

Corinthians: Christ the Foundation

by Stephen Kaung

The sermon emphasizes the importance of Christ as the foundation of the Christian faith and the need for the church to be built up by God's ministry and ministers, rather than being divided by party spirits.

Duration: 1:19:32

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 12:5, 1 Corinthians 1:10, 1 Corinthians 3:1, 1 Corinthians 3:16, Ephesians 4:4-6, 1 John 1:7

Topics: "Church Unity", "Christian Living"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the destructive nature of divisions among God's people in the church. He highlights how the Corinthians believers were more interested in various topics like marriage, spiritual gifts, and idols, rather than addressing the issue of divisions. The speaker points out that Paul extensively addresses this problem in the first four chapters of Corinthians, emphasizing the seriousness and importance of unity among believers. He also reminds the audience that everything in life, including adversity and prosperity, is meant for the building of the church and should be seen as part of God's work.

Transcript

This is Monday evening, August the 6th, 1973. In Richmond, Virginia, ministry is being given through Brother Stephen Kong. May we look to the Lord in prayer.

Lord, we do come to thy presence together this evening not because we are worthy, not because we are able to come, but because thou hast shed thy blood for us. Oh, how we praise and thank thee for the precious blood. How we praise and thank thee for the new and living way that thou hast opened for us.

How we praise and thank thee that we can trust thee as our great High Priest. And Lord, it is only by thyself that we are here and that we come, we come to thee, Lord. We pray, Lord, that thou will open our eyes, open our ears, open our hearts to thyself, that we may hear thy voice, we may see thy glory, and we may be touched by thyself.

Oh, Lord, we will see nothing, no one, but Jesus Christ, our Lord. Lord, keep us very open, very humble before thee. We pray that by thy light we may see light, that we may walk in the light as thou art in the light, that we may have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, our Lord, cleanses us from all our sins.

We commit this time into thy hands and trust thy Holy Spirit to quicken thy word to us. In the name of our Lord Jesus, amen. We have been fellowshiping for the last two times on 1 Corinthians.

Last night we were on 1 Corinthians chapter 1. Is the Christ divided? Paul raised that question, not only to the Corinthian believers, but this question is raised by the Spirit of God to us tonight. Is Christ divided? If Christ is not divided, then the Church is not divided. As Paul said, as the body is one, but has many members.

Though the members of many, yet the body is one, so also is the Christ. Christ is indivisible. Therefore, the Church, which is the Church, His body, in union with the head, is undivided.

This morning we were on 1 Corinthians chapter 2. Paul said, I am determined to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. That's the foundation. But on that foundation, Paul says, but we speak wisdom among the perfect.

To the grown-up in Christ, there is the wisdom of God. The preaching of the cross of Jesus Christ is the foolishness of God. Now, if the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of man, then how much more wiser will be the wisdom of God? Now, thank God we know the foolishness of God.

We are saved by that foolishness. But dear brothers and sisters, do we know the wisdom of God? We know Christ crucified, but do we know why was He crucified? The cross is not the end. The cross is the means to the end.

Now, what is the end? The end is Christ glorified in and among His people. Now, tonight we would like to go on to 1 Corinthians chapter 3. Again, we will read the whole chapter. I hope, brothers and sisters, as we are reading the Word of God, that we will pay very close attention to what the Word says.

And just look to the Lord that as His Word is read, somehow, somewhere in the Word, He may speak to each one of us. You know, very often we may read the same Word in the same chapter, but I doubt that we will get the whole chapter. I believe that probably when we read a chapter, the Spirit of God may speak to one sentence to speak to the other another word.

So I do hope that we will look to the Lord when His Word is read, that the Spirit of God is able to speak to each according to our need and according to His need in us. 1 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 1. And I, brethren, have not been able to speak to you as to spiritual, but as to fleshly, as to babes in Christ. I have given you milk to drink, not meat, for ye have not been able, nor indeed are ye yet able, for ye are yet carnal.

For where is there all among you emulation and strife? Are ye not carnal, and walk according to man? For when one says, I am of Paul, and another I of Apollos, are ye not man? Who then is Apollos, and who Paul, ministering servants, through whom ye have believed, and as the Lord hath given to each? I have planted, Apollos watered, but God hath given the increase. So that neither the planter is anything, nor the waterer, but God, the giver of the increase. For the planter and the waterer are one, but each shall receive his own reward, according to his own labor.

