

THE PLUMB LINE

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“Thus He showed me: and, behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumb line, with a plumb line in His hand. And the LORD said unto me, Amos, what see you? And I said, A plumb line. Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of My people Israel: I will not again pass by them anymore. Amos 7:7, 8.

GOD usually speaks by men according to their natural capacity. Amos was a herdsman. He was not a man of noble and priestly rank, like Ezekiel, nor a man of gigantic intellect and mighty eloquence, like Isaiah. He was a simple herdsman, and therefore God did not cause him to see the visions of Isaiah, or dazzle his mind with the wondrous revelations that were given to Ezekiel. God's rule is, “Every man in his own order;” and if we depart from that, we get out of place ourselves, and we are apt to try to make others do that which they are not fit to do, and then blame them when they fail to accomplish what they should never have attempted. God always uses His servants in the best possible way, and as they ought to be used; so, when the herdsman Amos had a vision, he simply saw a piece of string with a plumb of lead at the bottom of it—a plumb line—a thing which he could easily understand. There was a mystery about the vision, but the vision itself was not mysterious. It was a very simple emblem indeed, exactly suited to the mind of Amos, just as the visions of Ezekiel and Isaiah were adapted to the more poetic minds of men of another class. You and I, dear brethren, may be very thankful if God should use us as he did Amos; and, if He does, we must not be aping the Isaiahs and Ezekiels. If we see a plumb line, let us preach about a plumb line; and if God should ever enable us to understand the visions of Zechariah or Ezekiel, then let us preach about them. Let every preacher or teacher testify according to the measure of light and grace that God has given him; then we shall do well. Amos can see a plumb line, and he sees it well; and when he has seen it, he tells what he has seen, and leaves God to set His seal upon his testimony.

Now, on this occasion we have nothing before us but this plumb line, but there is a great deal to be learned from it. The first thing is this, *the plumb line is used in construction*; secondly, *the plumb line is used for testing what is built*; and, thirdly, it appears from the text that *the plumb line is used in the work of destruction*, for the casting down of that which is found not to be straight.

I. First, THE PLUMB LINE IS USED IN CONSTRUCTION. We are told in the text, that “the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumb line,” that is to say, a wall which had been constructed with the help of a plumb line; and, therefore, He tested it with that which was supposed to have been used in its construction, which was a fair and proper thing to do. If the wall only professed to be run up without a plumb line, then it might be hard to try it with the plumb line; but as it was a wall which professed to have been constructed according to the rules of the builder's art, it was fair and reasonable that it should be tested by the plumb line.

First, then, dear friends, a plumb line is used in building when it is done as it ought to be; and I remind you that *God always uses it in His building*. Everything that God builds is built plumb, and straight, and square, and fair. You see that rule at work in nature; there is nothing out of proportion there. Those who understand these things, and look deeply into them, will tell you that the very form and size of the earth have a connection with the blooming of a flower, or the hanging of a dew-drop upon a blade of grass; and that, if the sun were larger or smaller than it is, or if the material of which the earth is formed were more dense, or different in any degree from what it is, then everything, the most magnificent and the most

minute, would be thrown out of gear. Someone of old used to say that God is the great Arithmetician, the great Master of geometry; and so He is. He never makes any mistakes in His calculations; there is not anything in the world that He has made in a careless manner. The mixing of the component parts of the air we breathe is managed with consummate skill; and if you could resolve a drop of water into its original elements, you would be struck by the wisdom with which God has adapted the proportions of each particle so as to make a liquid which man can drink. Everything is done by order and rule, as in the changes of the various seasons, the movements of the heavenly bodies, and the arrangements of divine providence. God always has the plumb line in His hand. He never begins to build, as a careless workman would, that which might turn out to be right, or might turn out to be wrong; but He makes sure work of all that He does.

