

Exegetical Notes – 1 Corinthians 3:10-23

Prepared by Charles H. Jensen for Cornerstone Fellowship
101 Kyllies Road, Coatesville, PA 19320
610-384-1375
charleshjensen@aol.com

Introduction: In 1 Corinthians 1:1-4:21 Paul is discussing the great problem that that church faces, division among themselves. In chapter 3:1-10, he explains that these divisions come from their failure to think spiritually. They are not mature in their faith and as a result they do not think with the mind of Christ. They do not know or act on the basis of God's word. In this passage of 1 Corinthians, Paul discusses the cost of immature thinking.

1 Corinthians 3:10-23

Verses 10-11

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.

- Paul's purpose in God's plan was to lay the foundation for a Christian's life. He was an evangelist whose job was to awaken faith in Jesus Christ among people who did not know Jesus as Savior. He was to reveal the foundation carefully. The foundation was/is Jesus Christ. No one can be saved except through Jesus Christ.
- Jesus is received by the grace of God through faith. Jesus is the foundation upon which a Christian's life is built. Paul's job was to show people who did not know Jesus how they could come to Jesus. This foundation for our walk with God was laid by God and is Jesus Christ. Paul's job in God's plan was to show people this great truth.

Verses 12-15

¹² If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. ¹⁴ If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a

reward. ¹⁵ *If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.*

- After the foundation has been revealed, another worker, perhaps Apollos or Peter (see 1:12, 3:5-9) builds on the solid foundation which is Jesus Christ. Building a Christian is a team effort. Each member of the building team must do what God has called him to do to build up the Church.
- But each member of the building team must take care to build carefully. Like the three little pigs in the children's story, the builder should use appropriate building materials because he will be judged by God by fire. Fire refines gold and silver. It does not damage or improve costly stones. However, it destroys wood, hay, and straw. So, each member of the team must be careful to build with the best materials. If the building survives the test, the builders are rewarded by God (see 1 Corinthians 9:25, 1 Thessalonians 2:19, 2 Timothy 4:8, James 1:12, 1 Peter 5:4). However, if the building does not survive, the builder loses his reward but not his salvation.
- The consequence for the building is troubling. The building did not survive the test of fire. It fell away because the builders failed to give it what it needed to survive and receive eternal life in Jesus Christ. Does that mean that the failure of the builders cost the building eternal life? Or was the building's foundation, Jesus Christ, sufficient to save it from complete destruction? We hope the latter is true. However, this is not Paul's point. He is trying to show how important it is for the builders to work together as a team in building a Christian and for each builder to do his/her job with the utmost care not for the sake of their reward but because of the results to the building and for the glory of God.

Verses 16-17

¹⁶ *Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?* ¹⁷ *If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.*

- In chapter 6:19 Paul says that each individual Christian's body is God's Temple. Scholars argue that here he uses the same image to speak of the Church as a whole. However, since the Church is the body of Christ, and that body has many members (12:12-31), the distinction is lost. The body of Christ individually and as a whole is to work together as a team.
- If it does not work together the body is affected negatively. Therefore, to divide the body of Christ is to destroy God's Temple. God will hold any

person who destroys the unity of the body of Christ, the Church, accountable.

Verses 18-23

¹⁸ Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become “fools” so that you may become wise. ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight. As it is written: “He catches the wise in their craftiness”; ²⁰ and again, “The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.” ²¹ So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, ²³ and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

- Paul admonishes the Corinthians to stop thinking like the world (see 1:18-31). He admonishes the Corinthians to think as does God.
- They should stop boasting over human beings (see 3:1-10). God gave them the leaders he gave them to build their faith, working together as a team to bring glory to God.
- Their boasting should be in Christ alone (see 1:18-2:16).

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