For we are God's fellow-workmen, ye are God's husbandry, God's building. According to the grace of God which has been given to me, as a wise architect, I have laid the foundation, but another builds upon it. But let each see how he builds upon it, for other foundations can no man lay, besides that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Now if anyone build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, straw, the work of each shall be made manifest. For the day shall declare it, because it is revealed in fire, and the fire shall try the work of each, what it is. If the work of anyone which he has built upon the foundation shall abide, he shall receive a reward.

If the work of anyone shall be consumed, he shall suffer loss, but he shall be saved, for so as through the fire. Do ye not know that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone corrupt the temple of God, him shall God destroy, for the temple of God is holy, and such are ye. Let no one deceive himself.

If anyone thinks himself to be wise among you in this world, let him become foolish, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, for it is written, He who takes the wise in their practice. And again, the Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are vain, so that no one boasts in them.

For all things are yours. For all things are yours. Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things coming, all are yours.

Isn't that tremendous? All are yours. And ye are Christ. And Christ is God.

You know, the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians deal with one subject matter. The first four chapters deal with only one thing, and that is divisions in the Church. The parties in the Church.

The party spirit that existed in the Church, which was in Corinth. As we mentioned in the beginning, Paul didn't write this letter starting with answering their questions. They wrote to Paul and asked several questions, which to them were very important.

But when Paul answered their letter, he did not start with answering their questions. He reserved that until the seventh chapter. But when he wrote a reply to the Church in Corinth, he began with what he considered as the most serious problem in the midst of these Corinthian believers.

They did not realize the seriousness of it. Probably they overlooked the whole thing. Probably they were taking for granted, as if it was something you had to have and had to live with.

But not with Paul. When Paul heard that there were divisions in their midst, that is to say, some say, I am of Paul. Some said, I'm of Apollos.

Some say, I'm of Cephas. And some would come out and say, I'm of Christ, in an exclusive way. Paul said, is the Christ divided? Dear brothers and sisters, in the sight of God, and with those who know God's heart and His eternal purpose, there is no problem more serious among God's people than this problem of division.

Today we take division for granted. We have to live with this evil. It is the evil of our days.

And what can you do with it? We are too intelligent. We are too sophisticated. We are too clever.

Just like the Corinthian believers. But God forbid that we should take divisions, party spirits, sectarian spirits, among God's people for granted. Because the division of God's people strikes at the very heart of God's purpose.

It violates the very meaning and nature of our calling. It destroys the testimony of the Church. Therefore you'll find Paul used the first four chapters.

Of course, in the original, it is not divided into chapters. But at least you'll find Paul used four chapters. That is, Paul wrote extensively on this most serious and basic thing that existed among the people at Corinth.

And sad to say, it still exists. And very often our attitude towards that is just like the attitude of the Corinthian believers. We are more interested in marriage, virgin, remarriage, things offered to idols, spiritual gifts, and so forth.

And we seem to allow divisions among God's people to exist as if it is nothing. Dear brothers and sisters, divisions among God's people destroys the very testimony of the Church. Paul deals with this matter from different angles.

And when he came to the third chapter of 1 Corinthians, remember, he was still dealing with the same problem. He hadn't finished that yet. So I do hope when we are fellowshiping tonight on the third chapter, that we will bear in our mind that Paul was still dealing with this problem of divisions among God's people.

He said, I, brethren, have not been able to speak to you as to spiritual, but as to fleshly, as to faith in Christ. When Paul was in Corinth for 18 months, he was in their midst. He preached nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

He did not treat these Corinthian believers as grown-ups. And they were not, because they were newly saved. They were bathed in Christ.

He did not treat them as spiritual, as if you can be spiritual in a day. Oh, brothers and sisters, if anyone will come to you and say, I can make you spiritual instantaneously, I think you will listen. If anyone will give you a formula, if anyone will tell you, if you do certain things, you will become spiritual instantaneously.

Who does not want it? He will have lots of hours. But Paul did not help our ego very much. When Paul was among the believers in Corinth for 18 months, he treated them as bathed in Christ.

Not in any sense looked down upon them, no. But Paul knew what they were. So he preached nothing among them but Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

They needed to know the cross. They needed to know Christ crucified. Oh, Christ crucified.

You may preach on that for 18 months, day in and day out, like Paul did, and never get tired of it. He said, when I was with you, I was not able to speak to you as spiritual, but as professionally. Now, you know, in the original, there is a little bit variation in Greek concerning that word fleshly in the first verse and in the third verse.

In the first verse, it said, and I, brethren, have not been able to speak to you as to spiritual, but as to fleshly, as to bathed in Christ. Then in the third verse, for ye are yet carnal. Now, in our English version, you use different words.

