

Reading 1 Cor. 3:5-15. Is Paul saying there that Paul, Barnabas, and Silas are God's workers and all the rest of the people are God's field? Is that what he's saying? Well, we'll see.

As you noticed in the verse to which I called your attention (v.9), there are two ways of interpreting it. Paul, and the Apostles, they are God's workers. They ~~are~~ people are God's field; they are God's building. That was the attitude the Roman Catholic church of the Middle Ages. In fact they had pictures that showed the ship of salvation--it had the boat and fish and in it --they were in the ship of salvation. The fish were outside in the water == the people were outside in the water struggling and they were throwing ropes to them and they tried to deliver some of them. But there were two classes.

One of the great steps forward of Calvinism and of the leaders of the Reformation was the breaking down of that sort of thinking. Instead they (taught) the universal priesthood of believers. There are not those who are God's servants, and those who are God's field. But we are all God's servants if we are Christians, and we are all God's field, part of God's vineyard.

I've known people who have said, I believe everything in the Bible. I take the whole Bible literally, every word. I wonder when a person says that whether he's ever read it! If he takes the whole Bible literally. It would be far better to say, I take the whole Bible as true. And I believe that every statement in it and every sentence if I can decide what it means that that is the truth. But when you say you take it all literally you are speaking nonsense, because there has never probably been a page written that could be taken entirely as literal.

Figures of speech are a constant part of our speaking. We use figures of speech. Often they have come to be so used for that we forget the original figure, and we use them as if they meant the same as the figure they stood for. But figures of speech add greatly to our understanding; they add greatly to the beauty of language, but they must be understood as figures. If you don't understand these two as figures you have two sharp contradictions in one verse. "We are God's workers, and you are God's field." That's a contradiction of most of the church because we all Christians are God's fellow workers and all Christians are God's field, part of God's field.

But you have another contradiction if you take it literally. You are God's field, God's building. How can you be both a field and a building? They are quite different. There are two different figures used here in the one verse. In the previous vv. Paul has spoken under the figure of a field. Paul planted the field; somebody else watered it, but God made it grow. In the vv. that follow he uses the figure of a building. A building is being built and we all have a part in the making of this building, and use various materials as we build the building. The two are both figures; they are not to be taken literally. But they are taken as true. They are pictures of very important truths.