In spiritual matters, it is very manifest that whenever God is dealing with souls, He always uses the plumb line. In beginning with us, He finds that the very foundation of our nature is out of the perpendicular; and, therefore, He does not attempt to build upon it, but commences His operations by digging it out. The first work of divine grace in the soul is to pull down all that nature has built up. God says, "I cannot use these stones in My building. This man has been behaving himself admirably in some respects, and he thinks that he is building up a temple to My honor and glory with his own natural virtues, his own good works, and other things of a like character. But all this must be dug out." The man has taken a great deal of pains in putting it together, but it must all come out, and there must be a great hole left; the man must feel himself emptied, and abased, and humbled in the sight of God; for, if God is to be everything to the man, then he himself must be nothing; and if Christ is to be his Savior, He must be a complete Savior, from beginning to end. So, the foundation of human merit must be cleared right out, and flung away, for God could not build squarely upon it. With such a foundation as that, the plumb line would never mark a perpendicular wall.

After all human merit has been flung out, the Lord begins His gracious work by laying the foundation stone of a simple faith in Jesus Christ, and that faith, though simple, is very real. When a man professes to convert his fellow man, he only gives him a fictitious faith which is of no value to him; but when God saves a sinner, He gives him real faith. There may be little knowledge of the truth, but the little that the man knows is truth; and faith, though it is but as a grain of mustard seed, if it is of the right sort, it is better than that faith which is as big as a mountain, yet all of the wrong sort, which will not stand in the time of testing. But the faith, which the Holy Spirit gives, is the faith of God's elect, the real faith which will endure even the tests which God applies to it.

Side by side with that faith, God puts true repentance. When a man attempts to convert his fellow man, he gives him a sham repentance, or perhaps he tells him that there is no need of any repentance at all. Certain preachers have been telling us, lately, that it is a very easy matter to obtain salvation, and that there is no need of repentance; or if repentance is needed, it is merely a change of mind. That is not the doctrine that our fathers used to preach, nor the doctrine that we have believed. That faith, which is not accompanied by repentance, will have to be repented of; so, whenever God builds, He builds repentance fair and square with faith. These two things go together; the man just as much regrets and grieves over the past as he sees that past obliterated by the precious blood of Jesus. He just as much hates all his sin as he believes that his sin has been all put away.

The Lord never builds anything falsely in any man, or teaches him to reckon that to be true which is not true; but He builds with facts, with substantial verities, with true grace, and with a real and lasting work in the soul. When the Lord builds in a man, He builds with the plumb line in the sense of always building up that which is towards holiness. Have any of you fallen into sin? Rest assured that God did not build you in that way. Have sinful desires and lustings after evil been excited within you by any doctrine to which you have listened? Then, you may be sure that it was not of God. "By their fruits shall you know them," is an infallible test of doctrines as well as of disciples; and if any of you have embraced any form of doctrine which hinders you from being watchful, prayerful, careful, and anxious to avoid sin, you have embraced error, and not truth, for all God's building tends towards holiness, towards carefulness, towards a gracious walk to the praise and glory of God. When the Lord builds a man up, He makes him conscientious, makes him jealous of Himself, makes him detect the very shadow of sin, so that before the sin itself comes upon him, he holds up his all-covering shield of faith, that he may be preserved from its deadly assaults. You may always know God's building because it is pure building, clean building; but if anybody

builds you up in such a style that you can talk of sin as a trifle, and think that you may indulge in it, even in the least measure, with impunity, that is certainly not God's building.

And, blessed be His name, when our souls are really given up into the Lord's hands, He will continue to build in us until He has built us up to perfection. There will come a day when sin, which now makes its nest in this mortal body of ours, shall find this body dissolving and crumbling back to the earth of which it was made; and then our emancipated spirits, delivered from the last taint and trace of sin—free from even the tendency to evil—shall soar away to be with Christ, which is far better, and to wait for the trumpet of the resurrection, when the body itself shall also be delivered from corruption, for the grave is a refining pot; and, at the coming of Christ, our body shall be pure and white, like the garments of a bride arrayed to meet her bridegroom, and the soul, re-united with the body, shall have triumphed over every sin. This is the way that God builds. He does not build us up so that we can go to heaven with our sin still working in us. He does not build us up to be temples for Him to dwell in, and let the devil also dwell in us. Antinomian building is not according to the fashion of God's building; but God builds up surely, solidly, truthfully, sincerely, and until we have reached that state of perfection which makes us fit for heaven.