It is very refined. But sometimes it is so refined that you miss the meaning of it, or you miss the emphasis of it, right? In the original, it is the same word with a little variation. Fleshly and carnal are the same word, and yet not exactly the same.

In verse 1, it is sakinos, fleshly. That is to say, you are made with the material of the flesh. The emphasis is on the material, the substance that composes a thing.

You are fleshly. You are made up of flesh. And, of course, they were.

Why? Because even though they were saved, they had a new life in them, yet so far as they were concerned, they were still fleshly. Very much of the flesh. The new life in them was very young.

The new life in them had not taken over the whole being. Even though they were saved, yet they were still fleshly. They still acted like bathed in Christ.

That is to say, lots of the things that were manifested were still of the flesh, made up of that material. Now, isn't that true with us? When we were first saved? That's the material. Made up of.

I don't know. Maybe we use a different word in English. I don't know if there is such a word.

That may help us to see a little bit of distinction. I would rather translate that word but to the fleshy. Take away the L and just let the Y remain there.

Not speaking to the spiritual, but to the fleshy. You are still fleshy. Lots of flesh.

Even though you are saved, but there is lots of flesh there. All very fleshy. Just bathed in Christ.

Anything wrong with that? Nothing wrong with that. Nothing wrong with that. You do not expect a bathing in Christ to be spiritual.

You don't expect that, do you? You do not expect one who newly believed the Lord to be fully matured. You don't expect that. One who is newly saved, he is bathed in Christ.

There is new life in him and yet you find what he manifests is his flesh. Very innocent though. You look at a baby.

Is a baby fleshy? Very fleshy. Oh, if you have company, oh, how that baby will act. Very fleshy.

But it's quite amusing though. It's quite interesting. Do you condemn a baby? No.

That's what he is. He is not conscious of it. When he is trying to attract attention, he is trying to do something which he thinks is of tremendous achievement.

Do you laugh at him? Not at all. You clap your hands. Oh, great.

Oh, great. Isn't that true? Now, my God's people, this is the same thing. When one newly believes in the Lord and he begins to act in a way, you know, and you know he attracts people to himself, you don't condemn him.

You say, praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Right? Fleshy.

Very fleshy. And to a baby, you give a baby milk. Now, what is milk? Milk is pre-digested food.

You digest it for him, and then you give it to him. Why? Because he cannot digest it himself. Oh, brothers and sisters, to the babes in Christ, all you can give is milk.

It is Christ crucified. The foundation truth of Christ. That's all he can take.

And nothing wrong with that. Dear brothers and sisters, if someone is newly saved and he is a little bit fleshly, don't condemn him. He's just innocent.

But the thing is, Paul said, for ye have not yet been able, nor indeed are ye yet able, for ye are fleshly. Now, that is something, dawg. After a few years, they ought to grow out of their babyhood.

They ought to be able to consume solid food through the exercise of their abilities. But, Paul said, when I was with you, I treated you as babes, and that was all right. That was the right thing to do.

I know knew nothing among you but Jesus Christ and him crucified. You needed a foundation truth, and that was perfectly normal and right. But now a few years have passed, and you are still not able to take solid food.

You are fleshly. So far as time is concerned, you should not be babes anymore. You should have grown up a little bit.

You should have grown out of your fleshiness. You should not try to attract people to yourself. You should not try to display yourself.

You should know Christ in a deeper way. You should be able to enter into the purpose of God. To be God-centered, Christ-centered, instead of self-centered.

You are no longer innocent. That's ignorant. Oh, brothers and sisters, when Paul said you are fleshly, his heart was at peace.

But when he said you are fleshly, his heart was disturbed. We who have believed in the Lord Jesus, there should be a period of babyhood. That's normal.

If a baby is born and he acts like an old man, that's abnormal. That's ugly. Act like spiritual.

That's ugly. Be natural. Don't be too spiritual.

But after a few years, and if you still act so babyish, it grieves the heart of the parents. That's fleshly. Now, fleshly is psychical.

It may mean the material or the physical substance that makes up the thing. But it also may mean morally. Fleshly.

In other words, it is more than the makeup. It remains in a moral deficiency. In a state of moral deficiency.

You ought to be controlled by the Holy Spirit, and you are still under the rule of the flesh. You still walk according to the flesh and not according to the Spirit. That is fleshly.

That is carnal. Why did Paul say you are still fleshly? Why? By what symptom was Paul able to distinguish, to discern that they were still fleshly and they were not spiritual? There is an unmistakable sign here. And the unmistakable sign here is for whereas there are among you emulation and strife, are ye not carnal and walk according to man? Brothers and sisters, one sure sign of carnality, one sure sign of being fleshly, is division, strife, emulation, walk according to man.

