

BOUNDLESS WEALTH

I Corinthians 3:16-23

Paul begins now to sum up and conclude his teaching as contained in the first division of his letter. It had to do with the divine origin of Christianity. Because of that origin there was to be a certain order of life among believers. Here it is viewed as a building with the collective believers being considered as "the temple of God."

A temple is a house in which God dwells. Paul said, "Do you not know? Do you not understand your position? Ye are the temple of God."

There are two words in the Greek New Testament which are translated "temple." One of these is hieron, which refers to the temple as it then stood, the whole of it, all its precincts. It was a marvelous structure, which required fifty-six years to complete. The second word is nahos, which refers, not to the whole temple with all its precincts and its courts, but to the inner shrine, the very Holy of Holies. That is the word Paul used here. That is also the word our Lord used of His own body, when in that first year of His public ministry He was challenged as to His authority. He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," referring to the inner shrine, the very dwelling place of Deity.

The significance of this passage lies in the purpose of a temple of God. It was a meeting place for God and man. It was a place of companionship and fellowship. It was a place of worship. But not only this, it was also a place from whence blessing should go forth to the world. Such a place, then, must be holy and clean.

One of the things of great interest to a Christian as he travels in Europe, Africa and Asia is in seeing the great temples of worship. In France one sees the Rheims Cathedral, where Joan of Arc crowned the Dauphin and which was shelled by the Germans during the war. In Milan one visits the church house on whose walls Da Vinci painted his masterpiece, "The Last Supper," and in which Napoleon afterwards stabled his horses. When we were there, they were in the process of trying to restore this famous painting which had been damaged during the bombing raids. In Venice there is Saint Mark's Cathedral, so exquisitely described by John Ruskin and whose pigeons are world famous. When one goes to Rome he visits Saint Peter's, which is the central temple for the Roman Catholics of the world. In London is Westminster Abbey, where the great of the British Empire have been buried. And there is Saint Paul's also, which is the center of religious interest for the Episcopalian people of the world. Then, there is the great Mosque of the Mohammedans in Damascus, Syrai, as well as the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, commonly called the Mosque of Omar.

Of course, the great temple mentioned in the Bible was that of Solomon, the most magnificent building ever erected to the honor of God in the name of religion. Isn't this a suggestion that God ought to have the best in every community. Then, if God should have the best house in which His people may assemble, and where He may meet them in their worship, He also ought to have the very best in the human temple in all the world. God's temple ought to be the purest, finest, cleanest and best place. Then, Christians ought to be the best people in the world, since they are the dwelling place for God.

Certain characteristics of a temple of God are noteworthy. One is that it is purchased and paid for. "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price."

"Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe,
Sin had left its crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow."

Our hands, our feet, our tongues and our bodies are not ours; Christ has bought them and paid for them, so they belong to Him.

Another characteristic of a temple of God is that it is set apart for specific purposes. It is a useful place. The temple of God is holy, separated from sin and dedicated to God.

Let us listen to these three words, "Know ye not?" Do you not know that ye are the temple of God or His dwelling place? There could not have been any divisions in the church at Corinth, just as there cannot be in any church, if that truth had been or is remembered.

It is no wonder that this solemn warning was issued, "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy." The word translated defile in the first clause of this verse is the same as that rendered destroy in the second. It has the general meaning of marring or bringing into a worse state. "If any man injure the temple of God, him will God injure." This is a solemn warning against defiling the sanctity of the Christian body of believers. The temple, which, as used here, is the collective body of believers, must be kept clean, pure and united. Whoever mars or injures a church by false teaching or by causing disunity and contention is certain to be the recipient of divine retribution.

Paul then proceeds with the admonition, "Let no man deceive himself." It seems incredible that such a warning note as this needs to be sounded. We usually think of man as having too much sense to allow himself to be deceived. But, it must be a pit into which many fall, otherwise this exhortation would not have been given. The biggest fool is the man who deceives himself. It is so easy for us to deceive ourselves about the knowledge we think we possess.

Worldly wisdom is deluding. It deceives a man in that it leads him to overrate the value of his attainments. It also leads him to overrate his importance. What Paul was warning against was this, if a man thought he was wise and was puffed up in intellectual apprehension according to the standards of the age, let him confess his ignorance, because the wisdom in the material realm of this world sees nothing beyond it. Such wisdom is foolishness or silliness with God. To Him it is stupidity, or the wisdom of a moron. By a moron is meant an adult with the mentality of a child of twelve. Some of the Corinthians thought they were very clever, listening to the accents of the schoolmen, instead of fastening upon the message of Paul, Apollos and Cephas. As a matter of fact, Paul had already told them that they were babies, that they had not matured spiritually.

Evidently some in the church at Corinth were trying to unite Grecian philosophy with Christianity. They were trying to fuse and weld the two so that they would appear as one. This was tantamount to defiling the temple because it was corrupting divine truth with human wisdom. There were two forces which sought to destroy early Christianity—one was force and the other was intellectuality. It was Roman persecution and Grecian philosophy. Neither succeeded, of course, for Christianity has survived to this day. As for the wise philosophers God took them "in their own craftiness." Their intellectual assaults came to naught. This was true because they were not fighting human ideas but divine truths. Truly there is no conflict between real science and scripture. There is no disagreement between what science really knows and what scripture actually says.

