

**United in Christ: Overcoming the Challenges of Diversity**  
**Studies in 1 Corinthians**  
**Building God's temple with proper caution**

**Intro: In our lessons so far we've seen that the Corinthian church was divided because they were being influenced by values that were a part of their culture. Because they weighed the wisdom of their teachers by human standards (what they knew and how they spoke) they had resorted to comparing preachers and divisions resulted from their loyalty to those who had taught them. As we have seen so far, Paul has met their issues methodically and powerfully. He had to correct their whole mindset piece by piece.**

They needed to understand that God did not save them by human wisdom but by what human wisdom could have never conceived, by the message of the cross.

They needed to understand that God saved them in that way in order that He might eliminate the kind of human glory and boasting that they were practicing.

Consequently Paul points out that his preaching was in harmony with God's purposes. He determined to knowing nothing but Christ and to speak not with words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power.

However to say that men like Paul and Apollos did not speak with human wisdom did not mean that the message they preached was not wise. The Corinthians needed to understand that the message that they preached was God's wisdom revealed by the Holy Spirit.

Likewise they needed to understand that the messengers of the gospel were God's servants and they should not divide over them. Or to put it another way, they were plants in God's field; they were stones in God's temple.

**All of this then would lead Paul to give a practical word of instruction and warning to those who would seek to put stones into the temple of God or to those who would seek to tear it down:**

*According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Cor. 3:10-15)*

**Some consider this to be one of the most difficult texts of the NT; but I suggest that it is understandable if we keep before us the analogy of a temple. As we understand it, it packs a powerful message to all who would seek to put stones in the temple of God.**

### **Understanding the terms in Paul's analogy**

*Paul uses a picture that every Corinthian could have easily related to; for all over the city of Corinth were various temples that had been built in honor of the various Greco-Roman deities. Perhaps some of them they had actually seen being constructed. First the foundation would be laid and then stones would be added one by one until the edifice was completed as a dwelling place in honor of the deity to whom it was dedicated. Such a picture would be a practical way to instruct the Corinthians.*

The temple of God is the church at Corinth (cf. 3:16).

The foundation of the temple is Christ (and Him crucified). This was the message that Paul had preached among them (cf. 2:1-2).

The stones of various materials are the disciples who are built upon the foundation, those who are added to the temple or church.

The masons are those who would seek to teach or add "stones" to God's temple. They are the ones who "build" upon the foundation Paul had laid in Corinth, since he had established the church there.

The day of testing is the judgment.

### **Understanding the message of Paul's analogy**

*Those who teach the word must add "stones" in keeping with the nature of the temple.*

It is a temple that seeks to honor of God and not the builders. Thus, the stones that are added must be people who boast only in God and not in any man.

It is a temple built upon the message of Christ and His cross as the means of salvation, not the "knowledge and wisdom" of the teacher.

Thus, the stones that are added must be people whose faith is in Christ and Him crucified, not in the "human wisdom" of the teacher.

*Those "stones" that become a part of the temple, but have been added in disharmony with the nature of the temple, will be rejected at the judgment.*

Materials of gold, precious stones, etc. represent things which the fire of judgment will not destroy. They represent those who have been added to God's temple properly, based on acceptance of the wisdom of God and faith in the cross of Christ. These shall be approved by God. Materials of wood, hay, and stubble represent things which the fire of judgment will destroy. They represent those who have been added to God's temple based on the wisdom of man and faith in other things.

These will be rejected by God.

*The "mason" who adds properly to the temple of God will receive a reward for his work; but the "mason" who adds improperly to the temple of God will suffer loss since his "converts" will be rejected by God.*

Paul indicates that God will reward those who have labored properly to build His temple. This is a message that Jesus also taught:

*Already he who reaps is receiving wages, and is gathering fruit for life eternal; that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together.*

*(John 4:36)*

In contrast, those whose “converts” do not meet the test of God’s judgment will lose the reward for their efforts, but will not surrender their salvation if they are true disciples.

***Hence the message of this paragraph is an encouragement for those who teach to build with due regard for the purposes of the “owner” of the temple and to build with a caution that respects His standards.***

### **How Paul’s message about the temple workers applies to the Corinthian problem**

***As we have already seen, the Corinthians placed the emphasis upon men and their wisdom rather than upon God and His wisdom.***

***They needed to understand that no temple honors God that is made up of those who are added based on attraction to something besides God and His purposes.***

***They needed to understand that no temple honors God that wins people by human wisdom rather than by the foolishness of the message preached—Christ and Him crucified.***

### **How Paul’s message about the temple workers speaks to us today**

***What kind of disciples are we?***

What motivates people to become members a particular church? A lot of answers could be given.

Parents were members before us.

We know someone here and want to be near them.

We like the preacher.

I can be a member here and continue to practice things that are sinful without judgment.

I like the music.

I want the social services that the church provides (recreation, child care, etc.)

You get the idea.

It would good for each of us to ask ourselves, “What has motivated me to be here, as a “stone” in this “temple,” i.e. as a member of this church?” and there is really only one reason to be here:

Because we see the “wisdom” of the cross, because we believe in this sacrifice as our only hope, and because we want the things that God has prepared for those who love Him.

***We kind of disciples do we seek to make?***

We hear a lot today about “growing the church.” Unfortunately, some of the masonry work being done is pretty shoddy. People can be added for the wrong reasons, because they are drawn to the wrong things.

But what have we accomplished if we filled a thousand buildings with a membership made of materials that will not meet the test of God’s judgment? It would be like building a thousand temples out of hay bales! The fire of judgment will destroy them all!

I've seen a lot of people build houses; and almost all of them are very meticulous in demanding that the workmanship on their new house meets the highest standards; but what about the church of the Lord? This is not an excuse to make no effort, or to accept the status quo; but to heed Paul's warning to building upon the foundation carefully.

**Conclusion: Since the temple is God's, and He will at last determine what stones remain, let us make sure that we honor His standards of workmanship!**