

Corinthians 3:1-11

3 Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. **2** I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. **3** You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? **4** For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings?

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. **6** I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. **7** So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. **8** The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. **9** For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.

10 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. **11** For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

HAPPY SUPER BOWL SUNDAY. THIS IS THE DAY ALL FOOTBALL FANS THROUGHOUT THE NATION LOOK FORWARD TO WITH GREAT ENTHUSIASM.

TODAY IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT FOR THOSE WHO ARE INVESTED EMOTIONALLY OR OTHERWISE, IN EITHER OF THE TWO TEAMS PLAYING IN THE SUPER BOWL.

SOME FANS SPEND HUNDREDS OF DOLLARS FOR A TICKET, OTHERS HAVE A BIG SUPER BOWL PARTY, FANS WEAR TEAM COLORS, AND SOME EVEN PAINT THEIR HAIR OR FACE.

THE FRIENDLY RIVALRY OF SPORTS TEAMS, AS WELL AS SCHOOLS, IS PART OF THE SOCIAL NORM, AND THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH A LITTLE COMPETITION IN THOSE AREAS.

PERHAPS JESUS AND THE APOSTLE PAUL MIGHT EVEN FIND THIS KIND OF RIVALRY SOMEWHAT AMUSING.

THEY WOULD NOT HOWEVER, CONDONE, LET ALONE FIND ENTERTAINING, RIVALRY WITHIN OR BETWEEN CHURCHES.

TODAY’S EPISTLE READING OPENS WITH PAUL EXPRESSING ANNOYANCE AND EXASPERATION OVER THE COMPETITIVE NATURE OF MANY CHRISTIANS IN CORINTH.

THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH SEEMED TO BASK IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF COMPARING AND CONTRASTING THEIR FAITH COMMITMENT, THEIR SPIRITUAL GIFTS, AND THEIR ROLES WITHIN THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY.

THEY WERE SO OFTEN FOCUSED ON WHERE THEY WERE, OR WANTED TO BE IN THE SELF-MADE HIERARCHY OF CHURCH LIFE, THEY LOST SIGHT OF JESUS AND THE GOSPEL.

THE READING TODAY ADDRESSES ONE OF THESE ISSUES. IT CONCERNED LEADERS IN THE CHURCH AND THEIR IMPACT ON OTHERS.

YOU SEE, WHILE PAUL FOUNDED THE CHURCH IN CORINTH, ONE OF THOSE WHO TOOK UP WHERE PAUL LEFT OFF, WHEN THE APOSTLE MOVED ON, WAS APOLLOS

HE IS NAMED IN THE BOOK OF ACTS AS ENTHUSIASTIC AND A GREAT PREACHER, WHO AT FIRST HAD BE GUIDED BY OTHERS, BUT THEN WAS AN GREAT HELP IN SPREADING THE GOSPEL.

SOON AFTER APOLLOS ARRIVED IN CORINTH, HIS MINISTRY APPARENTLY GAINED A FOLLOWING, WHILE OTHERS IN THE CHURCH CLUNG TO FOLLOWING PAUL.

THE APOSTLE VIEWED THE PRIDE OF THOSE CHRISTIANS OVER WHICH LEADER THEY LIKE BEST AS INFANTILE.

THEY WERE CREATING A PROBLEM WHERE NONE EXISTED, AND THOSE WHO TOOK SIDES WERE INHIBITING THE CHURCH'S WITNESS TO JESUS CHRIST.

HIS ISSUE WAS NOT THAT THEY WERE RELATIVELY NEW CHRISTIANS, BUT RATHER THAT THEY WERE CONTENT TO NOT GROW AND MATURE IN FAITH.

READING PAUL'S WORDS IN THE OPENING VERSES OF FIRST CORINTHIANS CHAPTER THREE, BRINGS THE FICTIONAL CHARACTER OF PETER PAN TO MIND.

REMEMBER IN THE CHILDREN'S STORY PETER FIRMLY REFUSED TO GROW UP. YOU MAY RECALL THE OLD MOVIE WHICH INCLUDED THE SONG "I WON'T GROW UP"

SOME OF THE LYRICS PROCLAIM: "I WON'T GROW UP, I'LL NEVER GROW UP, NOT ME, NOT I.... I WON'T GROW UP...I'LL NEVER GROW UP...I'LL NEVER EVEN TRY."

