

1 Corinthians Chapter 3

1 Corinthians 3:1 "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, [even] as unto babes in Christ."

We see a reprimand from Paul to these Corinthians. He is saying, you have not grown in the Lord since you first began. You are still like a baby who must be told everything to do. These people still had one foot in the world while proclaiming Christianity.

The cause of problems in the church was more than external, worldly influence. It was also internal carnality. The pressures of the world were combined with the weakness of the flesh. Carnal meaning that although Corinthian believers were no longer “natural,” they were not “spiritual” or fully controlled by the Holy Spirit. In fact, they were “carnal or controlled by the fallen flesh. Though all believers have the Holy Spirit (see Romans 8:9), they still battle the fallen flesh.

Paul says the only message that he could bring them was the simple salvation message, because they were not ready to receive any weightier message. These people have not made their spirit rule over their flesh. They are still operating in the fleshly realm.

“Babes in Christ”: The carnality of those believers was indicative of their immaturity. They had no excuse for not being mature, since Paul implied that he should have been able to write to them as mature, considering all he had taught them.

1 Corinthians 3:2 "I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able [to bear it], neither yet now are ye able."

It appears they were criticizing the simple message that Paul has brought. He is saying, someone should hold your hand in Christian matters. You have not fed your spirit with the Word that would have made you stronger. You still want someone else to do all the studying for you. You are like a little baby that needs to be fed milk and not meat. It seems that Paul is a little aggravated with them for not growing in the Lord.

“Milk”: meaning not a reference to certain doctrines, but to the more easily digestible truths of doctrine that were given to new believers. “Solid food”: The deeper features of the doctrines of Scripture. The difference is not in kind of truth, but degree of depth. Spiritual immaturity makes one unable to receive the richest truths.

1 Corinthians 3:3 "For ye are yet carnal: for whereas [there is] among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?"

We see in this that they are still operating in the flesh. They are acting the same way they did before they got saved. Men in the verse above, is meant worldly men. Notice that envy, strife, and divisions are worldly. They should have no place in the church.

“Envy, strife”: Carnality produces the attitude of envy, a severe form of selfishness, which produces the action of strife and the subsequent divisions.

“Walk as men”: Apart from the will of the Spirit, hence carnal, not spiritual.

1 Corinthians 3:4 "For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I [am] of Apollos; are ye not carnal?"

Paul says, that just the fact that they are saying they are of Paul and of Apollos shows him that they do not truly understand Christianity.

Factionalism was the divisive product of carnality.

1 Corinthians 3:5 "Who then is Paul, and who [is] Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?"

The problem here, is their object of worship. They have their eyes on the people through whom they heard the gospel, rather than on the message that minister brought. The ministers should not be the object of worship. They are just a voice bringing the gospel message. Paul and Apollos are both servants of the Most High God themselves.

“Who then is Paul, and who [is] Apollos” is a humble but accurate assessment of the roles that ministers play. “The Lord gave”: meaning that it is the Lord alone who can give the faith to the spiritually ignorant and dead. Salvation is God’s work of grace to whom He chooses to give it.

1 Corinthians 3:6 "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase."

We see from this that it is not the one who brings the original message, or even the person who comes along and furthers the message, but God who quickens the message to their unbeliever’s heart. The destination is the kingdom. It really matters not too much who helped you get there.

Simply put, Paul is saying that he planted the seeds when he told them about the gospel. Apollos watered that seed as he continued to teach them the word. But ultimately it is God Himself who draws the repentant sinner to Himself so it is He alone who gives the increase, not those spreading the Gospel.

1 Corinthians 3:7 "So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase."

We see in this that the message carrier is not the important one. God is to be worshipped and He alone. He is the One who sent the messenger. When you get a telegram, the one who brings the message is not important. The message that he brings is the important thing.

1 Corinthians 3:8 "Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor."

God rewards the messenger that He sent, if the servant is obedient to take the message that God sent. God has rewards set up for all His obedient servants. Your work may go unnoticed here on the earth, but if you do the exact job God sent you to do, there will be great rewards in heaven stored up for you by God.