Now, beloved, as God thus uses the plumb line in His building, I gather that *we also should use the plumb line in our building*. First, with regard to the upbuilding of our own soul, I would urge upon myself first, and then upon you next, the constant use of the plumb line. It is very easy to seek after speed, but to neglect to ensure certainty. There is such a thing as being in a dreadful hurry to do what had better never be done, or else be done in a very different style. We see some people, who become Christians in about two minutes; and I am devoutly thankful when that is really the case. We see some others become full-grown Christians in about two days, and instructors of others in the course of a week; and, very speedily, they attain to such vast dimensions that there is no ordinary church that is big enough to hold them. That is very quick work; that is the way that mushrooms grow, but it is not the way that oaks grow. I urge you all to remember that often, the proverb, "the more haste, the less speed," is true in spiritual things as well as in temporal. My dear brother, if you only grow an inch in the course of ten laborious years, yet that growth is real, it is better than appearing to grow six feet in an hour, when that would only be disease puffing you up, and blowing you out. Often and often, the soul needs to use the plumb line to see whether that which is built so very quickly is really built perpendicularly, or whether it does not lean this way or that. As the work goes on, we should frequently stop, and say to ourselves, "Now, is this right? Is this real? Is this true?" Many a time, if we did that, we would have to fall on our knees, and cry, "O Lord, deliver me from exalting myself above measure, and counting myself to be rich and increased with goods, when, all the while, I am wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

I would like you young men who are here to use the plumb line when you begin your spiritual life-building. I mean this; your father and mother are members of a certain church, but do not you, therefore, go and join that church without a thorough investigation of the principles on which it is founded. Use the plumb line to see whether it is all straight and square. Try all the doctrines that are taught, and do not embrace that which is popular, but that which is Biblical. Then, try with the plumb line the ordinances of the church; do not submit to them simply because other people do so, but use the plumb line of Scripture to test them all. You know that as a body, we are not afraid that you will ever read your Bible too much. We, as Baptists, have no objection to your bringing everything that is taught to the test of the Bible, for we know that we should be the gainers if you were to do that; but instead of using the plumb line of the Bible, many people have a newly-invented test—the Book of Common Prayer, or Minutes of the Conference, or something else equally valueless. Now, whatever respect I have for books of that sort, I prize my Bible infinitely above them all, and above all the volumes of decretals of popes, and councils, and conferences put together. I should not like to feel that I had been building, and building, and building, and building, and yet that there had been a radical error in the whole structure, for I had commenced with a mistake, and I had been building myself up, not in the most holy faith of the apostles, but in the most mischievous error of my own notions. Do, I pray you, apply the Bible plumb line continually to all your beliefs, and views, and practices!

But, even before you do that, use the gospel plumb line to see whether you really were ever born-again, for our Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born-again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Do test yourselves as to whether you have really believed in Jesus Christ, for "without faith it is

impossible to please God;” and if you have believed in Him, take care that while you think you are getting more faith, more love, more patience, more of every grace, you keep the plumb line going; otherwise, you may get a great deal into the structure that you will have to take out again, and you will get the building out of the perpendicular, and the whole of it may come down with a crash.