The "wisdom of this world" which Paul declares to be "foolishness" with God is the philosophy and science and the religious notions of the world, which are contrary to that which God has revealed in His Word. Why is the wisdom of this world foolishness with God? Because it has been unable to bring man any knowledge of God, it does not have any remedy for sin, it cannot save sinners, and it has not been able to see that sin is the cause of sorrow and misery. This statement, "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God," does not ridicule the search of man for knowledge. When man discovers that two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen make water, that human wisdom is not folly. But, when the wise try to manufacture God out of their thoughts, when they try to devise a way around the cross, when they discount and try to discredit the revelation of the Bible, then that wisdom is folly. The largest library in the world is in Moscow, and it comprises twelve million volumes. However, the largest library does not make Russia the wisest nation. Her wisdom is her folly because she recognizes a wisdom that does not recognize God. Therefore, the wisdom of that nation is foolishness with God.

We must renounce our own wisdom because it is folly. We must be empty in order to be filled. We must renounce our righteousness in order to be clothed with the righteousness of Christ. We must renounce our own strength in order to be made strong.

Our scripture also introduces another word of warning, "Let no man glory in men." It is so easy to become hero worshippers and to pay homage to human nature when it is due to God. One of the great mistakes of the early Corinthians, which called forth a vigorous protest from the Lord through this letter from Paul, was the fact that the members of the church had their eyes upon men and not upon the risen Christ. The result of their misplaced vision brought spiritual disaster to this early church. Why should anybody glory in man, when we are told emphatically that whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we should do it all to the glory of God? Men, along with all other things, are the gift of God. Therefore, we must glory not in the gifts but in the Giver.

The very antithesis to the idea of belonging to any special leader is presented in the statement, "all things are yours." If all of us could only be persuaded of the boundless wealth and power of these possessions, it would greatly increase the blessing and improve the behavior of our Christian lives. It was because the Corinthians failed in their understanding and appreciation of these possessions that they failed in their behavior.

The riches of this verse, "all things are yours," are couched in the present tense. We are rich, but the trouble with us is that we do not realize it. Our ignorance has kept us from the blessing which God intends for us to enjoy. An old lady living in Scotland had received from her son a monthly check over a period of years, but mistook them for pretty pieces of paper and carefully preserved them in her Bible. The result was that the dear soul went on living in poverty. She was rich but she was not aware of it. She lived in poverty because of her ignorance. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

All true ministers and teachers of Christ are yours: "Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas." God has given all of them to us. They are for our upbuilding. The idea of rivalry was a foreign and foolish element. They were not competitive, but complementary, each supplying that which the other lacked. All truth is ours. All of the great teachers in all lands and ages taught for our instruction. Why limit ourselves to one when they all belong to us? Let us not exclude ourselves from the riches of His grace bestowed through others.

Perhaps this statement will strike you with surprise, but the world is yours. It is a world of mountains and lakes, of flowers and birds, of summers and winters, of music and art, of culture and love. In the deepest and highest meaning of the word, no one can possess this world quite as truly as the Christian soul. The flowers are yours, the hills are yours, the valleys are yours, and the rivers are yours. They belong to God and He makes them yours.

Another thing which belongs to the Christian is life. The question is often raised, Do you find life worth living? The answer is "No." Nobody finds life worth living; he has to make life worth living. And the secret of the "making" is found adequately, joyously, achievingly in Christ our Lord. He did not find life worthwhile; He had to make it so. What He found in our world was hate and jealousy and misunderstanding and betrayal and sorrow and a cross. Did He surrender to these things? Never. He made them surrender to Him. Did He merely submit to them? Not at all. He seized them and turned them to profit. When life treated Him to its utmost villainy, spitting in His face and nailing Him to a cross, He took hold of that cross and fashioned it into a ladder of love and light up which He climbed to His throne of leadership and lordship in the hearts of millions. Yes, life belonged to Him, and when we belong to Him, then life belongs to us.

Death belongs to you. Paul proved this. When the executioner's axe was being prepared for him, Paul gave his Christian valedictory to life and his Christian salutatory to death and beyond: "I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have

fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day, and not to me only but unto all them also which love his appearing."

After Paul there came a noble company of men whom we call the Church Fathers. One of them was the eloquent and courageous Chrysostom. When the Roman emperor threatened him with banishment if he continued to be a Christian, Chrysostom replied, "You cannot banish me, for the world is my Father's house, and you cannot banish me from that." "I will take away your treasure," said the emperor. "That," said Chrysostom, "is impossible, for my treasure is in heaven." "But I will drive you from men, and you will not have a friend left." "Nay, you cannot, for I have a Friend in heaven from whom you cannot possibly separate me." "I will slay you," said the emperor. "That," answered Chrysostom, "you cannot do, for my life is hid with Christ in God." Death belonged to him! How? Because he belonged to One who had mastered death and left behind an empty tomb.

Taking one more look at the possessions of the Christian soul, Paul said, "things present or things to come" are yours. Are you Christ's? Then the present is yours, as capital for investment; and the future also is yours, as the sure day when you shall realize the dividends on what you have invested. Make the present yours, in Christ's name and for His sake, and then have no anxieties about the future.

A lady standing in front of the magnificent cathedral at Cologne heard some one behind her say, "Didn't we do a fine piece of work here?" Turning she saw a man in the plainest of working clothes, and said to him, "Pray, what did you do about it?" "I mixed the mortar for two years," was the cheerful reply. God's work today needs cheerful, patient, diligent mortar mixers. Mixing mortar is one of the hardest and most disagreeable things to do in erecting a building. But what sort of a building could be made without it? We are called upon now to do the menial things prior to the use of the glorious things His precious blood hath purchased for us.