**God Makes It Grow (It is only God in whom we should boast.)** January 24, 2021

1 Corinthians 3:1-23 Key Verse 3:7, “So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.”

There is a saying, “Building up takes time and is hard but tearing down is quick and easy.” This statement is very proper warning to the seriousness of division and as a result tearing down any precious relationship; especially God’s precious community. In the previous two chapters of the book of 1 Corinthians, we have studied how Paul deals with Corinthian believers’ problem of division caused by boasting about human wisdom and leaders. Paul’s lessons to solve the problem continue in today’s passage; chapter 3 and it goes up to next chapter, chapter 4 which is the climax of Paul’s lesson with his profoundly broken heart as their spiritual father. In today’s passage, as another solution to solve the problem of division, Paul teaches Corinthian believers to have the right view of God’s ministers and of themselves. He also urges them to build their lives using eternally sustainable materials on the foundation of Christ. In addition, Paul warns anyone who destroys God’s temple by division will be destroyed by Christ. Most importantly, as today’s key verse says, Paul emphasizes, “Neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. (7)” This means that in our Christian life and growth, it is only God in whom we should boast. And there is an incredibly amazing reality for all believers. When you believe in Jesus, you have God in your life. Then remember that all things which belong to God are yours and then you are God’s (21-23). This means that you don’t need to envy anyone or quarrel with anyone or boast about anyone or yourself because all things which belong to God are yours and you are his. I pray that God may open our spiritual eyes to see this awesome reality in God and we may always seek and boast in him alone. Amen!

1. **We are God’s co-workers in God’s service with one purpose (1-9)**

Let’s look at 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. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? 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?” Here, jealousy and quarreling among the Corinthian church believers were undeniable barometers that the Corinthian believers were still worldly rather than spiritual. 1John 2:15-17 teaches Christians not to love the world or anything in the world, which are defined as three things: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boasting (pride) of life. Despite their good beginnings in Christ, sadly the Corinthian believers were still dwelling in this love of the world; the boasting of human life. When they first joined the church by believing in Jesus, we are sure that they definitely gladly left the world. But after a while, the world was still in them. They couldn’t leave it completely. They were like the Israelites who, after having escaped from the slavery in Egypt, still had a slave mentality (Ex 14:12; 16:2). The Corinthians were believers in Christ but they were acting like unbelievers. Paul says they were still spiritually immature, like spiritual infants who can eat only milk not solid food. According to Hebrews 5:12-14, here milk means spiritually basic elementary truths of God’s word which are very general and easy one to digest, while solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained (disciplined) themselves to distinguish good from evil; mainly the detail teachings about righteousness. A growing Christian is the one who learns self-denial, taking up his cross, following Jesus, and obeying his commands no matter what. A growing Christian encourages and builds up others rather than criticizing and tearing them down. In a word, a mature Christian is not self-centered but God-centered.

Let’s look at 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. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.” Here, Paul teaches them three things about spiritual economics to correct their worldly way of thinking.

First, God is the one who makes us grow. In verses 5-8, the most important word is God. God had used Paul and Apollos as gospel servants through whom the Corinthians came to believe in Christ. Paul first planted the gospel seed in Corinth as the pioneer and founder. Then Apollos came and watered the gospel seed among them. And God is the one who made it grow. God is the one who works by his word and Holy Spirit to draw people to Jesus, lead them to salvation and enable them to grow. Second, working together is important. Paul and Apollos were different in character and style, but they were not competitors. Each did his assigned task given by God with one and the same purpose (8a). Paul planted, Apollos watered and God blessed their labor. Like in any team sport, the purpose is to win, not to lose. In order to win, having team spirit is crucial. Christian life is like a team sport. God’s work is never a one man show. Paul and Apollos were in the same team, but the Corinthians were taking sides and competing. How can people who are different from each other work together? They can do so when they have the same purpose and spirit. Third, each will be rewarded (8). Even though we are called to work as a team, it does not ignore our individual work. God rewards those who earnestly seek him (Heb 11:6) and will reward each person according to what he has done (2 Cor 5:10).

Paul’s main point is in verse 9. He says, “For we are God’s co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.” Here we learn two things about Christian’s right perspective. First, have a proper view of God’s servants. When we think over Corinthian believers’ problem of division, we come to know that fundamentally their problem was caused by a wrong view of God’s servants. Corinthian believers sided either with Paul or Apollos boasting about them based on their own preferences and ideas. They were only looking at the men, comparing them and limiting God. Perhaps this was due to the influence of Greek culture which emphasized schools of thought and specific teachers, invoking loyalty to one and animosity toward the others. They needed to see God who was working in both of them and respect both of them as God’s servants. God is God Almighty. He can do his work all by himself, but he chooses to work through his servants who obey him. Those who carry out their God-given tasks, God regards highly as his fellow workers. The Corinthian believers also needed to see Paul and Apollos as God’s co-workers. When they view them in such right view, they could see God working through both of them and grow spiritually mature. Second, have a proper view of ourselves. Paul says in verse 9b, “You are God’s field, God’s building.” A church is not an ordinary organization like any other human organization. It is a place where God is working. The members of a church are like God’s field or God’s building, where God is working in and through people’s lives. If each member has such a right view of church community, jealousy and quarrels have no ground to stand in the church and only respect and love for one another will grow building a beautiful and mature Christian community which pleases God.

