**WE ARE GOD’S CO-WORKERS**

1 Corinthians 3:1-22

Key Verse 9

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

**Introduction**



 In this passage Paul talks about Corinthians’ spiritual immaturity and explains who God’s servants are and why they should exalt God only. He also mentions why we should be wise builder for us and others and church. Through this passage we can learn who we are before God and what God does for us and how we should work as God’s co-workers.

**1. Read verses 1-4. What condition were the Corinthians in spiritually? (1-2) Why did Paul consider them worldly? (3-4) What does it mean by “mere” human beings?**

**1-1.** **Read verses 1-4.**

 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?

**1-2.** **What condition were the Corinthians in spiritually? (1-2)**

  ***I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.***

· They didn’t live by the Spirit rather live by the desire of flesh.

· They were worldly seeking worldly things and pleasure.

· Although Corinthian believers were born again, they were not “spiritual” and were not fully guided by the Holy Spirit. In fact, they were “carnal” controlled by the fallen flesh. Though all believers have the Holy Spirit they still battle the fallen flesh.

· They were still spiritually infants. They were spiritually immature. They didn’t grow and get mature even though they had been in Jesus long time.

* Paul kept his teaching on the basics, even though they had an inflated view of their spirituality.
* They believed they were ready for the “deeper things,” but were not living any deeper in the basic things he already preached to them.

·  **Milk** - the more easily digestible truths of word of God or teaching that were given to new believers.

·  **Solid food** - The deeper level truth of word of God. The difference from milk is not in kind of truth, but degree of depth. Spiritual immaturity makes one unable to receive the richest truths.

· The solid food refers to the words of God and teaching that requires maturity, deep understanding, deeper level faith and obedience. The solid food helps believers to grow and get mature to be spiritual adults.

· A man who eats milk only cannot grow but remains an infant all the time. We should get spiritually mature to receive deep word of God.

**1-3.** **Why did Paul consider them worldly? (3-4)**

  ***You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, ..Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings?***

· Worldly – They behaved like people in the world who act according to their sinful nature.

· They were jealousy and quarreling among them. People in the world jealousy to each other seeking things of this world and fight for their interest.

· Living by flesh produced the attitude of jealousy, the severe form of selfishness, which produces quarreling and the subsequent divisions

· The believers are supposed to be godly and spiritual as the ones who are saved from the worldliness to live godly life following Jesus’ image.

**1-4.** **What does it mean by “mere” human beings?**

***Are you not acting like mere humans?***

· Mere human being – corrupted human being who acts according to sinful and fallen human nature. Mere human lives are not being controlled by Spirit but by flesh.

· We should live as new human being who is new creature in Jesus and live by Spirit.

· When we live by the Spirit, there cannot be jealous or quarreling for self-interest.

**2. Read verses 5-9. What are the roles of God’s servants in his salvation work? (5-7) Why should we render glory to God only? (6-7) How will God’s servants be rewarded? (8) Who are we when we work for God? (9)**

**2-1. Read verses 5-9.**

 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.

**2-2. What are the roles of God’s servants in his salvation work? (5-7)**

 ***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, ..So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.***

· They are just servants whom God used to help them to believe. They are just God’s instruments. They are doing the task that God assigned them. They will get credit from God for their work.

· Paul planted the seed- He preached the word of God.

· Apollos watered it- He worked for the believers to grow continually after receiving word of God from Paul.

· Both tasks are important as same level for one person’s salvation and spiritual growth.

**2-3. Why should we render glory to God only? (6-7)**

 ***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.***

· God is the one who makes believers grow. If God doesn’t work for them to grow, servants’ work cannot produce anything.

· It is the God alone who work for a man to believe and grow spiritually.

· God works through Holy Spirit for those who receive word of God and let them believe and grow.

· God is the only one who should be exalted. Comparing to the God’s work, God’s servants’ work is minor even though the work is necessary.

· Even though we should study bible diligently but we should ask God’s work through prayer because only God can let us grow through the word.

· We should also pray for God’s work for our bible students and children, because God is the only one who make things grow. If God’s doesn’t work all our labor ends up being nothing.

· Even apostles are nothing of themselves, can do nothing with efficacy and success if God doesn’t work through their service. (Note, The best qualified and most faithful ministers have a just sense of their own insufficiency, and are very desirous that God should have all the glory of their success.)

. Some people are frustrated because they want to water when God has called them to plant, or they want to plant when God has called them to water. Others are frustrated because they want to make the increase happen, when only God can do that. Real fruitfulness in ministry happens when we are peacefully content with what God has called us to do.