You ought to be able to walk according to God, but you are still walking according to man. You act like any man will act, even though you are the Lord. That is fleshly.

That is carnal. What was this strife and emulation? What was this walking according to man? For when one says, I am of Paul, and another, I of Apollo, are ye not man? Dear brothers and sisters, after we have known the Lord for years, and we are still saying, I am of Paul, I am of Apollo, remember, this is the sure sign of carnality. You say you are spiritual, but you are still saying, I am of Paul, I am of Apollo.

You are carnally. What is it? Brothers and sisters, if anybody should come to you and say, I am of you, I am all for you, are you happy about it? Probably you would like more people to come to you in that way, but not with Paul. When some of the Corinthian believers said, I am of Paul, I stand for Paul, I exhort Paul, I am a follower of Paul, I know only Paul, all the Christ that Paul knows, brothers and sisters, Paul's heart was broken.

He would not lend himself to party and party spirits. Why? This evening I would like to share with you on one thing. I believe it is of great significance.

Let me put it in a question, into a question first. And I hope you will answer this question before the Lord. And the question is, is the church a platform for a servant of God, or the works of the servant of God for the building of the church? Now let me repeat it.

It may be a little bit complicated. The relationship between God's minister, or ministry, and God's church. Put it this way, to simplify it.

What is the relationship between ministry and church? What is the relationship between ministers and the church? Is the church a platform for the ministers? In other words, is the church to support a ministry? Or does a ministry support the church? I wonder if you consider this as a very important question. It is very, very important. Because unless we can see the difference here, and unless we choose the right answer, dear brothers and sisters, party, division, will continue.

There is no way to stop division. But if we can really answer that question according to God, then there is no way for division, for party. Is the church a platform for ministry? Does the church exist for ministry, or for the minister? Or, the ministry and the ministers are given by God to the church for its building up.

Very simple. And yet, very important. These Corinthian believers say, I am of Paul.

I support Paul. We exist for Paul. Paul is our leader.

We support him. We are his platform. We follow him.

And somebody will come out and say, no, no, no, we are of Apollos. Paul is only a very rough teacher. But Apollos is a refined teacher.

And we are greatly helped by him, so we are for Apollos. We follow Apollos. He is our leader.

We support him. We are his platform, that his ministry may be fulfilled. And then some other people come out and say, we are of Cephas.

We are the most original. We go back to Jerusalem. And some people come out with a spiritual so-called pride and say, we are of Christ.

Now, brothers and sisters, in doing that, they make the ministry or the minister bigger than the church. The church is for supporting a special minister or a special ministry. And some will support one minister, some will support another minister, some will support one ministry, some will support another ministry.

In other words, the center is ministry, work, minister, not Christ. Isn't that simple? And when people are supporting a minister or a ministry or a work, you'll find it's bound to have divisions. Because some other people will support other people and other ministry and other work.

But if all the ministers, if all the ministries are for the church, then you'll find everything flows into the church and there is unity. Otherwise, everyone would take away some people and make a center of itself. The church is divided.

I wonder if you have experienced it. Suppose there is a group of people coming together to serve the Lord with Christ as the center. And when we uplift Christ, and when we gather together unto Christ, we are one.

Then some great man of God or small man of God, it doesn't matter. Small man draws small crowd and big man draws big crowd. Now suppose a servant of the Lord comes.

Now he may be a Paul, a great apostle. Now suppose he comes and he began to preach the pure gospel of Jesus Christ. And many people are helped.

Now these people will follow Paul and say, Paul said, now who follows me, come over. And then you'll find a group follow Paul out. And then Apollo, the great teacher, comes.

And after he has taught for a while, then a group follow Apollo and set up an Apollo church. And then Cephas comes and says, now both Paul and Apollo, they enter in the midway. I started from the very beginning.

So you have to go back to the original. Those who want to be original, come with me. So there is a people in church.

Then some people try to be more spiritual than everybody else and say, we are of Christ. So they form another set. Brothers and sisters, do you see? The more ministry you have, the more ministers you have, the more divided you are.

And the division is according to man. The division is according to ministry. Every man becomes a center.

Every ministry becomes a center. Every special teaching becomes a center. Brothers and sisters, if that should happen, the church is divided.

There is no way to save it from division. But does God give these ministers to the church for division? In Ephesians chapter 4 you'll find God has given to the church some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some teachers and pastors for the perfecting of the saints. God gave these ministers with their special ministries to the church, not to draw people away from the church to themselves or to their ministry, but they are given to the church for the perfecting of the saints with a view to the building up of the body of Christ.