And this plumb line is also to be used upon all work that is done on behalf of other people. There is much teaching, which has been given with a pure motive, but which, nevertheless, cannot endure this test. There are some little sects, still existing upon the face of the earth, that were formed with much labor by their originators, but they are evidently not gold, or silver, or precious stones, for they are passing away with the lapse of time. I would like, as a minister of the gospel, to do for God that which will endure the supreme test of the Day of Judgment. I should not like to build up a great church here, and then, when I was dead and gone, for it to be scattered to the four winds, and to learn in heaven that I had been mistaken except as to the matter of my own salvation; and that, consequently, while some good was done, there was ill done as well. No; we must constantly use the plumb line, so that what we build may be perpendicular, and may stand the test of the ages, and the test of God’s great judgment seat. Look to it, sirs, you who are diligent, that you are diligent in spreading truth, and not error. See to it, you who count up your many converts, that they are real converts, and not the mere fruit of excitement. See to it, you who plod on from day to day so industriously seeking to save souls, that they are really saved, and truly brought to Christ; for, if not, your work will be in vain. Churches that are built in a hurry will come down in a hurry; wood, hay, and stubble that look all right in the building, will look terrible in the burning, when the day of the trial by fire shall come.

So that is our first point, that the plumb line is to be used in the construction of the building.

II. Secondly, **THE PLUMB LINE IS TO BE USED FOR TESTING THE BUILDING WHEN IT IS BUILT.**

Do not let us judge either ourselves or one another simply by the eye. I have frequently thought that a building was out of the perpendicular when it was not; and I have sometimes thought it perpendicular when it really was not so. The human eye is readily deceived, but the plumb line is not; it drops straight down, and at once shows whether the wall is upright or not. *We must continually use upon ourselves the plumb line of God’s Word.* Here is a wall that needs to be tested—the wall of self-righteousness. This man thinks he is all right. He never did anything very wrong. Moreover, he is religious in his way. He says that he has kept the law from his youth up. That is a fine piece of wall, is it not?—with some very handsome stones inlaid therein with fair colors. You are very proud of it, my dear friend; but if I put the Bible plumb line to your life, you will be astonished to find how much out of the perpendicular it is. The plumb line is according to this standard, “If any man will be saved by his own works, he must keep the law of the Lord perfectly; for he, who is guilty of the breach of any one of God’s commandments, has broken the whole law: ‘therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight.’” That condemns your wall, does it not?—because you have not at all times kept the whole law in the fullness of the meaning which Christ gave to it. If you are to be saved by works, there must not be a single flaw in the whole wall of your life. If there is, it is not in the perpendicular.

Here is another wall, built by a man who says that he is doing his best, and trusting to Christ to make up for his deficiencies. Well, my dear friend, your wall is sadly out of the perpendicular, because there is a text which says, “Christ is all;” and I know that the Lord Jesus Christ will never be willing to be put side by side with such a poor creature as you are, to be jointly used with yourself to your soul’s salvation. Remember that in the gospel plan, it is not Christ and Co.; it must be all Christ or no Christ at all. So, if you are depending partly upon self, and partly upon Him, my plumb line shows that your wall is out of the perpendicular, and that it will have to come down.

Another man is depending upon rites and ceremonies. Now, there are some very strong texts in Scripture concerning that matter. Here is one: “To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.” Will you come before God bringing the blood of beasts or costly offerings? Has He not told you that to come before Him with a broken and a contrite heart, and, especially, to come unto Him through the merit of the one great sacrifice offered by His Son, is the only acceptable way of approaching Him? The most gorgeous ceremonies in the whole world cannot save a single soul. That wall is out of the perpendicular, and must come down.

Here is another man, who says, "I am, as often as I can be, a hearer of the Word." I am glad that you are; but if you are only a hearer, and not a doer of the Word, your wall is out of the perpendicular; for, if it is good to hear what is right, it is better still to do it; and your condemnation will be all the more terrible if you have known what you ought to do, and yet have not done it. There are many of you, who come here, and who have been coming for a long time, who, I hope, will be led to do much more than simply come to hear; for I trust that you will be led, by the Holy Spirit, to lay hold on eternal life. If not, your wall will not endure the test of the Bible plumb line, which plainly shows that you are quite out of the perpendicular.

