

All is Ours, We are Christ's and Christ is God's

1 Corinthians 3:16-23

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The title of this message is *All is Ours, We are Christ's and Christ is God's*. Paul has been building toward this thought from the start of 1 Corinthians. Remember the city of Corinth was sophisticated for its day. The Corinthians were lovers of philosophy and learning, and admirers of orators and speakers. As we have seen, unfortunately the Corinthian Christians brought this Corinthian mind set into the church. They were glorying in men and finding their identity as followers of their favored teacher or leader. This created a divisive spirit in the church. It was bad. It's why Paul wrote. They were one messed up church. This is why what he says in verses 16-17 is so critical for all of us to understand.

God Treasures and Dwells Within His Church (3:16-17)

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16)

We hear Paul's dismay and amazement that they just don't seem to get it. They don't realize who they are as the dwelling place of God's presence. In chapter 6 he is going to say that each Christian is a dwelling place or tabernacle of the Spirit, but that's not his point here. "You" is in the plural. They collectively as the Church are the dwelling place of God, His temple.

That word "temple" has rich Old Testament meaning all the way back to Moses standing before the burning bush. The ground he stood on was holy and God told him to take off his sandals in reverence (Exodus 3:5). Why? God's presence was there. Wherever God is, that's a holy and sacred place (Exodus 25:8). The *Ark of the Covenant* was holy and to touch it meant your instant death (Numbers 4:15). The *tabernacle* was holy because God's presence was there. The *temple* was filled with the *shekinah* glory of God. He was there.

And now God does not dwell in a building and His Spirit isn't in a location, God's very presence is within and among His people, the Church. You could say when God's people get together we should take our shoes off out of reverence. God is here and where God is, is holy.

Think of it. Right here among us and within the essence of our church fellowship is the Holy Spirit of God uniting us, stirring us, convicting us, encouraging us, speaking through His Word, animating spiritual life within us and among us. Wow! If only we had eyes to see what's really going on.

Paul had eyes. He knew how sacred the Church is. That's why he is incredulous that the Corinthians would treat the Church the way they were by treating each other the way they were. He essentially says, "Don't you realize who you are?" They didn't. Too often we don't either.

One of the desperate needs of the Church is to recapture this vision of who she is and who God intends her to be. *In most Protestant circles one tends to take the local parish altogether too lightly. Seldom does one sense that it is, or can be, experienced as a community that is so powerfully indwelt by the Spirit that it functions as a genuine*

alternative to the pagan world in which it is found. It is perhaps not too strong to suggest that the recapturing of this vision of its being, both in terms of its being powerfully indwelt by the Spirit and of its thereby serving as a genuine alternative to the world, is its single greatest need. (Gordon Fee, 1 Corinthians, p. 149.)

The other implication is in verse 17, *If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.* (1 Corinthians 3:17) This echoes what Jesus said, *"Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.* (Luke 17:1-2) The Church is sacred to God. Therefore, you mess with the Church and God will mess with you. Actually it says here that God will destroy them. That's a strong warning.

God is like a father who finds a prowler in his daughter's bedroom. Look out! You are messing with something very precious and a dad will be highly motivated to punish. That is how God feels about us. It's good to know, isn't it? This is why how we conduct ourselves toward the Church and its people is so important. Are our words building up? Are our actions strengthening? Is our presence life-giving to the congregation? Or are we treating a sacred thing as common and doing damage to God's Church with our words or laziness or attitudes? This is a sober warning.

God Turns Human Thinking Inside Out (3:18-21)

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." So let no one boast in men. (1 Corinthians 3:18-21)

Paul returns to his theme from chapter 1 and the whole matter of man's wisdom vs. God's wisdom. Man's wisdom has as its reference point the glory and centrality of man. God's wisdom begins with God. Man's wisdom has a veneer of wisdom, but it is empty and ultimately futile. God's wisdom will appear like foolishness to the natural man, but it is eternal and able to save because God's wisdom to us begins with the cross of Jesus Christ. The cross explains who we are (sinners), what we need (righteousness and salvation), where it comes from (not us but God), and tells what God is like (holy, righteous, loving, sacrificing, beautiful).

So Paul re-emphasizes that each of us have to do what is counter-intuitive to the pride of man. We must humble ourselves (*become a fool*, v. 18) under the gospel and surrender ourselves to Jesus as Savior and Lord. Then and only then will we *become wise* unto salvation.

To prove his point, Paul quotes Scripture. The first is from Job 5 and emphasizes that God outwits the schemes of men. The second quote is from Psalm 94. *"The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."* (Psalm 94:11, NIV)

The wise think they are wise and by human standards they are, but God knows man's wisdom leads to nothing. Think of all the wise men in all the civilizations of antiquity. Think of all the schemes and secret plans of all the people who have ever lived. Think of all the glory and accomplishments of all those who have gone before us. What have they all come to? As Ecclesiastes says, *it's all meaningless.* Death silences all of us and shows the futility of our apparent wisdom. In the end, God's wisdom always wins.