Surely Paul, his heart was broken by those who admired him. You know, sometimes you are more troubled by your friends than by your enemies. Paul's heart was broken by these people who said, I'm a Paul.

Paul said, I don't want you to be a Paul. I'm not going to be a party leader. I'm not.

What about Apollos? When the Corinthian believers were divided, some of Paul, some of Apollos, you know what happened? Oh, Paul would say, Apollos, from now on I forbid you to go to Corinth. Corinth is my territory. Did Paul do that? No.

On the contrary, Paul encouraged Apollos to go. He said, why don't you go to Corinth? And how did Apollos react? Apollos said, no, I'm not going. I'm not going.

I'm not going to be a cause of division. No, no, no, I'm not going. He will not take opportunity and try to build his own kingdom.

No. A true servant of God never tries to attack people to himself. Never tries to make him or his work a center.

A true servant of God leads people to Christ for the building of the body of Christ. Dear brothers and sisters, thank God for Paul. Thank God for Apollos.

Thank God for Cephas. Thank God for these men of God. Even though people try to use them to build up divisions, but they will not give themselves their name to these sectarians.

Especially our temperament is involved. The likes always affect the likes. Because somehow your temperament just fits.

Dear brothers and sisters, God's people shall see that the servants of God are given by God to the church. And each serve as the Lord gives. In other words, these servants of God are only God's channels of blessing.

If you are blessed by any of God's servants, do not look at them. They are the channels. What you have received is from God, not from them.

They are nothing. They are nothing. It is God.

It is Christ. Oh, let us keep our eyes on Christ and not on men. You know one thing? Lots of God's servants are destroyed because they were exalted by men.

God is a jealous God. He will not share His glory with anybody. For sometimes God's servant, maybe it is his own fault, and sometimes it may not be his own fault.

He may not see that. But people just uplift him as if he is God and worship him. And the result is God's hand will be very heavy upon that man of God.

It is not threatening. It is true. It is true.

Dear brothers and sisters, don't spoil God's servants. You shall respect them if they are God's channel of blessing to you. But don't worship them.

Do not make them what they are not. You know, one thing that Paul was afraid of, and that was that people look at him more than he actually was. He said, Don't consider me more than I really am.

Because if you do that, you will put me in a precarious position. I may lose my head. And the hand of the Lord may be heavy upon me.

O servants of God, be afraid of the praise of man as the fire of hell. But it must work both ways. If a servant of God began to attract people to himself and longed to establish his own kingdom, that's fleshly, carnal, that divides the church.

But if the people of God shall try to uplift man instead of Christ, no matter how much that man may help you, you are acting in the flesh. You divide God's people. Who then is Apollos? And who Paul? Paul said, You are uplifting me as I am something.

And some are uplifting Apollos And if Apollos is somebody, Paul said, Who is Paul? Who is Apollos? Ministering servants. They are not masters. They are servants.

They are appointed by God for special job to be done through whom ye have believed and as the Lord has given to you. In other words, both Paul and Apollos are any servant of the Lord. They are just ministering servants.

God called them, called them, and appoints them for certain works to be done. They are just God's channels of blessing. They don't have the blessing.

They can only bless as they are given by God. So why do you stay with the servants? Why don't you look through the servants to the Lord, to the Master? Dear brothers and sisters, we have only one Master. Not many.

It is the Lord Himself. I have planted Apollos' water, but God has given me the increase. It is true, Paul has planted.

He came to Corinth. He sowed the seed of the gospel. He planted the gospel.

And Apollos came and watered the seed and made it grow. But it is God who gave the increase. Now we will say if you plant it and you water it, it bound to have increased.

It is not. You may plant it, you may water it, and it does not give the increase. Automatically.

Now that doesn't mean you don't need to plant it. Nor you don't need to water. Surely you need to plant, you need to water.

But whether there will be increase, it depends on the giver. That is God. So, neither the planter is anything, nor the waterer.

But God, the giver of the increase. Oh, dear brothers and sisters, what is man? What is a servant of the Lord? Now, again, I don't want you to... You know, sometimes I may give people a wrong impression. I remember once when I was in a certain city.

I was talking with brothers and sisters. I realized that these brothers and sisters uplift man too much. They make man everything.

If that man shall say so, they'll do it. I challenged them. I said, do you have the word of God? Does the Lord speak to you? Are you sure that this is what God wants you to do? And one answer come back from

one brother and said, no, but because so and so is my authority, and he says this, so I don't do it.

I say that's not good enough. Not because I despise any servant of God. We shall respect those who help us.