PAUL WAS ACCUSING MANY IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH OF A SIMILAR STUBBORNNESS.

THEREFORE, HE CALLED THEIR OPINIONS JUVENILE, AND REMINDED THEM NEITHER HE, NOR APOLLOS, NOR ANYONE OTHER APOSTLE, EVANGELIST, TEACHER, OR PREACHER WERE COMPETITORS.

ALL OF THEM WERE FELLOW SERVANTS OF JESUS CHRIST WHOM THEY, AS WELL AS THE CORINTHIANS, WERE FOLLOWERS OF.

PAUL CHALLENGED HIS READERS TO FORSAKE CHILDISH WAYS AND OPEN THEMSELVES UP TO THE GUIDANCE AND GROWTH IN FAITH, GOD OFFERS THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT.

HIS POINT WAS: ALL CHRISTIANS ARE EQUAL BEFORE CHRIST, SAVED BY HIS SACRIFICE, AND CALLED AND EMPOWERED BY GOD'S SPIRIT TO SERVE THE LORD- NOT THEMSELVES.

IN SHORT, PAUL WAS SAYING ANY AND ALL COMPETITION THEY ARE EXPERIENCING IS IN THEIR OWN MINDS, AND NOT PART OF GOD'S WILL.

IN FACT, ALL SUCH RIVALRY AND COMPETITION, WHETHER OVER CHURCH LEADERS OR OTHER MATTERS, IS NOT JUST IMMATURE- IT IS ALSO NOT CHRIST-LIKE.

HE DESCRIBES THEIR OPINIONS AND BEHAVIOR AS BEING OF THE FLESH, MEANING PART OF THEIR HUMAN NATURE INFLUENCED BY SIN, RATHER THAN BY THE HOLY SPIRIT.

HERE HE CHALLENGES THE CHURCH AND HER MEMBERS THEN, AS WELL AS CHRISTIANS TODAY, TO NOT GET CAUGHT UP THINGS THAT INTERFERE WITH GOD'S WILL.

THE APOSTLE REINFORCES THIS TEACHING WITH THE METAPHOR OF THE CHURCH AS A GARDEN.

PAUL BEGINS BY REMINDING THEM THEIR CHURCH WAS LIKE A GARDEN HE PLANTED.

IT WAS THE SEEDS OF HIM PREACHING THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST IN CORINTH, THAT BORE FRUIT WITHIN THOSE WHO BECAME CHRISTIAN, WHICH BEGAN THE CHURCH THERE.

PAUL STAYED AND NURTURED THEM FOR A TIME, BUT THEN WAS CALLED BY GOD TO GO ELSEWHERE.

JESUS, HOWEVER REMAINED WITH THEM, AND THEN GOD BROUGHT APOLLOS THERE TO WATER WHAT PAUL PLANTED. OTHERS WILL COME AND GO AS WELL OVER TIME; SOME MAY RETURN OR NURTURE THEM FROM AFAR, AND OTHERS WILL NOT.

EACH ONE OF THEIR LEADERS CAN BE APPRECIATED FOR THE MINISTRY THAT HAPPENED WHILE THEY WERE IN CORINTH.

HOWEVER, ALL OF THEM WERE MERELY EQUAL SERVANTS OF CHRIST IMPORTANT AND USEFUL BUT NOT IN THEMSELVES ESSENTIAL FOR THE CHURCH.

PAUL'S INTENTION WAS TO EMPHASIZE THAT WITHOUT THE MORE VITAL WORK OF GOD, WHO IS THE ONE WHO GROWS THE GARDEN WHICH IS CHRIST'S CHURCH, NOTHING PRODUCTIVE WILL HAPPEN.

IN THIS PASSAGE, THE IMAGE AND TEACHING OF CHRISTIANS BEING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER, AND WITH GOD IS REINFORCED.

THE METAPHOR ALSO REMINDS THE READERS OF THIS LETTER OF EVERY TIME AND PLACE, THE CHURCH IS NOT THEIR GARDEN OR OUR GARDEN BUT IT BELONGS TO THE LORD.