**2-4. How will God’s servants be rewarded? (8)**

  ***The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor.***

· Servants will receive reward from God according to their own labor.

· God’s servants have their different gifts from one and the same Spirit, for the very same purposes; Planters and waterers are but fellow-labourers in the same work.

· All the faithful ministers of Christ are one in the great business and intention of their ministry. They may have differences of opinion in minor things but they had one common goal, which is to serve God’s will and glorify his name by promoting true Christianity in the world.

· Believers should let God reward them instead of exalting their names for themselves.Those that work hardest shall fare best. Those that are most faithful shall have the greatest reward; and glorious work it is in which all faithful ministers are employed.

· All the human instruments God uses to produce salvation life are equally considered and rewarded for their work. God never forgets those who serve God’s salvation work. All the work we do for his salvation work will be rewarded without missing even giving one cup of cold water to little ones.

· But still all the glory goes to God alone.

**2-5. Who are we when we work for God? (9)**

  ***We are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.***

· God’s servants are God’s co-workers.

· Paul, Apollos, Peter, and all ministers are equal workers in the field,

· God’s field, building – God is the major worker for his field and building, the believers even though his servants do some work.

· The believers are God’s field and building that the servants work for.

· As God’s servants we are engaged in his business. we are working together with God, in promoting the purposes of his glory, and the salvation of precious souls; and he who knows our work will take care they do not labour in vain.

· We work under him, and with him, and for him. It is all for God that we have been doing among you.

· God’s servants are assistants or partners who work together with God. It is the best honor for us. We were called to work for His field and building. Ministering over God’s sheep is hard job that requires a lot of work and sacrifice but this is the most glorious and honorable work that we ever can do.

· We should take care of God’s field and building with trembling heart.

**3. Read verses 10-15. How did Paul lay a foundation? (10a, 11) Why should we build with care on this foundation? (10b, 12, 13) What will happen according to the quality of each person’s work? (14-15)**

**3-1. Read verses 10-15**.

 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. 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.

**3-2. How did Paul lay a foundation? (10a, 11)**

 ***By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder.. any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ***

· He begins with a declaration of grace. He knew that his status as a worker in God’s field, or on God’s building, was based on *God’s undeserved favor*, not on his own deserving or merit.

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. When Paul founded the church in Corinth (Acts 18), he set the only foundation that can be laid – the person and work of Jesus Christ. Yet he knew that others would come after him and build on the foundation he set.

. In this way, Paul was used by God to establish the groundwork for others who could build the churches up from the foundation he set.

· He laid a foundation as a wise builder so that the building on it may not be destroyed but strong**.**

Matthews 7:25 reads,

 “The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.”

· The only and true foundation is Jesus Christ not anything else. Paul did not design the foundation; he only laid it down by preaching Christ.

· We should build on our spiritual building on Jesus only and help others to build their own on Jesus.

**3-3. Why should we build with care on this foundation? (10b, 12, 13)**



  ***If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 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.***

· Anyone builds- This is, first of all, in reference to the evangelist (v. 9), and then to all believers who are called to build the church through faithful ministry.

· Gold, silver, precious stones- His quality materials represent dedicated, spiritual service to build the church. These people are those who receive the pure truths of the gospel, who hold nothing but the truth as it is in Jesus, and preach nothing else. This is building well upon a good foundation, making all of apiece. They receive and teach pure doctrine without any corrupt mixtures, without adding or diminishing.

· Wood, hay, straw- Inferior materials implying shallow activity with no eternal value. They depart from the mind of Christ in many particulars, substitute their own fantasies and inventions in the room of his doctrines and institutions.

· Our work will be shown for what it is on the Day. The fire will test the quality of our work.

· The day- Refers to the time of the Judgment. The fire of God’s discerning judgment indicates that the wood, hay, and straw are “worthless” things that don’t stand the test of judgment fire

· Servants of Christ should take great care that they do not build their own teachings on the foundation of Christ. What they preach should be the plain doctrine of their Master, or what is perfectly agreeable with it.

**3-4. What will happen according to the quality of each person’s work? (14-15)**

 ***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***

· If what we built is survived we will receive a reward from God. Faithful servants of Christ will meet with a full and ample reward in a future life. Those who spread true and pure religion in all the branches of it, and whose work will abide in the great day, shall receive a reward!

· All that which has been accomplished in His power and for His glory will survive.

· Those who build with wood, hay and straw will be discovered, disowned, and rejected, in that day – shall be first manifested to be corrupt, and then disapproved of God and rejected.

· The great day will pluck off all disguises, and make things appear as they are: He whose work shall be burnt will suffer loss.