Scripture is filled with examples: Pharaoh matched wits with God and lost; Haman tries to destroy the Jews and hangs on gallows of his own making; the religious leaders plot to destroy Jesus but unwittingly make him Savior of all; even Satan himself schemes and plots against God yet all his schemes merely fulfill God's purposes. As Luther said, *the Devil is God's devil*. Satan is a frustrated devil.

Why is this important? Because there are people around who still think they can play games with God. This is the deception (verse 18). It might be you today. Your secrets are no secrets to Him. The mask you wear for others, God sees through it. The deals you try to make with Him, He holds all the cards. Our plans and schemes are futile against an all-wise and all-powerful God. Why not just surrender to Him in faith and trust that God's plans and purposes are better for us than anything our scheming could ever produce?

Bottom line - *don't boast in men* (verse 21). It's so easy to put our trust in someone; find some identity in them; put them on a pedestal of hope. We have seen a little of that this week, haven't we? That was some scene at the inauguration. In our world, that is the pinnacle of human power and accomplishment. Yet, what do we know about all the honor and glory lavished this week? It will end up like all the presidents and all the kings and all the Pharaohs and all the Emperors that have ever lived. In the end, everyone leaves the stage in weakness and in death. So let no one boast in men. Why?

For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's. (1 Corinthians 3:16-23)

All is ours, We are Christ's and Christ is God's

This is the crescendo of chapters 1-3. These Corinthian Christians had it all backwards. They were finding their identity in a man - Paul, Apollos, Cephas (or Peter). If you were going to belong to a man and choose identity with one, it'd be hard to beat Paul, Peter, or Apollos. They were truly great Christians and men of great faith.

But here's what the Corinthians got backwards. In reality, they didn't belong to Paul, Paul belonged to them. They didn't belong to Peter, Peter belonged to them. These men and all leaders and teachers in the Church are there for the sake of the Church. Do you see? That is still true today.

When the Church forgets who she is, things get turned upside down and it wreaks havoc in the Church. Count on it. Whenever you hear of a church splitting, somewhere along the way the church forgot who she is and people in the church forgot who belonged to whom. Have you ever heard this? *This is my church*. Beware, that's how it starts. "This church belongs to me." From that small deviation comes lots of pain. Why? We have it all backwards.

Paul wants to set their thinking aright. Let's make sure we understand who belongs to whom. Paul belonged to the Church. He was its servant. Peter belonged to the Church. He was a worker in the field (1 Corinthians 3:9). *For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future.* (1 Corinthians 3:21b-22)

How does the thought that "all things are yours" strike you? It's hard to believe because it feels far from our interpretation of our present experience. Once again this is because the church and Christians have forgotten who they are and what we have in Christ. Paul lists

five things that are presently our possession - The world, life, death, the present, and the future. How can this be? It doesn't feel like it to me. The world is against us. Life is fleeting. Death is imminent. The present is confusing and the future is uncertain.

The answer is the next phrase, *you are Christ's*. These things belong to us because we belong to Christ. This is how all things are ours. They are ours because we are Christ's and all things are His and He gives them to us. *But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things.* (Hebrews 1:2)

All is ours because we are Christ's and all is His. None of this do we deserve or have we earned. It is ours by God's generosity and Christ's sacrifice. The *world* is His. *Life* is His as He is the giver of eternal life. *Death* is His because He conquered it in His resurrection. *Today* is His. *Tomorrow* and all the tomorrows are His. He is the First and the Last and Lord of all. *All is ours because we are Christ's and all is His.*

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ... (Romans 8:16-17)

The final thought is that Christ is God's. Here we see the unity of the Trinity. Christ belongs to God. No member of the Trinity operates independent of the other. The Son is subordinate to the Father so that in the end, all is God's and nothing exists independent or apart from Him.

So do you see our place and why putting a human leader on a pedestal has the whole thing upside down? Christians belong to the Church and are so happy we do. The church is heir of all things because of its glorious relationship to Christ who is the actual possessor of it. But even Christ, as glorious as He is, belongs to God so that God is the starting point of all wisdom, being, and significance. When the Church forgets her place and becomes man-centered instead of God-centered, or when Christians and even leaders forget their place, the reality is turned upside down, which is what was happening at Corinth.

What do we need here at Bethel? We need to remember our place both in its glory and its humility. Our glory is who we are in Christ because He is Lord of all. In Him we have all things. But humility is also essential as we do not glory in what we possess but glory in whose possession we are.

We belong to Him (Romans 1:6; 1 Corinthians 15:23). Therefore, never boast in a man, but let all our boasting and praising and glorying be in the One who has given Himself to us in His cross, and in His victory, gives us everything else too. To Him be the glory.

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