PAUL WARNS THAT PETTY DIVISIONS AMONG CHRISTIANS INHIBIT THE GROWTH OF INDIVIDUALS.

BUT THOSE UNIMPORTANT RIVALRIES ALSO HURT THE WHOLE CHURCH, AND SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE AMONG BOTH BELIEVERS AND NON-BELIEVERS.

NEXT, THE APOSTLES ADDS THE METAPHOR OF THE CHURCH AS A BUILDING.

PAUL'S MESSAGE TO THE CORINTHIANS WAS THAT THEY WERE NOT ONLY A GARDEN, BUT ALSO COULD BE DESCRIBED AS GOD'S BUILDING.

HIS USE OF THE WORD, HOWEVER, IS NOT MEANT TO DESCRIBE A PHYSICAL STRUCTURE BUT A SPIRITUAL ONE.

A LESSER-KNOWN HYMN FROM THE LATER 1960'S INTERPRETS OUR INDIVIDUAL LIVES AS CHRISTIANS IN A SIMILAR WAY.

SOME OF THE LYRICS SAY: "THERE'S A CHURCH WITHIN US, O LORD...THERE'S SOME BUILDING TO BE DONE, O LORD. NOT WITH STEEL, NOT WITH STONE.

BUT WITH LIVES WHICH ARE YOUR OWN, THERE'S A CHURCH TO BE BUILT, O LORD...."

THIS IS SOMETHING NOT ONLY THE EARLY CHRISTIANS NEEDED TO HEAR, BUT WE TODAY ALSO WOULD DO WELL TO REMEMBER.

THIS LETTER TO THE CHURCH EMPHASIZES THE REALITY THAT THEY ALL BELONG TO GOD, NOT TO PAUL, NOT TO APOLLOS, NOT EVEN TO THEMSELVES.

PAUL INSISTS THAT IT WAS BY GOD'S GRACE AND WILL, HE WAS GIVEN THE TASK TO ESTABLISH THE CHURCH IN CORINTH.

HOWEVER, JUST LIKE WITH THE EXAMPLE OF A GARDEN, THE BUILDING OF A CHURCH TAKES TEAM WORK.

PAUL DID THE INITIAL DIGGING, BUT SOMEONE ELSE WAS GIVEN THE TASK TO BUILD UPON THE FOUNDATION HE LAID.

THE IMPLICATION WAS THAT OTHERS WILL FOLLOW, AND EACH IN HIS OR HER OWN WAY WILL ADD TO THE BUILDING OF THE CONGREGATION.

THE APOSTLE THEN MOVES TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER, BY NAMING THE FOUNDATION UPON WHICH ALL OF THEM BUILD. THAT FOUNDATION IS JESUS CHRIST.

HERE PAUL DIRECTS HIS READERS OF EVERY TIME AND PLACE TO FOCUS ON THE ONE THEY SHOULD BE FOLLOWING, AND THE ONE UPON WHOM THEIR FAITH IS BUILT.

PAUL WROTE ABOUT THIS SAME THING TO ANOTHER CHURCH IN EPHESIANS 5:23. HE SAID: "CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH, HIS BODY, AND IS HIMSELF ITS SAVIOR."

HIS POINT IS THAT HE, APOLLOS, AND EVERY OTHER HUMAN APOSTLE, TEACHER, PREACHER, EVANGELIST, AND OTHER KINDS OF LEADERS ARE EXPENDABLE.

NONE OF THEM, NO ONE AMONG US, IS SO IMPORTANT THAT THE CHURCH CANNOT EXIST IF AND WHEN WE ARE GONE, AS LONG AS JESUS REMAINS THE FOUNDATION AND FOCUS.

LET'S PUT THIS BACK INTO FOOTBALL TERMS. MANY THINK THAT IT IS PRIMARILY THE QUARTERBACK THE TEAM MUST RELY ON IF THEY ARE TO WIN.

YES, THE QUARTERBACK IS IMPORTANT, HOWEVER EVEN IF THE TEAM NEVER SCORES WHILE THE QUARTERBACK IS ON THE FIELD, THE TEAM CAN STILL WIN THE GAME.