There are many other bowing walls, beside those I have mentioned, but I cannot stop to try them now. I would, however, most earnestly urge you all to remember that if you do not test yourself by the plumb line of God's Word, *if you are God's servant, you will be tried and tested*. Have you never known what it is to be laid aside, on a bed of sickness, and to have everything about you tried? In times of acute pain, I have had every morsel of what I thought to be gold and silver put into the fire, piece by piece, by the Master Himself, until He has put it all in. Thank God, some of it has been proved to be gold; and has come out all the brighter for the testing; but, oh, how much of it has proved to be alloy, or even worthless dross! You can have a great deal of patience when you have not any pain; and you can have a great deal of joy in the Lord when you have got joy in your worldly prosperity; and you can have any quantity of it when you have no troubles to test its reality. But the real faith is that which will endure the trial by fire. The real patience is that which will bear intense agony without a murmur of complaint. The Lord will test and try you, my brother, sooner or later, if you are His. He will be sure to use the plumb line, so you had better use it yourself. It may save you much anxiety in the future if you stop now to question yourself, and to inquire whether these things are real and true to you or not.

And remember, once more, that *God will use the plumb line, at the last great day to test everything*. How many of us could hear, without a tremor, the intimation that God had summoned us to appear before His bar? O my brethren and sisters, if the great scales of divine justice were swinging from this ceiling now, and the Judge of all said to you, "Step in, and let me see what is your weight," is there one of us who could solemnly and sincerely rise, and say, "Lord, I am ready for the weighing"? Yes; I trust that many could say, each one for himself or herself, "There is not anything good in me, but my hope is fixed on Christ alone; and though I am not what I ought to be, nor what I want to be, nor what I shall be, yet 'by the grace of God I am what I am.' My profession of being a Christian is not a lie, it is not a pretense, it is not a piece of religious masquerade; it is true, great God; it is true." My brother, my sister, if you can say that, you may step into the scales, without any fear, for the contrite and believing heart can endure being weighed. But into the scales you will have to go whether you are ready or not. Your building will all have to be tested and tried. Some of you have built fine mansions, and towers, and palaces; but the plumb line will be applied to them all, and it is God Himself who will use the plumb line in every case. No counterfeit will be allowed to pass the pearly gates, nor anything that defiles, or works abomination, or makes a lie. At the last great day, none shall pass from beneath the eye of the Judge of all without due examination. He will not suffer even one of the guilty to escape, nor condemn any one of those who have been absolved for Christ's sake. It will be a right and just judgment that will be given in that day; but judgment there will be.

III. My last point is this, THE PLUMB LINE IS USED IN THE WORK OF DESTRUCTION.

When a city wall was to be battered down, the general would sometimes say, "This wall is to be taken down to this point," and then the plumb line was hung down to mark how far they were to go with the work of destruction. They thus marked out that part which might be spared, and that which must be destroyed.

Now, in the work of destruction, God always uses the plumb line, and *He goes about that work very slowly*. He shows that He does not like it. When the Lord is going to save a sinner, He has wings on His feet; but when He is going to destroy a sinner, He goes with lead footsteps, waiting, and warning many times, and while He waits and warns, sighing, and crying, "How shall I give you up?" He even goes so far as to use an oath, saying, "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." God never brings men to judgment, as the infamous Judge Jeffreys did, in a great haste. He would hurry them off to the gallows, with indecent speed; but, at the last

great day, there will be a solemn and stately pomp about the whole dread assize—the sounding of the trumpet, the bursting of the graves, the setting up of the great white throne, the opening of the books, and the majestic appearance of Him from whose face heaven and earth will flee away. And when the judgment begins, it will not be without due order, nor will it be without keen perception of all differences. There will hang the infallible plumb line. That which is perpendicular will be declared to be perpendicular, and that which bows will be shown tottering to its fall; for, before the Judge's eye, and before the eyes of the assembled universe, shall hang a plumb line, with these words above it, "He which is filthy, let him be filthy still . . . and he that is holy, let him be holy still."