But, dear brothers and sisters, a servant of the Lord is nothing. Is nothing. He may be a planter.

He may be a waterer. He plants, he waters, according to God's appointment, by God's grace, but he is nothing. If God does not give the increase, no matter how he plants, no matter how he waters, there is nothing coming up.

God is everything. Man is nothing. Dear brothers and sisters, to make man something is of the flesh.

Are we fleshless? Are we still looking to man? Are we still following man? Are we still uplifting one man over another man? That's God. That's flesh. That will divide God's people.

They are nothing. God is everything. Oh, brothers and sisters, how I thank God that these words come out from the mouth of Paul, one of the greatest servants of God.

And yet, he humbly confesses he is nothing. I'm afraid many so-called servants of God think of themselves more than they should. And if they can affect people to themselves, they are glad.

Brothers and sisters, that's carnality. But, the planter and the waterer are one. It is true.

One is called to be the planter. The other is called to be the waterer. You need the planter, you need the waterer.

But the planter and the waterer are one. Even though their works are distinct, their works are different, and yet, they are one. In what sense? They are all ministering servants of the same Master.

They are doing one work, the work of God. They are one in work, they are one in spirit. Do not differentiate them.

Do not divide them. But each shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. Oh, if the servants of the Lord should be faithful, they will receive their reward.

That's their share before God. But to reward them before the time will make them lose the reward that comes from God. For we are God's fellow workmen.

All the servants of the Lord engage in God's work. They are engaged in different works. They are given different gifts.

They are fellow workmen, and their work is one. And what is the work? You are God's husbandry, God's building. Brothers and sisters, when Paul said, you are God's husbandry, God's building, whom thus did he point to? To the church that was in Corinth.

The church that was in Corinth was the work of God. Whether Paul or Apollo or Cephas, they were all engaged in the same work. Paul came to plant, Apollo came to water, and maybe Cephas came to strengthen it.

But it is one work. In other words, the church is the work of God, which is greater, bigger. The church are the workmen.

The workmen work that the church may be built. The workmen are only the means. The church is the end, which is bigger.

Oh, brothers and sisters, let us realize that the church is greater than any or all the servants of God. The servants of the Lord exist for the church. The church does not exist for them, for their sake.

The church is not a platform for any of God's servants. But all the labors of God's servants should contribute to the building of the church of God. The church is like a husbandry.

And when you think of the field of a husbandry, the emphasis is on life. The church is like a building. When you think of building, the emphasis is on relationship.

One stone is to be built to another stone, relationship. So you find the work of God's servants is to help, to develop the life of God's people, and to help in their relatedness one to another. These are the two sides of the work of God's servants, whether your plant or your water.

The work is, on the one hand, that God's people may be deeply rooted in Christ, going down, deep in life, and also rising high up as a building. And all the servants of God are engaged in that. Oh, brothers and sisters, I don't know how.

Only the Holy Spirit can make you see. The church of God is God's work today. All the servants of the Lord are called to that work.

And if any servant of the Lord should make his work or himself the center, he destroys the work of God. Many are working for God. But not working with God.

That's what our brother Watchman, he says. I remember that. Many are working with God.

All God. But not working with God. They are engaged in so-called God's work.

But are they working God's work? And then Paul began to broaden it. In a sense, you know, not only Apollos and Paul are working God's work. The building of the church.

Here you find he broadens it and includes all the Corinthian believers. That is to say, he includes everybody. It is true.

Paul, Apollos, given by God to the church for the perfecting of the saints with a view to the ministry. The ministry of the body. With a view to the building up of the body of Christ.

In other words, after the foundation is laid, after the servants of God have worked upon these people of God, then everyone is engaged in the same work. We are being worked upon and we are working upon it. So here you'll find we are all involved.

How do we build upon this foundation? There is no other foundation but Jesus Christ. And Paul says he is like a wise architect. He has laid the foundation and you cannot lay any other foundation.

There is none of them. Now notice how you build upon it. Brothers and sisters, we are all building upon that foundation.

We are all engaged in the work of God. Some build with gold, silver, precious stones. Some build with wood, grass, straw.

Gold speaks of the nature of God. The glory of God. Silver speaks of the redemption of Christ.

Because silver is used as redemption money. Precious stone speaks of the operation of the Holy Spirit. He works hidden and long to produce something very precious.

Brothers and sisters, if we build upon the foundation with gold, silver, and precious stones, that is with that which is of God. Or you may build upon that foundation with wood, grass, and straw. Wood speaks of the nature of man.