“Are one”: All the human instruments God uses to produce salvation life are equally considered and rewarded for their willingness to be used by God. But all the glory goes to Him, who alone saves. Because of that, the silly favoritism of (verse 4), and that of (chapter 1:12), is condemned.

1 Corinthians 3:9 For we are laborers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, [ye are] God's building."

Christians are the hands on this earth that carry out the tasks for God. The word husbandry here, indicates that God has left us as overseers of His own. Husbandry normally means farmer, someone who cares for a crop which in this case, the Corinthians themselves.

We are to water them, dig around them, and even trim them from time to time. God wants the Christian ministers to care for His crop of believers here on the earth. We know that we are building blocks in God's house. Jesus is the chief Cornerstone, and we are stones fitted together to build God's house.

1 Peter 2:5 "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

1 Corinthians 3:10 "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon."

As we said above, the building is the spiritual house, which is also the priesthood. The High Priest is our Lord Jesus Christ and all believers in Christ are the priests. Jesus is the cornerstone of this building.

In Paul's building the foundation, he is saying that he was the one who started this church in Corinth. God used Paul to establish the groundwork for churches in Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece. Then others such as Timothy and Apollos built the churches up from his foundations.

He wants the followers who minister in this church to bring the same message that he had started. This is why he said "take heed how he buildeth".

This is the very same thing said above about one planting the seed, another waters it, and God gets the increase.

1 Corinthians 3:11 "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

Paul did not design the foundation, Christ did. He only laid it down by preaching Christ.

This building is to be built upon Jesus Christ our Lord. Paul went on to say in another place, that if anyone brought another message, let him be accursed.

1 Corinthians 3:12 "Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;"

“If any man build”: This is first of all, about the evangelists and pastors mentioned (in verse 9), and then to all believers who are called to build the church through faithful ministry.

Gold, silver, precious stones, quality materials represent dedicated, spiritual service to build the church. These items become purer when the fire is applied to them. This would be a lasting building built with these that symbolize the true church which could not be destroyed by the efforts of man.

Wood, hay, stubble are inferior materials implying shallow activity with no eternal value. They do not refer to activities that are evil. These would burn up if any heat was applied and symbolize a shallow form of Christianity which would fail under persecution.

1 Corinthians 3:13 "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."

The day spoken of here, is speaking of that day when we stand before the Lord Jesus Christ at the Bema Judgment. This is the judgment for believers, not unbelievers. “Be revealed by Fire:” means the fire of God’s discerning judgment.

Fire is figurative for judgment, more specifically, the righteous judgment of God. Fire is used here to denote, not enlightening power, but consuming power. Of the six types of material mentioned, three are combustible and three are incombustible.

1 Corinthians 3:14 "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward."

Most people who have done mighty tasks for the Lord never are rewarded on this earth. Some of the early founders of Christianity gave their lives for what they believed in. Most of the Old Testament prophets were killed for doing the task God had set before them. We are told by historians that Isaiah was sawed in two. We know that James, the brother of John, was killed. We know that Stephen was stoned to death for speaking boldly of God. We must continue in the face of death, if we are to be counted among the faithful.

“If any man’s work abide”: All that which has been accomplished in His power and for His glory will survive. The “Reward” is not a judgment for sin. Christ has paid that price, so that no believer will ever be judged for sin. This is only to determine eternal reward. (See chapter 4 verse 5).

1 Corinthians 3:15 "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."

The key to this is that this man did a work for God. This man thought that he was doing a good work for God. Even though the work could not stand the heat of trials, God saved the man, because of the effort he had put forth to do the work. The workman is saved here, even though the work is burned. God looked on the heart of this man. The man wanted to do something to please God, and God saved him for his effort.

No matter how much is worthless, no believer will forfeit salvation.

1 Corinthians 3:16 "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and [that] the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"

We are the house that the Lord Jesus lives in upon this earth, if we are Christians.