The whole judgment shall be according to the plumb line. *Not a soul, in that great day, will be sent to hell that does not deserve to go there.* If there is any man, who can plead that it would be unjust to condemn him—if he can truthfully prove that he has been obedient up to the measure of his light—if he can prove that justice is on his side—God will not do an unjust turn to him, or to any other man. Those awful gates that grind upon their iron hinges, never yet opened to receive a soul damned unjustly. It would be impossible, in the very nature of things, for such a thing to happen. If any man could truly say, "This is unjust," he would have taken away the sting of hell, for this is the essence and the soul of hell, "I am wrong, and can never get right. I am wrong, and do not want to get right; I am so wrong that I love the wrong, and make evil to be my good, and good to be my evil. I hate God, for it is impossible, while I am in such a state as this, that I can be otherwise than unhappy; and this is the greatest hell that can happen to a man—not to love God, and not to love right." That is the flame of hell, the worm that gnaws forever—that being out of gear with God—that being out of harmony with the Most High forever. I believe that there needs to be no fiercer hell than that. So the final judgment will be according to the plumb line, so that no one will be condemned unjustly. You talk to me about the fate of the heathen who have never heard the gospel, and I reply, "I know very little about them; but I know that God is just, so, I leave them in His hands, knowing that the Judge of all the earth will do right." There will not be one pang, to a soul in hell, more than that soul deserves—not a single spasm of despair, or a sinking in hopelessness, that is imposed by the arbitrary will of God. It will be a terrible reaping for them, when they reap sheaves of fire; but they will only reap what they have sown. There will be an awful pouring out of divine vengeance upon the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction; but no one will be able to say that the judgment is unjust. The lost will themselves feel that they only have to eat as they baked, and to drink as they brewed. It will all be just to them; and this is what will make the teeth of the serpent of hell, and the flame of its fire—that it is all just—that if I were myself judge, I must condemn myself to what I have to suffer. Think of that, and escape from the wrath to come.

And as that plumb line hangs there, in that great day of account, *there will be differences made between some lost men and other lost men.* All hell is not the same hell, any more than all flesh is the same flesh. That man knew His Lord's will, and did it not; lay on the lashes to the full that the law allows. That other man did not obey His Lord's will; but then, he did not know it, so he shall be beaten with few stripes. Few will be too many for anyone to bear; so do not run the risk of them. But, oh, the many stripes, what will they be? There are the lost that perished in Sodom and Gomorrah—those filthy beings whose sins we dare not think upon. There they are, and there is the hell they suffer. There hangs the plumb line; and, by His unerring justice, God awards their doom. But what will He award to you, and you, and you, who have heard the gospel simply and plainly preached, and yet have rejected Christ? You will have to go lower down in hell than the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, for God's plumb line tells us that sin against light is the worst of sin, and that the willful rejection of the atoning blood flowing from the loving Savior's wounds, is the climax of all iniquity. That is how the plumb line will work. And when you come up, you rich man, who has spent your money in sin—and when you come up, you poor man, who works so hard—there shall be a difference between the one of you and the other—between the seducer, whom the world allows to enter into her drawing room, and the poor girl whom he led astray; for, though both are guilty, God will make a difference, not as men make it here, but quite the other way. The man of talent, and of rank, and of position, who frittered away his whole existence in the life of a butterfly—there will be a difference between his sentence and that of the obscure, uneducated individual, who did sin, but not as he did who had the greater gifts. To put one talent in a napkin brings its due punishment; but to bury or

misuse ten talents, shall bring a tenfold doom; for there will hang that plumb line, and by the rules of infinite justice everything shall be determined.

