

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

The Preacher and the Local Church

By Bobby Witherington

“(5) Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? (6) I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. (7) So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God, who gives the increase. (8) Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. (9) For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. (10) According to the grace of God which was given to me as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it” (1 Cor. 3:5-10).

The preceding scriptures were initially penned by the inspired apostle Paul to *“the church of God..at Corinth”* (1 Cor. 1:1-2). This local church was established by Paul and his co-laborers during what is sometimes referred to as “Paul’s second missionary journey,” as it is outlined in Acts 15:40-18:22. During this period of his labors Paul and his co-laborers went through *“Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches”* (Acts 16:41). They *“came to Derbe and Lystra”* (Acts 16:1); they went through *“Phrygia and the region of Galatia”* (Acts 16:6); then went to Troas, where he received *“the Macedonian call”* (Acts 16:8-10); they went to Philippi (Acts 16:12); from there they went to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1), and from Thessalonica they went to Berea (Acts 17:10). Upon departing from Berea, Paul went to Athens (Acts 17:15), and from Athens Paul *“went to Corinth”* (Acts 18:1), where he *“continued a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them”* (Acts 18:11). As a result of his labors at Corinth, *“many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed, and were baptized”* (Acts 18:8). Later Paul departed from Corinth, returned to Antioch from whence he had been sent out to preach, and then after a period of time he embarked upon his “third missionary journey,” the events of which are recorded in Acts 18:23-21:17. During his third journey Paul went to Ephesus (Acts 19), where he labored for a total period of about three years (cf. Acts 20:31), and during which time he wrote his first epistle to the church at Corinth (cf. 1 Cor. 16:8).

“Church problems” are not a new thing! The church at Corinth had an abundance of problems; in fact, one reason for Paul’s writing to the church at Corinth was to provide a means whereby he could properly deal with those problems. From 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 we learn the following facts about some of the members of the church at Corinth: (1) they were *“carnal”* (v. 1), meaning they were dominated by the flesh. (2) they were *“babes in Christ”* (v. 1), implying that they had not matured in their spiritual knowledge. Being *“babes,”* they could not handle *“solid food,”* and thus had to rely upon *“the milk”* of the word (v. 2). (3) They were characterized by *“envy, strife, and divisions”* (v. 3). (4) And they were guilty of what we today might call “Preacheritis,” in that some said *“I am of Paul,”* and another said *“I am of Apollos,”* (v. 4), others saying *“I am of Cephas,”* or *“I am of Christ”* (1 Cor. 1:12). A further study of Paul’s first letter to the church at Corinth reveals the existence of many other issues with which he also dealt with in this letter.

Clearly, the church at Corinth had its share of problems! In part, in order to deal with the problems at Corinth, Paul had much to say about the preacher, his relationship to the church, and his role in the scheme of God. By examining portions of Paul’s first letter to the church at Corinth, we discover What Preachers are, as it relates to God’s divine revelation. But first, let us observe:

What Preachers are Not!

1. **Preachers are not lawmakers!** God now speaks to us through *“His Son”* (Heb. 1:1-2), Who is *“the Mediator of the new covenant”* (Heb. 9:15), and who is the *“one Lawgiver”* (Jas. 4:12), whose instructions we

all must follow.

2. **Preachers are not objects of worship.** God is the proper Object of worship (John 4:23-24). Farmers do not put the germ of life into the seed they sow, nor do preachers put ***“the power”*** (Rom. 1:16) in the gospel seed which they plant in the soils of human hearts. So worship God, not “the preacher!”
3. **Preachers are not infallible judges of people.** The Lord Who “looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7), ***“knows”*** our hearts (Luke 16:15). However, no person really knows what is in the heart of another ***“except the spirit of the man which is in him”*** (1 Cor. 2:11). Preachers may think they are good judges of character (and many are), but God alone knows what is in the heart of another!
4. **Preachers, as preachers, are not overseers of local churches.** The qualifications for elders (overseers, bishops, pastors, shepherds) are set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, and Titus 1:5-9. Of course, if a preacher possesses those qualifications, he, along with others, may be appointed to thus serve, but preachers, as preachers, are not overseers of local churches. And they are obligated, along with the other members of the local church, to “be submissive” to those who do thus serve (Heb. 13:17).
5. **Preachers are not social, or welfare workers.**
6. **Preachers are not recreational directors for the local church.** Study the New Testament! No such “office” is mentioned in the New Testament. Good, clean recreation may serve a good purpose, but such is the function of the home and other organizations; not the church – at least, not the church of which one can read in the Bible!
7. **Preachers are not the only ones charged with the responsibility of building up the local church.** According to Ephesians 4:16, the ***“whole body”*** involves ***“every joint”*** (every member), and its true growth is determined by what ***“every joint supplies.”***

What Preachers Are! (as viewed in the Scriptures)

1. **Preachers are Planters, or Seed Sowers.** Alluding to his gospel efforts among them, Paul said to the saints at Corinth, ***“I planted”*** (1 Cor. 3:6). The gospel, or the word of God, is the ***“seed”*** which is sown in the soil of human hearts (Luke 8:11-12; 1 Pet. 1:22-23). The measure of their success is not only determined by their ability and knowledge; it is also determined by the condition of the soil (the heart) into which the seed is sown (cf. Luke 8:15).
2. **Preachers are Waterers.** Paul said, ***“I planted, Apollos watered...”*** (1 Cor. 3:6). Paul ***“planted”*** in that he was the first to preach the word at Corinth. Apollos ***“watered,”*** in that he followed Paul, and sought to build upon the gospel work Paul had begun in Corinth.
3. **Preachers are “God’s fellow workers”** (1 Cor. 3:9). Paul had planted, Apollos had watered, but God gave ***“the increase”*** (1 Cor. 3:9); hence, Paul and Apollos were ***“God’s fellow workers.”*** Contrary to what some may think, preaching is work! Perhaps this is why Paul admonished Timothy to ***“do the work of an evangelist”*** (2 Tim. 4:5).
4. **Preachers are builders.** Paul said ***“as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it”*** (1 Cor. 3:10). A sound local church is ***“God’s building”*** (1 Cor. 3:9), and faithful preachers, through evangelistic efforts, must continually build upon the true ***“foundation.”*** But they must also ***“take heed how”*** they build (1 Cor. 3:10). Too many preachers are more concerned about numbers than true conversions; many have let down their guard, and seldom preach the whole truth on such issues as Marriage, divorce, and remarriage, false doctrine, moral issues, etc.
5. **Preachers are Stewards.** Regarding himself and other preachers, Paul said, ***“Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God,”*** and then he said ***“it is required in stewards that one be found faithful”*** (1 Cor. 4:1-2). A servant, as used in this verse, is a slave; he is the Lord’s slave! A steward is one who holds something in trust for another. He is entrusted with the gospel! He is not commanded to be eloquent, a good mixer, nor a politician, but a ***“steward,”*** one answerable to God, and before Whom he is obligated to be ***“found faithful.”***

Conclusion: God’s plan involves people – people who serve as saints, elders, deacons, and preachers. We need to know the meaning and significance of each of these functions, and what God requires of each. Consider ye well! ■

Service Times — Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM — Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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