

CHAPTER 3



Notice what St. Paul says about himself and Apollos: they are ministers directed by the Lord, no more and no less (3:5). He then attributes all success in evangelism and spiritual growth to God by using an agricultural metaphor, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives increase." Ambrosiaster explains this metaphor, "To plant is to evangelize and to bring to faith, to water is to baptize with the approved form of words. To forgive sins, however, and to give the Spirit belongs to God alone." Because this work is through God's strength (Philippians 4:13), the workers are united (1 Corinthians 3:8). Nonetheless, pay attention to what St. Paul says in verse nine: "We are God's fellow workers." Just think of the dignity this gives to each Christian who serves God, as Theodore of Mopsuestia notes, "Paul calls us God's fellow workers, not his servants or slaves."

St. Paul further makes his point by using the metaphor of a building: each Christian is God's building (3:9). St. Paul himself, an apostle, is a master builder (3:10), and lays the foundation that is Jesus Christ (3:11). Anyone who builds on this holy foundation, whatever the materials used - gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw - will have that building tested by God, and will be either rewarded or not (even though the builder will be painfully saved) (3:12-15). This is a complicated metaphor: Jesus Christ is the foundation of the Christian life, and a Christian teacher simply builds up individual Christians upon this foundation; Christian teachers will be judged on whether they build Christians in love, or build them to form personality cults and disunity.

What type of building are you? You are the holy temple of God (3:16, 17)! In fact, the Spirit of God dwells in you! This is why St. Paul criticizes divisiveness so strongly, and why it will merit such punishment on the Day of Judgement:

because it defiles the temple of God.

After this, St. Paul again returns to the subject of spiritual wisdom. While in the first two chapters St. Paul observed that those who adhere to human wisdom believe the wisdom of God to be foolishness (1:18; 2:14), in this chapter he points to the full truth: the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God (3:19). Quoting Psalm 94:11, St. Paul states that the Lord knows the futility of so-called wise thoughts (3:20), and - quoting Job 5:13 - even claims that the Lord catches the wise in their own craftiness. God does this, St. John Chrysostom teaches, "By showing them that while they imagined they can do without God, just then they would have all the more need of Him. They are reduced to such a strait as to appear inferior to fishers and illiterates, whose wisdom they cannot now do without."



Have You Read 1
Corinthians 3 Yet?

TODAY'S SPECIAL: READ THE BIBLE

Do you find yourself believing that you're better than others because you are an Orthodox Christian? Remember that your life, your membership in the Church, and the mysteries you receive in the Church, are all gifts from God. You are incapable of creating these things yourself, and you could never "earn the right" to receive these things on your own. You are a Christian, and receive the mysteries of God in His Church, solely because He is so generous that He accepts you and works within you.

Telling others that you are superior to them because you are an Orthodox Christian would be lying, not only about yourself and your personal holiness, but also about God, because you would be claiming personal credit for something that He graciously gives to you.

As St. Romans the Melodist explains,

You were not worthy of having what you possess and what you keep through the grace of the giver. Do not hesitate, then, to distribute to those who ask, just as the woman of Samaria once shared. For having drawn from the well by herself, she shared with others what she received. No one asked her, and yet she gave to all ungrudgingly of her free gift. She thirsts, yet gives lavishly, not drinking, she gives to drink. When she has not yet tasted, still as one who is drunk, she cries out to those of her race: 'Come, I have found a spring; is not this the One who furnishes Exceeding great joy and redemption?'