“This is dreadful talk,” some of you may be saying. It is; it is; and it is a dreadful business altogether for the lost—that being driven from God’s presence when you die—hearing Him say, “Depart, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” You do not like to hear about this, and I do not like to preach about it; only I must do so, lest you come unto that place of torment because I failed to warn you. Then might you say, in your despair, “O cursed preacher! O unfaithful minister! You tried to tickle our ears with pleasant things, but you left out all allusions to the wrath to come. You toned down the truth, you softened it, and now we are ruined forever through your wicked desire to please our foolish ears.” O sirs, you will never be able to truthfully say that, for I do pray you to escape from that awful future. Run no risk of it. I think every one of you would like to have his house insured against fire, and to know that as far as proper title-deeds go, whatever you have is held on a good tenure. Then, I implore you, make sure work for eternity by laying hold on Christ Jesus. Yield yourself up to Him, that He may make you right where you are wrong, put you in gear with God, and set you running parallel with the will of the Most High; that He, indeed, may build you up on the perpendicular, on the solid foundation of His eternal merits by faith, through the power of the ever-blessed Spirit—that you may be so built that when God Himself holds the plumb line, it may hang straight down, and He will be able to say, “It is all right.” Happy will you be if you hear His verdict, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful in a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter you into the joy of your Lord.”

May God grant this mercy to each one of you, for Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: 1 CORINTHIANS 3.

Verse 1. *And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.*

Their spiritual part had not grown strong. Their old carnal nature still had the preponderance, so Paul was obliged to address that which was the bigger half of them.

2. *I have fed you with milk,*

That is a blessing.

2. *And not with meat:*

That is not a blessing. It is a great privilege to be fed even with the simple doctrines of grace, with the milk of the gospel; but it is a higher gift to have such a spiritual constitution as to be able to eat the strong meat of the Word.

2, 3. *For hitherto you were not able to bear it, neither yet now are you able. For you are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are you not carnal, and walk as men?*

As ordinary, unregenerate men.

4. *For while one says, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are you not carnal?*

Is not this just how common, ordinary men would do? Where is your spiritual-mindedness if you so act?

5. *Who then is Paul?*

Mark, it is Paul himself who asks this question. He puts his own name here in order to show that he does not despise Apollos any more than he despises himself.

5-9. *Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom you believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that plants any thing, neither he that waters; but God that gives the increase. Now he that plants and he that waters are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are laborers together with God: you are God’s husbandry.*

You are God’s tilled ground.

Then the apostle works out the same thought under another image, turning from agriculture to architecture.

9, 10. *You are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another builds thereon.*

Paul began the churches; he was the first preacher of the gospel in Corinth, and also in other places; and other preachers followed in his footsteps. When a man lays a good foundation, he always feels anxious that those who come after him should build in the same substantial manner as he has begun. It is a great grief to a man if he sees that after he has laid a foundation of truth, somebody else follows, and builds up an error on the top of it. Alas, men do that still sometimes.

10-15. *But let every man take heed how he builds thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he has built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.*

If he is a good man, he builds for God; though he may build mistakenly, and say much that he ought not to have said. He shall escape, as a man flies out of a burning house, but all his work is gone. What a dreadful thing that would be, at the end of life, to get into heaven, but to have seen that all your life's work had been a failure; to have been building a great deal, but to see it all burned; or to know, as you die, that because it was not God's truth, it would all be burned!

16, 17. *Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God,—*

For so it should run,—

17. *Him shall God destroy;*

If any man should pull down that which Paul built for God, if any man shall pull down that which any faithful minister of Christ has built before him, "him shall God destroy;"

17, 18. *For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are. Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seems to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.*

For that kind of folly is the doorstep of true wisdom.

19. *For the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God.*

All that which calls itself philosophy, and talks about its culture, and so on, is foolishness with God, just as much today as it was among the Greeks.

19. *For it is written, He takes the wise in their own craftiness.*

They call themselves wise, but they shall all be taken in their own craftiness.

20, 21. *And again, The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. Therefore let no man glory in men.*

Men are poor things to glory in.

21, 23. *For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's.*

Glory be to His holy name!

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