy or quarrelling. We are all equal, coworking for the same goal and running after our own reward, not given by others, but given by God. Some members in our Friday meeting pointed out that another reason why there would be such jealousy and quarrelling is because of human ambition.

We heard the graceful graduation testimony from Ester last week regarding how God guided her to Wheaton during her hectic days of pre-college season. We could see how God used His precious servants at the right place and at the right time. Dr. Sam A. Lee in New Jersey, Mother Barry in Chicago and Dr. John Yoon in Hyde Park all played an important role in Ester’s decision-making. Even Sarah Bahn helped dearly. That’s how co-working works. That reminds me of how Msn. Mary and I played some part in Dr. John Yoon’s decision-making in his heyday. When Dr. John was in Texas for his medical school study, he used to come to our small apartment after Saturday evening Bible study because his school was a little far away from Arlington TX Bible center. So, while staying with us Saturday night, instead of rest, he often had a long, heart-felt conversation with us over many issues. That conversation often went on well past midnight even up to 2AM in the morning. At that time, the most pressuring issue was not his medical study but his marriage. As a good friend to him, we patiently listened to him, and gave our honest opinion about it along with our own experiences and prayed together with him. We were dog-tired next morning and yet we could see Dr. John’s face was beamed more than before.

We are UBF, University Bible Fellowship, helping students in anyway possible with the Bible. But we can call ourselves as University Bible Friendship, because that is what we are, making friends with all kinds of people, and becoming co-friends with Christ. May God bless our coworking so that many students like Ester or Dr. John of his young age could become holy man and woman of God in our midst.

1. **The Foundation and the Building Materials (10-23)**

Look at verse 10. Here, Paul began to use a new analogy, that is, a building project. Paul claimed that he laid a foundation as a wise builder (or an expert builder) so that someone else could build on it. And in the next verse, we can see clearly that the foundation is Jesus Christ. Truly, the church’s one foundation is Christ. Elsewhere, Paul describes him as the chief cornerstone (Eph 2:20). Still, it is the same concept that Jesus is the beginning point of the building.

Look at verse 12. Now is the time for the construction of our building with building materials. Paul says there are a variety of building materials to use. It is up to the builders regarding what type of materials to be used. Earlier, Paul says the builders should build with care. He then illustrates six different materials starting from gold: gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw. In the next verse, we see the reason why the builders should build with care, because their work will be revealed at the time of test. Surely, even our little children know why builders should choose the building materials carefully, through the story of “Three Little Pigs.” In the children’s story, the testing was done through the big bad wolf’s huffing and puffing, but our ultimate test will be performed through the fire. The fire will reveal the quality of each person’s work. This test day of fire is synonymous with the Day of Judgment.

If the building somehow survives the fire, the builder will receive a reward. What would be such a reward? In the Book of Revelation, our Lord encourages the Smyrna church to be faithful to the point of death during the test of imprisonment and persecution, because he would give them life as their victor’s crown. So, the victor’s crown is our reward. What happens when our building does not survive but is burned up? In verse 15, we see that we are still saved despite the fact that we will suffer loss. This would be like one escaping through the flames just like Lot escaping Sodom with only his two daughters. Surely, non-flammable materials such as gold, silver and stones are much better in terms of fire withstanding, but people are hesitant to use them because those are expensive. Still, those are worth our investment, and they are embodiment of the precious words of God. May God help us to build our life with His precious words, not with human knowledge.

Look at verse 16. Here, Paul reminds them that they themselves are God’s temple in which His Spirit would dwell. It means both collectively as a church and individually as a person. This temple is so sacred that Paul gives a dire warning that whoever destroys God’s temple would be also destroyed.

In verse 18, Paul gives another warning regarding not being built as God’s temple. The reason why one cannot be built as such is that he deceives himself. How can we deceive ourselves? In the later part of verse 18, we see how we knowingly or unknowingly deceive ourselves. When we think we are wise by the standard of this age, we are self-deceived. This is one of the oldest tricks and yet still works and everyone falls into this trick. Adam and Eve fell for it, and so did Solomon, the said wisest person in the history of mankind. With regard to this self-deception, Paul exhorts us to become “fools” so that we may become truly wise. It is because the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight. In our Friday meeting, one person wisely pointed out that the “fear” of the Lord is beginning of the wisdom. So when we try to become fools before God and fear Him, we can be wise people in God.

In verse 21, coming back to the point again, Paul asks no more boasting about human leaders! Boasting such great leaders might make you feel better, confident, and wise but that is one way of deceiving ourselves. Instead, as Paul helps the Corinthians, we should believe that all things are ours. Verse 22-23 reminds us of Romans 8:38-39. As mature believers, we are not to boast about men. We should rejoice that all are ours, and we are of Christ and Christ of God. That means we are all united in Christ and in the Father. That matters most and nothing else does.

In conclusion, we do not have to boast about human leaders. If we do, we are still worldly and infants in the sight of God. Human recognition and boasting are kind of milk to us, and we are to stop consuming on it. Instead, we consider ourselves as God’s co-workers with unique task given to us. Let us not worry about who we are in the worldly sense. Let us continue to be united and be built as a holy temple with good materials such as precious stones, that is, God’s word.