

*“All Things Belong to You”*

1 Cor 3:18-23

*“Celebrating the Centrality of Christ in the Local Assembly”*

Paul reviews what he has already stated earlier. His conclusion then was, “Let him who boasts, boast in the LORD” (1:31). Here he will state it in the negative, “Let no one boast in men” (3:21). His point is clear.

- I. “Let no man deceive himself” - Factionalism divides the local assembly (vv. 18-20)

Self-deception is always a real threat. It is one of those sins that you never know you have. It means, “to beguile or seduce.” The reflexive pronoun “himself” makes the seduction even more sinister.

- A. The request to be considered a fool (v. 18)
- B. The reasons for being considered a fool (vv. 19-20)

- II. “Let no one boast in men” - Factionalism robs the local assembly of the greater good (vv. 21-23)

**“[To identify] with some party is the acceptance of slavery by those who should be kings.” (Barclay, 1 Corinthians, 35).**

Paul has a three-fold conclusion concerning all that has been said.

- A. The exhortation “not to boast about men” (v. 21a)
- B. The theological basis for “no more boasting about men” (vv. 21b-23)
- C. The doxology (v. 23)

When we polarize around people or programs, we are wrong for two reasons.

1. Factionalism is wrong because the focus is wrong.
2. Factionalism is wrong because it cuts the individual off from the wider heritage that is rightfully theirs.

In verse 22, “the five things that follow ‘Paul or Apollos or Cephas’ represent the fundamental tyrannies of human life, the things that enslave us, the things that hold us in bondage.” (D.A. Carson, The Cross and Christian Ministry, 86).

- a. The world

*Continued on the other side...*

- b. This present life
- c. Death
- d. The urgency of the present
- e. The vague promises and threats of the future

Verses 18-23 summarize Paul's thoughts in chapter 3. In essence, Paul says, "Why are you quarreling over the parts, when you already possess the whole?"

By chasing after a part of the whole, they miss the whole. By embracing the whole, they have all the parts. Notice the language of verses 22 and 23, "All are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's." Because Christ is the substance and all of creation is but a shadow cast by the substance, to have the substance is to have the shadow. Each piece of creation "whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come (v. 22)," all these "things" ultimately belong to God and thus Christ and thus His people.

In the context of the Corinthian Church, people were dividing over the parts by failing to see the whole. Churches "fail" when they lose sight of why they exist. Churches exist not to fulfill the mission statement of any institution. Churches exist to be passionate worshipers of God. This is the mission and what flows from the all consuming passionate worship of God is a ministry to others that is characterized by Christ and not by the pieces.

It is hard to move beyond ingrained pettiness, but we must. We are judgmental when we use labels to alienate and divide. We tend to believe that unless someone or something is just like us, there is no possible way God could be using them. As a fellowship we still use labels and those labels can divide us if we are not pursuing Christ.

How often do we find ourselves straining at the gnat while attempting to swallow the entire camel? The entire law is summed up in this one commandment, "Love God." And the natural outworking of that singular devotion is a love for one's neighbor. Can this be said of us? Are we truly loving?

How tragic for us as a fellowship if we miss what God's larger purpose is and seek to focus on "things" that are only pieces of the much larger whole.