Grass speaks of the manifestation of the flesh. All flesh are as grass. And the glory of the flesh are as the flowers.

And straw speaks of the work of man. Because, you remember, Pharaoh commanded the children of Israel to mix straw with mud to make bricks. The work of man.

Dear brothers and sisters, if you build upon that foundation with that which is of God, or if you build upon that foundation with that of man, today, people having no spiritual discernment will not see the difference, and they may just see the opposite. If you build with gold, silver, and precious stones, no one will see it. Why? It must be very small.

It is too costly. Too heavy. But if you build with wood, grass, and straw, my, you can get a big building visible for miles.

How people look for something big, visible, success. But it is not now. It is then.

When the Lord shall return, the work of each shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it. The day shall come when we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Then we shall be judged each according to our worth, not the great white throne judgment.

Thank God that is past. The judgment is past. Because Christ was judged for us on the cross.

But that doesn't mean a Christian will not be judged. Paul said we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, not the throne, but the seat. It's a family judgment, not a government judgment.

Not eternal life and eternal death, but loss and reward. One day when Christ shall return, we shall all stand at the judgment seat of Christ, and it is revealed in fire. And the fire shall try the work of each what it is.

Brothers and sisters, if our work is to be tried by other ways, the truth may never be known. But if it is tried by fire, then it is very clear. Gold, silver and precious stone, when fire tries it, instead of consuming it, it purifies it, it gives it a glow.

A brilliancy, a valiancy. But wood, grass, straw, they are fuel for the fire. It's all burned, all finished.

Are they not saved? They are saved. But as saved through the fire. In other words, barely saved.

Why? Because the fire cannot consume the foundation. The foundation is Christ. So they are still saved.

But saved as through the fire. All your life on this earth, after you are saved, are completely wasted. Dear brothers and sisters, what a loss.

But if your work can stand the fire, then you shall receive reward. The law says, come, enter into the joy of the Lord. You can rule ten cities, you can rule five cities, because you have proven yourself as faithful and wise.

Dear brothers and sisters, do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone corrupt the temple of God, him shall God destroy. For the temple of God is holy, and such are you. We often use these words and apply them individually.

There is a place for it. But if you read the context, you have to apply it correctly. You are, you plural number, you are the temple, singular number of God.

What is God's work? God's work is to build His temple. And every one of us is engaged in this work. You are building a pot.

I'm building a pot. Now, if you build it with gold, silver, and precious stone, and I build it with wood, grass, and straw, we are all building a temple of God. We are the temple of God.

Not everyone a temple, but we are the temple of God. Now, of course, in the Scripture, there are other places where you can find that individual is a temple of God. Our body is a temple of God.

But here, in the context, you find Paul has before him the covenant. You are the temple of God in which the Spirit of God dwells. And if anyone should corrupt that temple, God will destroy him.

If you read the context. You know what is building with wood, grass, and straw? You know what is destroying the temple? It is I am of Paul. I am of Apollo.

That's wood. That's grass. That's straw.

That's destroying the temple of God. And God said He will destroy you because God is holy. How? The fire shall appear.

You will be saved, but as through the fire. So, dear brothers and sisters, here Paul says, let no one deceive himself. If anyone thinks himself to be wise among you in the world, let him become foolish that he may be wise.

Dear brothers and sisters, do not deceive yourself. You think you are wise. You think that you say, I am of Paul.

I am of Apollo. That's wise. Because that's eating.

That's sin. That's big. That's building with wood, grass, straw.

And look at these people. They have to pay so much in order to have so little. You think you are wise.

Paul said, I hope you will be foolish. You are very thinking you are wise. You are deceiving yourself.

Because the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. So, dear brothers and sisters, Paul said, let no one boast in man. Let us not boast in man.

And if you read the first chapter, you will find, let him boast in the Lord. Don't boast in man. Why? Why not boast in man? Has not Paul helped me? And it is through Paul that I am saved.

Has not Apollo helped me? It is through the teaching of Apollo that I grow. No. Paul said, do not boast in man.

Why? For all are yours. Isn't that surprising? All are yours. Paul is yours.

Yes. Oh, you hold on to Paul and then I boast of Paul because Paul is mine. Paul said, why are you so small? Not only I, Paul is yours.

Apollo is yours too. Why don't you hold on to Paul and you don't want Apollo? You need both. All these are given by God to the church for the building of the church.

No one servant of God is perfect and complete. Every servant of God has his share, has his portion. But, all are yours.

Oh, dear brothers and sisters, the church is bigger, greater, than any servant of God, than all the servants of God. All are yours. Whether Paul or Apollo's.

