

I CORINTHIANS: HANDLING BELIEVERS' PRACTICAL PROBLEMS

II. Handling Divisions Among Believers, 1 Corinthians 1:10-4:21

E. Handling Divisions By Understanding Biblical Ministries (1 Corinthians 3:5-15)

I. Introduction

- A. The people Paul disciplined in Corinth lived in a city that was known for its immorality, alcoholism and worldly pursuits (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, "Introduction to the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians: The City of Corinth," p. 1619), so the formidable influence of the city's culture on the Corinthian believers left Paul addressing "(a)berrant beliefs and practices of an astonishing variety" in his letters to them, *Ibid*.
- B. However, in a vision Paul received from God as he ministered at Corinth in Acts 18:10b NIV, God told him, "I have many people in this city," so Paul was to keep on ministering regardless of the trials he faced there.
- C. This epistle is timely for us who face our own decadent culture today, so we view 1 Corinthians 3:5-15 where Paul taught how understanding of Biblical ministries counters any rationale for carnal divisions over ministry:

II. Handling Divisions By Understanding Biblical Ministries, 1 Corinthians 3:5-15.

- A. Since Paul's carnal readers were boasting in their following of different Christian ministers, Paul countered their lofty exaltation of these men by asserting that they were simply "servants" (*diakonos*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 183-184) of God through whom Paul's readers had come to believe in Christ in accord with the assigned task that God had given to each "servant" of His, 1 Corinthians 3:5.
- B. Paul gave an illustration from farming: God had sent him to plant and Apollos to water, but God had given the increase, 1 Corinthians 3:6. Thus, the servant who plants and the servant who waters are nothing in themselves, for only God has the glory of actually making the plants grow, 1 Corinthians 3:7.
- C. Thus, the planter and the waterer are one in purpose, but each "servant" of God will receive his reward from the Lord in according to his labor, 1 Corinthians 3:8. Paul added that he and Apollos were laborers together with God, that his readers were God's field, and then Paul switched the illustration from that of a field of crops to that of a building where his readers were likened to a building that was inhabited by God, 1 Corinthians 3:9.
- D. Having introduced the idea of the accountability of God's "servants" to the Lord and the idea of rewards for service, Paul launched into a discussion of the Judgment Seat of Christ for believers, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15:
 - 1. Paul stated that God had gifted him to be a skilled master builder in laying a foundation, 1 Cor. 3:10a.
 - 2. However, others who built on his foundation were to be careful how they did so, for no other foundation could anyone lay than what Paul had laid, that foundation being Christ, 1 Cor. 3:10b-11. By "foundation," Paul meant the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ as opposed to the works of the Law or human merit, and sanctification through Christ in the Christian life by grace, Ephesians 2:8-9 with Romans 8:3-4.
 - 3. If anyone built on this foundation valuable discipling works (like gold, silver, precious stones) or carnal works (like wood, hay, stubble), every believer's work would become manifest for the time of Christ's evaluation of it at the Judgment Seat of Christ will disclose this fact, 1 Corinthians 3:12-13a.
 - 4. This disclosure would occur by fire, for the fire will test what "sort" of work each one had done, the word for "sort" (*hopoios*) meaning "quality," Thayer's Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1963, p. 449. (1 Cor. 3:13b)
 - 5. If one's work remained (gold, silver and precious stones), he would receive a reward from God, but if any man's work were burned up (wood, hay, stubble), he would suffer a loss of reward, but he himself would be saved as one who escapes through the fire, 1 Corinthians 3:14-15 NIV.
- E. From other Scriptures, we understand how God will test a man's works, and what some of the rewards will be:
 - 1. Several characteristics God will seek in His servant's works will be **faithfulness** in God's assigned tasks (Parable of the Talents, Matt. 25:14-30), capitalizing on **opportunities** to minister (Parable of the Pounds, Lk. 19:12-27), good **motives** (1 Cor. 4:3-5) and **sticking** to God's **truth** (2 John 4-11).
 - 2. Crowns believers will be given will be an **incorruptible** crown for self-control to avoid sins that disqualify one from ministering (1 Cor. 9:25-27), a crown of **life** for overcoming temptation (James 1:12), a crown of **joy** for discipling others (1 Thess. 2:19), a crown of **righteousness** for loving the Lord's appearing (2 Tim. 4:8), and a crown of **glory** for serving Biblically as a Church elder (1 Peter 5:1-4).

Lesson: *Instead of dividing over boasting what minister of God we should follow, believers must realize that such servants are just "servants" of God, that they are accountable to Him Who is the actual Cause of our discipling!*

Application: *May we unitedly look to the Lord alone as our real Discipler and focus on our accountability to Him!*