

# Sermon Notes

## *The Church as Soil & Structure*

1 Corinthians 3:9-17

March 22, 2015

### **Introduction & Focus**

Since the Corinthian Church had been squabbling over different ministers, and since that squabbling had revealed a root of pride, and was getting ready to put forth the fruit of disunity, Paul had instructed them about ministers and the ministry. While all of this was instructive, it was also a rebuke and a warning. Things were out of focus. While this passage is chiefly about ministers and their work, it also has much to say to those who are ministered unto; the congregation. Who—or what—is the congregation? What is the Church? Who are you? The Corinthians needed to learn this as well.

*God's Fellow workers; God's Field; God's Building (3:9)*

This words show the right priority and give the right perspective. Each of these designations begin with God, and each of these images are instructive.

*The Church as Soil & Structure*

This is not about me; this is “we.” This is a corporate passage; it is filled with plurals. Being part of the church is to be part of something more than, and larger than, you. When you think about the Church, what do you see? The answer to this question is revealing. Among the various views of the Church, whether they be “high” or “low”, some even chronically view the Church as something quite different from who they are. What about these images of field and structure? What was Paul getting at? Where did they come from? Is Paul just being creative?

### **God's Field**

*Of the dirt...*

At creation: we are from the ground and we shall return to the ground (Gen. 2:7; Eccl. 3:20). Adam and Eve were placed in a garden, and they were to work together on and in the dirt of the earth. This garden was called “the garden of God” (Ezek. 28:13).

*From the dirt...*

Gardens, the ground, and fields are supposed to be places of growth...and this fits in with Paul's exhortation to maturity. Humans are likened to plants in the Bible (Psalm 1), and our children are compared to olive plants around our tables (Psalm 128). The righteous will flourish like trees and will still bear fruit unto their old age (Psalm 92:12-14). Gardens and fields are also places where things live and die. We are compared to the flowers and the grasses (Is. 40:6-8; 1 Peter 1:24). This should also make us think of the Land of Promise as well as the images of a vine(yard) or olive trees. Jesus referred to His kingdom like a field and told a parable about soils (Matt. 13). Jesus said that He was the vine and that we are the branches (Jn. 15).

### **God's Building**

If God was to have a building (and He does), what kind of building would it be? Paul explains. He expands on the images of “God's building” and lets us know that it's not just any old building. It is a distinctive building; it would be a building of worship: it is—we are!—a temple (3:16).

(3:10) *A wise master builder*

(3:12) *Construction materials:* gold, silver, precious stones; wood, hay, straw

Bezalel—craftsman of the tabernacle ? (Exodus 31:2-4)

Solomon—“builder” of the temple ? (2 Chronicles 29:2-3)

The tabernacle and the temple were both places of worship and they were places of the presence of God. This is part of what Paul is saying to the Church: “...and that the Spirit of God dwells in you” (3:16).

### **Works & Warnings (3:11-17)**

The foundation is laid and it is secure. It is possible for some of the work which is done upon this foundation to be inconsistent with this firm and reliable foundation. The foundation will remain, however some of the work upon it will not remain. The work performed is likened to building materials; some which can endure the fire and others which will be consumed by the fire. (See Eph. 4:20; Col. 2:6-7). The work which remains is consistent with the foundation, and is called gold, silver, and precious stones. The other work is burned up. This fire reveals and destroys. Please note: this is not about the worker being destroyed, this is about the works being destroyed. While there is scrutiny, there is great security.

Still, a warning is offered, and it is a warning about “destroying” God's temple; God's building. The Lord is severe as these are His people, and this warning must be taken in the context about those who were stirring up discord and division in the Church (see Proverbs 6:16, 19; James 4:5-6).

### **In Conclusion**