A TEAM WITH A POOR OFFENSE CAN GAIN VICTORY WITH A GOOD DEFENSE, IF A PLAYER IS ABLE TO INTERCEPT A PASS OR RECOVER A FUMBLE, AND SCORE A TOUCHDOWN.

SIMILARLY, EVERY CHURCH HAS RESOURCES GOD CAN AND WILL USE EVEN WHEN THE CHURCH IS WITHOUT A PASTOR.

IN FACT, CHURCH LEADERS WHO DO NOT HAVE CHRIST AS THEIR FOUNDATION CAN DO MUCH LESS GOOD, THAN A CHURCH WHO HAS SOME CONGREGATIONAL LEADERS, WHO LOOK TO, AND SERVE CHRIST.

IT IS JESUS CHRIST, WHO IS OUR TRUE AND GREAT FOUNDATION, ALONG WITH THE GUIDANCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT HE GIVES TO US, THAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING.

SOMEONE ELSE PUT IT THIS WAY: "JESUS IS SO FUNDAMENTAL TO THE CHURCH, THAT ANYTHING NOT BUILT ON HIM WILL FALL."

WE SHOULD ALSO REMEMBER THAT WHILE GOD CAN DO IT ALL BY HIMSELF, HE CHOOSES NOT TO DO SO.

JESUS CALLED DISCIPLES AND OTHER FOLLOWERS TO ASSIST HIM. THEY WORKED TOGETHER, TO ASSIST JESUS IN HIS MISSION.

SOME WORKED VISIBLY WITH HIM, OTHERS BEHIND THE SCENES PROVIDING FOOD AND SHELTER AND OTHER NECESSITIES, FOR THE SAVIOR AND HIS DISCIPLES.

THEN, AFTER JESUS ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN, GOD SENT THE HOLY SPIRIT TO GIVE BIRTH TO THE CHURCH, AND ESTABLISH THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS.

OUR SAVIOR CONTINUES TO CALL FOLLOWERS TO VARIOUS ROLES AND TASKS, BOTH IN THE CHURCH, AND OUT IN THE WORLD, MOST OFTEN IN OUR DAILY LIVES.

INDEED, EVERY DAY WE ARE CALLED TO BE OPEN TO THE SPIRIT'S LEADING, TO LISTEN TO AND OBEY CHRIST'S CALL.

TRULY, GOD WORKS THROUGH US TODAY, IN THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD, IN GREAT AND SMALL WAYS.

UNFORTUNATELY, EVEN WHEN WE ACCEPT THIS, WE DO NOT ALWAYS FIND IT EASY TO LET GOD WORK THROUGH US.

THERE ARE OCCASIONS WHEN WE RESIST BECAUSE WE DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT GOD IS DOING. OTHER TIMES, WE MAY NOT APPROVE OF THE DIRECTION GOD IS LEADING US.

IT MAY ALSO BE THAT WE BECOME DISTRACTED OR OVERWHELMED WITH DAILY LIFE AND RESPONSIBILITIES.

SOMETIMES WE MAY BECOME DISILLUSIONED WITH THE TASK SET BEFORE US, AND WE QUESTION THE USE OF OUR TIME AND ENERGY GOD ASKS US TO SPEND ON SOMETHING OR SOMEONE.

THIS IS WHY COMMUNITY WORSHIP, FELLOWSHIP, AND MISSION WORK, ALONG WITH PRAYER AND THE STUDY OF SCRIPTURE IS SO IMPORTANT.

TOGETHER, THOSE THINGS HELP US TO ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER, AND TEACH US TO WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHER BELIEVERS AND WITH THE LORD.

LET US PRAY:

COME, LORD JESUS, SPEAK TO US YOUR WORDS OF LIFE, OFFER US DIRECTION, AND HELP US TO HEAR AND OBEY YOUR VOICE.

WE GIVE THANKS BECAUSE YOU BLESS US WITH YOUR LOVE, SHOWER US WITH YOUR GRACE, AND HELP US GROW IN FAITH.

ALL GLORY AND HONOR AND PRAISE BE TO GOD; FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN

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