Galatians 2:20: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

1 Corinthians 6:19: "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost [which is] in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?"

1 Corinthians 3:17 "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which [temple] ye are."

Here is a severe warning to any who would try to interfere with or destroy the building of the church on the foundation of Christ (see Matthew 18:6-7).

Anything that is done to the body of the believer is done to the Lord, as well. This should quiet some people who are constantly criticizing other Christians. You are attacking God, when you attack God's servant.

1 Corinthians 3:18 "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise."

Those who defile the church and think they can succeed in destroying it by their human wisdom, would be far better to reject that wisdom and accept the foolishness of Christ's cross.

This is speaking of being won over by the foolishness of preaching. The wisest thing a person can do is become as a foolish man and come to God.

Luke 18:17 "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein."

1 Corinthians 3:19-20 "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness." "And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain."

With quotations from (Job 5:13 and Psalm 94:11), Paul reinforces his point from (chapter 1:18-25), by reminding them that human wisdom which cannot save, also cannot either build a church or prevent its growth.

A person must humble himself to receive God. Those who think themselves to be wise, do not know that they need a Savior.

The wisdom of man is foolishness to God. The wisest man in the world is the one who seeks God and humbly receives Him as his Savior.

1 Corinthians 3:21 "Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours;"

“Glory in men”: Paul, Apollos, and all others receive no credit for the building of the church. “All things are yours”: All believers share equally in God’s most important and valuable provisions and glories; human boasting, therefore, is ludicrous as well as sinful.

We should not elevate man up to a position that he does not belong. Just because someone is wealthy or has great influence, is no reason to elevate him up higher than anyone else. We are all exactly what God has allowed us to be.

1 Corinthians 3:22 "Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours;"

Although the universe is now in Satan’s grip, it is still the God given and God made possession of Christians. In the millennial kingdom and throughout eternity however, believers will possess both the recreated and eternal earth in an infinitely more complete and rich way (Matt. 5:5 and Rev. 21).

“Life”: Spiritual, eternal life;

“Death”: Spiritual and eternal death;

“Things present”: Everything the believer has or experiences in this life;

“Things to come”: All the blessings of heaven;

“All are yours”: In Christ, all good and holy things are for believers’ blessing and for God’s glory (Eph. 1:3 and 2 Peter 1:3).

Paul is telling them here, not to choose one of these men out and elevate him up. God has promised all believers the same inheritance.

1 Corinthians 3:23 "And ye are Christ's; and Christ [is] God's."

Paul is saying in this, just because he led you to the Lord is no reason to feel obligated to him. Regardless of who led you to the Lord, you belong to Christ. This is showing the chain of command. We belong to Christ, and Christ is God the Father's. The Father, Son and Holy Ghost are all in total agreement.

Knowing that believers belong to Christ and therefore to each other is the greatest incentive for unity in the church.

1 Corinthians Chapter 3 Questions

1. What does Paul call the Christians in verse 1?
2. What reprimand was there for them by Paul?
3. Why could Paul not bring them any message, except the simple salvation message?
4. What does verse 2 say that Paul had fed them?
5. Why had he not fed them otherwise?
6. What three things in verse 3 made him believe they were still carnal?
7. What showed Paul that they did not truly understand Christianity?
8. Who are Paul and Apollos really?
9. Paul planted, Apollos watered, and _____ gave the increase.
10. Every man shall receive his reward according to what?
11. What are the Christians called in verse 9?
12. What does Paul call himself in verse 10?
13. Who is the great High Priest?
14. Who are the priests?
15. What is the foundation that is laid in verse 11?
16. Name the 6 things that might be used to build with?
17. Which of these materials will stand up under fire?
18. What will try every man's work?

19. What will happen to the man whose work is burned up?
20. What will happen to the man who defiles the temple of God?
21. What is the temple of God?
22. The wisdom of this world is _____ with God.
23. Who is the wisest man?
24. Let no man glory in _____.