· If it is burn up, we will suffer loss but yet will be saved but with shame.

· No matter how much is worthless, no believer will forfeit salvation.

· Those who hold the foundation of Christianity, though they build hay, wood, and stubble, upon it, may be saved. They shall be snatched out of that flame which will consume his work. God will have no mercy on their works, though he may pluck them as brands out of the burning.

**4. Read 16-23. Why are we God’s temple? (16) Why is it so important to keep God’s temple holy together? (17) Why should we not boast about human leaders in the church? (18-21a) What does it mean by “all things are yours”? (21b-23)**

**4-1. Read 16-23. Why are we God’s temple? (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.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”[a]; 20 and again, “The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.”[b] 21 So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas[c] 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

**4-2. Why is it so important to keep God’s temple holy together? (17)**

 ***you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for God’s temple is sacred, and you together are that temple***

· Each of us is God’s temple where God’s Spirit dwells. Every Christian is a living temple of the living God.

· Also we are God’s temple together as one body, as a church.

· The temple was devoted and consecrated to God, and set apart from every common to a holy use. So all Christians are separated from common uses, and set apart for God and his service.

· If we are the temples of God, we must do nothing that shall alienate ourselves from him, or corrupt and pollute ourselves, and thereby unfit ourselves for his use.

· If anyone destroys God’s temple through division or any sin, God will destroy the person.

· This is a severe warning to any who would try to destroy the building of the church on the foundation of Christ.

**4-3. Why should we not boast about human leaders in the church? (18-21a)**

 ***For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight. As it is written: “He catches the wise in their craftiness”; .. “The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.” So then, no more boasting about human leaders!***

· The wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight.

· People could boast about human leaders because of their wisdom but God sees it as foolishness.

· We are in great danger of deceiving ourselves when we have too high an opinion of human wisdom and arts.

· To have a high opinion of our wisdom is but to flatter ourselves, and self-flattery is the very next step to self-deceit. The way to true wisdom is to sink our opinion of our own to a due level, and be willing to be taught of God. He must become a fool who would be truly and thoroughly wise.

· Someone who has a low opinion of his own knowledge and powers will submit to better knowledge but the proud man, conceited of his own wisdom and understanding, will undertake to correct even divine wisdom itself, and prefer his own shallow reasonings to the revelations of infallible truth and wisdom.

· Human wisdom which cannot save, also cannot either build a church or prevent its growth.

· God has a perfect knowledge of the thoughts of men, the deepest thoughts of the wisest men, their most secret counsels and purposes: nothing is hidden from him, but all things are naked and bare before him,

· We should not boast about human leaders any more. They are just God’s servants whom God gave us for help.

· Paul, Apollos, and all others receive no credit for the building of the church.

**4-4. What does it mean by “all things are yours”? (21b-23)**

 ***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***

· All things are yours – All things, God’s servants, the world, life or death, presents or future, are given to us for our benefits. All believers share equally in God’s most important and valuable provisions and glories; human boasting, therefore, is ludicrous as well as sinful.

· All things are the God-given and God-made possession of Christians

· God’s servants are not to be set up in competition with one another. All faithful ministers are serving one Lord and pursuing one purpose. They were appointed of Christ, for the common benefit of the church:

· "Paul, and Apollos, and Cephas, are all yours. One is not to be set up against another, but all are to be valued and used for your own spiritual benefit."

· "Life is yours, that we may have season and opportunity to prepare for the life of heaven;

· and death is yours, that we may go to the possession of it.

· Things present are yours, for your support on the road; things to come are yours, to enrich and regale us for ever until we enter the kingdom of God.

· All is ours, time and eternity, earth and heaven, life and death.

· But it must be remembered, at the same time, that we are Christ's, the subjects of his kingdom, his property. He is Lord over us, and we must own his dominion, and cheerfully submit to his command and yield ourselves to his pleasure.

· We are of Christ – We belong to Christ. Only Christ should be honored and glorified.

· Christ is of God – Christ belongs to God and Jesus gives everything to God. He is anointed of God, and commissioned by him, to bear the role of a Mediator, and to act for the purposes of his glory.

**Conclusion**

 We should not live according to the desire of flesh but be mature by living by the Spirit. It is the God alone who let us grow to be mature. We should exalt Him alone and ask His help and work for our spiritual growth. We are God’s coworkers who are called to work together with God for his salvation work. This is the great blessing and honor for us. We should be careful about how to build our spiritual life and others and church knowing that all our works will be shown and we will receive reward accordingly. We should take care of ourselves and church recognizing us as God’s holy temple avoiding any work of destruction.

**One word: We are God’s coworkers!**