What will you rather have? You will rather have Paul or you will rather have Apollo or if you can have both. Why not both? And God gives both to you. Thank God for these two thousand years all the servants that have been and are being sent by God, they are all ours.

Yes, Paul is ours. Oh, how we receive help from Paul. From the reading of his epistles.

Severs is ours. How we are helped by his epistles. Apollo's is ours, even though he does not leave us any epistle.

Now, some people say the book of Hebrews probably is written by Apollo's. Now, I will not quarrel with you. It is uncertain.

Uncertain. Who wrote that letter to Hebrews? But anyway, by his very life and example we are helped. Augustine is ours.

Martin Luther is ours. John Wesley is ours. Oh, brothers and sisters, how rich we are.

We inherit from God all the servants. Are we rich? All the ministers. All the grace and gifts of God.

In these people are contributed and deposited in the church. They are ours. Whether Paul or Apollo's or Severs.

Now, strange. Or the world. Or the world.

Now, what do you mean by that? Even the world is ours. Are we not called out of the world? We are in the world and yet we are not of the world. And how can the world be ours? Oh, dear brothers and sisters.

Or life? Or death? Well, life is ours. That's good. But death is ours too.

Are the things present? Are things coming? All are yours. Isn't that too much? You remember that famous verse in Romans chapter 8, verse 28. All things work together for good for those who love the Lord who

are called upon Him for purpose.

Oh, that's what it is. Not only those servants of God are all ours and we shall receive from all of them. This is our inheritance from God.

Do not be so narrow minded. Do not be contented with a little. Open your mouth wide and receive much.

And not only all the servants of God are ours. Even the world. Life.

Death. Things present. Things coming.

All are ours. Why? All things work together for good. Sometimes it is life.

Sometimes it is death. Some things are here. Some things are coming.

Our environment. The things that we are in contact with. Even the world itself.

Why is it we are not of the world and yet we are still in the world? Because the world is ours. We can learn something here. There are precious lessons to be learned.

We learn discipline. We learn to forsake the world. We learn to endure the sufferings in the world.

We learn to see through it. We learn to claim it for the Lord. O brothers and sisters, you find that our everyday life, all the things and events that happen in this world, whether it is adversity or prosperity, you find everything is ours.

They are all for the building of the Church. That's the work of God. How big is the Church.

But don't forget, all are yours. But that's not the end. You are Christ.

Do not hold these things and say that all are mine, so I'll hold them. No. They are all given to you that you may give all to Christ.

You are Christ. You do not belong to any man. You do not belong to Paul.

You do not belong to Apollo. You do not belong to Cephas. You do not belong to the world.

You belong to Christ. All the gifts and the grace of God that come to you are Christ's. For his glory.

For his honor. For his pleasure. And Christ is God's.

Look at Christ. Everything that he has, everything in his life is for the Father. It's for God.

And he has set an example for us. So whatever God has given to us, whatever is deposited in the Church, it is for the glory of the head. Dear brothers and sisters, if we can see the relationship between ministry and the Church, ministers and the Church, and if we can see the right relationship, that is to say, the ministers or the ministries given by God are for the Church, for the building of the Church.

The Church is not for these ministries. If we can see it in the right perspective, how can God's people be divided? We are able to receive all God's servants. We will be rich spiritually.

We will be the deposit of all the grace and the gifts of God. But sad, sad. God's servants are such.

When a servant of God comes, he takes some away and builds his own kingdom. God's people are such that they hold on to man instead of hold on to Christ. That's why the Church is divided.

May God be merciful to us, dear brothers and sisters. May we see that God's purpose is the building of the Church. We all contribute to it.

We don't take away from it. We are for it. It is not for us.

We don't expect anything from it. If we all take that kind of attitude, there can be no division. There can only be increase and the building of the body of Christ.

Shall we pray? Dear Heavenly Father, Thou knowest, Thou knowest what is happening in Thy Church today. Thou knowest the hearts of each. Oh, we do confess before Thee how we are still in the flesh.

How we boast in man and how man try to make themselves statues. Oh, forgive us. Do open our eyes to see that Thy work is the building of the Church.

And we are to contribute to it, not to take it away. Oh, Lord, have mercy upon us. We pray that Thy Holy Spirit would impress us very deeply that makes it impossible for us to be a cause of division.

Rather, we may contribute to its building up. Oh, Lord, have mercy upon Thy people. Have mercy upon Thy servants throughout this world.

Oh, Lord, may Thy will be done, Thy purpose be realized, and to Thee be all the praise and the glory both now and evermore. In the name of our Lord Jesus, Amen.

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