1. **Build on Jesus, the true foundation (10-23)**

Paul shifts from a gardening analogy to a construction analogy, from a field metaphor to a building metaphor (10). The construction of a building begins with the foundation. To lay the foundation requires much time, effort and money. Generally speaking, laying the foundation takes longer time and requires harder work than building up on the top of the foundation. In Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus taught the importance of building a foundation for life on a rock by putting his words into practice. The house with its foundation on rock can withstand windstorm and floods. Then what is the trustworthy foundation which Paul laid? It is Jesus Christ (11). Jesus Christ is the true foundation for individuals and for the church (1 Peter 2:4-5). Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of God’s house and of God’s redemptive history (1Peter 2:6). Some people try to build their lives on mere human love, or career, or reputation, or money, or just a human family, or another person whom they admire. But sooner or later, they will realize that none of these are a lasting trustworthy foundation. The only trustworthy and eternal foundation is Christ himself.

In verses 12-15, Paul compares the building of a sound Christian life or ministry to the construction of a sturdy house. A building can be made of fragile, cheap, natural materials like wood, hay, or straw, or enduring, costly, transformed materials like gold, silver, or costly stones. What does it mean to build with cheap materials? Here notice that three cheap materials are all combustible. It means that they will be all burned up in the fire of God’s judgment for the believers. So they will be saved because they are still believers but their salvation will be like escaping through the flames. Then what are the combustible cheap materials in building our Christian life? They are easy-going, comfort zone-seeking, sacrifice-avoiding, and compromising life. Obviously, to these types of life, God can not reward. On the other hand, notice that costly materials such as gold, silver, or costly stones are all non-combustible which means that they can endure in the fire of God’s judgment for the believers. They are a life of investing their hearts, time, effort, money, and even their very life in building God’s kingdom. An expert Christian builder is the one who denies himself, takes up his cross daily and follow Jesus to the end. He struggles to obey Jesus ahead of his own worldly desire and ideas. He labors to please the Spirit of God, rather than his own sinful nature. (Gal 6:7-8) Those who build their lives in such endurable ways will be rewarded by God according to what they had done for him.

In verses 16-17, in addition to calling the Corinthian church God’s field and God’s building, Paul now calls them God’s temple; God’s holy dwelling place. According to 1 Corinthians 6:19, Christian’s individual body is God’s temple. And here God’s church community is also God’s temple because not only in individual level but also in community level, God is still dwelling in and among them. So, God takes any offence destroying God’s church very seriously. If anyone destroys God’s church by human division, God promises that he will also destroy that person.

In closing this chapter, Paul encourages them to become “fool” by turning away from human wisdom so that they may become wise. In verses 21-23, Paul concludes why we should no more boast about human leaders. It is because when we believe in Jesus, there is unbelievably amazing blessing and reality given to us by God. Paul says, “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 of Christ, and Christ is of God.” People have cravings for obtaining people’s approval or recognition or praise. These are all about seeking and boasting about human; human wisdom or human leaders. And we know that we can never get all these things no matter how smart we are and how much we make effort because we can never achieve perfection in our own wisdom or effort. So there is always fear, anxiety, hurt, being hurt, frustration, division, hatred, pride, and arrogance for those who seek human wisdom and recognition and eventually they can become a chronic P.P.D. (People-Pleasing-Disease) patient. But here is good news that in Christ all things are yours and you are his. I say again. In Christ all things which belong to him are yours and you are his. So, no longer you need to boast about human leaders or heroes or anyone or anything because In Christ you have everything.

Last year, I newly learned that when I have God in Christ, I actually have everything. In the parable of the lost son (Luke 15:29-32), when his first son complained to his father, the father answered him saying, “My son, you are always with me, and ***everything I have is yours****.”* This statement is so powerful to me opening my spiritual eyes and understanding about spiritual reality more widely and deeply. All I need is to just boast in him alone, depend on him alone, seek him alone, and love him most. Then all other things which belong to God are mine. This is what God planed for each Christian to enjoy.

So as a conclusion, let’s fix our eyes on God who grows us fully mature and makes us his holy children as we have the right view of God’s servants and ourselves and build our lives using eternally endurable materials on the foundation of Christ Jesus. Let’s remember that when we believe in Jesus, we have everything which belongs to God.

Big Idea: It is only God in whom we should boast