

1 Corinthians 3

Verses 1-4:

--Paul is going to speak to these believers very plainly here and point out their immaturity in Christ. They are not unsaved—that is the *natural man* he had just spoken of. They are *carnal + babes*.

--Even still, he speaks of them as his *brethren*. It is important that they recognize their arrested development in Christ.

--He identifies their carnality in a few ways:

--First, he cannot speak to them as *to spiritual people*. As a teacher, he has to withhold certain lessons because they are not yet able to receive them (**Isa. 28:9-10; Mk. 4:33**).

John 16:12: I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

--Notice he says you are *not able to receive* Vs. *not willing to receive*. Why? They were very likely willing to talk deep spiritual talk but Paul knew they were not mature enough in personal character. **Theology talk is dangerous without Christlike life**

--Second, they are not as far along as they should be in their development. Their behavior is reflective of immaturity: ***For where there are envy, strife, and division among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?***

--The emphasis here is what is foremost in them? Spirituality or Carnality? The *natural* life and character or the *supernatural* life and character? **Not just in drastic things!**

--Third, they are still babies! Babies are:

- 1) Self-centered
- 2) Demand perfect conditions or they lose it
- 3) Must be noticed
- 4) Live by feelings
- 5) Unaware of larger purposes, life, people, and circumstances like joy or danger
- 6) Consume a limited diet
- 7) Need adults to help them share and get along

Verses 5-8:

--Paul is now making it clear that ministers of Christ are servants and not heads of rival sects or schools like the various Greek philosophers. Both he and Apollos were simply laborers hired by the same Owner!

--The differences between Paul and Apollos in planting and watering—which were no doubt the used as justifications by their divisive parties—were in fact God-appointed for their good as a garden. There was a single Owner, Purpose, and Authority behind all they were doing—nothing competing.

--Also, neither of them could cause any true fruit to grow. Only God can do that!

--(8) What they could expect was a reward in accordance with their labors. All tasks of course, being those appointed by the Owner. *As were the tasks of breaking down the tabernacle appointed by the high priest (**Num. 4:19+27**).*

--We must not fear the fact that good works do matter *after* salvation but not *for* salvation. The Bible makes it clear that every work will have its proper and fitting reward.

--The book of Revelation was that *which God gave Him to show His servants (1:1)* and Jesus closes the book saying: *And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work (22:12)*. *7 letters in Revelation each with their own reward*

--As no two servants are the same, nor is their labor the same, so too is their reward given in particular relation to their works.

Matthew 10:41-42: He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.

--Again, it is labor—work—that is the basis of the reward. Not success or production per say.

George Augustus Selwyn—the first pioneer bishop of New Zealand: In six months he traveled 1400 miles by ship; 397 by boat; 126 on horseback; and 762 on foot!

--It was said of him that: *He always took the heavy oar in everything.*

Verse 9:

--So what does a mature believer see and know? They see God's servants, God's garden, God's building.

--It is interesting that Paul combines these two images of the church as both a plant and a building. He does this on other occasions.

Ephesians 3:17: That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love...

--All of us who are called to labor by God are **fellow workers**. We are all on the same team coached by the same God. In building a house you wouldn't have the carpenters saying, *We are the carpenters we don't have anything to do with the electricians, plumbers, or drywall guys!* They are all there for a common purpose.

--To be a *fellow-worker* with God is to enjoy a greater privilege than babes as they are not yet mature enough to join in.

--Paul then transitions to the illustration of the church of God as a building. (**1 Cor. 6:19-20; Eph. 2:20-22; 1 Peter 2:5**).

Verses 10-15:

--Here Paul begins laying out an important doctrine in terms of our day at the judgment seat of Christ (Bema Seat). No doubt, he has been speaking of Christian leadership but he has expanded to **each one & anyone** over and over here in this passage. This is any individual involved in building on the work of Christ.

--This section is still speaking about believers as even those who suffer loss **will be saved**. This is in no way the judgment of the unsaved world.

2 Timothy 4:8: Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

--Also, are the materials works or doctrines? Both! The two always go together. The wisdom of the world will produce one type of behavior and the wisdom of God will produce another.

--So Paul says that, in God's grace, he has laid Christ (**Isa. 28:16; Acts 4:11; Eph. 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6**) as the only foundation upon which anyone can build.

--The emphasis is that you can then build upon that foundation of Christ in a way that is worthy or unworthy. You choose the materials.

--Worthy materials are all that we find in Christ and that is pleasing to Him—and that is no small stash! In fact, it is enough to provide a lifetime of work for any who desire to commit to the job.

--All will be tested in the end by Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire.

Verses 16-17:

--Here Paul is again shifting the discussion. He uses the phrase **Do you not know**. . . nine more times in this letter (**5:6; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19; 9:13+24**). He is saying things that they should have known by now.

--Here he warns them about what *kind* of building they are. God's temple!

--Not just as individuals—though that is true (**1 Cor. 6:19-20**)—but collectively as His gathered church. And not only just the outside of the building but the very holy place of God's dwelling.

--There are two Greek words for temple. One (*hieron*) means the building itself and the other used here (*naos*) refers to the sanctuary or Holy of Holies.

--God walked in the garden, then He tabernacle with Israel, then He came in human flesh as the Son of Man and Son of God, and now He dwells in the Church through the Holy Spirit. So His direct presence is a warning to all those whose intent in the church is not in line with God's.

--To **destroy** is most often translated to *corrupt* as in the good habits of **1 Cor. 15:33**; Satan's attempts to corrupt our simplicity in **2 Cor. 11:3**; the perverse nature of our old man in **Eph. 4:22**; and literally the whole world with the Great Harlot of **Rev. 19:2**.

--I don't know all that this warning means, but I know that we should heed it because God doesn't warn in vain. I also, know that it makes God—not humans—the defender of His own holiness.

Verses 18-21a:

--Here Paul brings all his previous arguments back into play and states that ultimately the wisdom of this world is deception and the wisdom of God is truth. *The Eternal God has not *changed with the times*—Joshua +Hiel of Bethel and sons (**1 Kings 16:34**) as His strange word through Joshua remains true hundreds of years later.*

--Paul references **Job 5:13 + Ps. 94:11** to impress his point that this was always God's intent.

--He then finishes making sure they realized that they shouldn't regard any fellow-servants as masters. No boasting in men was necessary.

Verses 21b-23:

--He finishes by showing them that they haven't lost anything by resting in God.

--It may be easier to see what he is saying by tracing it backwards: God—Christ—All things—Men. . . so they have gone from *I am of Paul + Cephas + Apollos* to *I am God's in Christ Jesus*.

--There are some that fear to claim or read books from believers of other theological persuasions or denominations. I am so thankful that all the servants of God belong to me! I own them in Christ—not all their theology—but all their gold, silver, and precious stones.