

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

Even as Paul begins a section of chastisement, he identifies his audience as his brethren, fellow believers, people he cares about. Paul is explaining why he limited his teaching to them. In contrasting spiritual with carnal, it seems that Paul is referencing a level of maturity regarding their knowledge / discernment of the things of God. In fact, he compares them to *babes in Christ*, newborns in the faith, people that need to learn the very basics of spiritual truth and how to make application in their lives.

1Cor. 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.

Just as a baby needs milk to grow to a point of being able to digest meat, so the new believer needs to be taught the foundational truths of faith before he is able to understand the truths associated with a higher level of spiritual understanding. The writer of Hebrews expresses this same principle:

Heb. 5:13 For every one that useth milk *is* unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.

Heb. 5:14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, *even* those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

One of the criteria for being able to add meat to your spiritual diet is skillfulness in the word of righteousness, the scripture. This involves more than just head knowledge. It is the ability to put that knowledge to use in discerning good and evil. Paul is stating that the Corinthians have not yet reached that skill level regarding the scriptures as exemplified by their actions, their lifestyles.

1Cor. 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?

Paul is speaking the truth in love. He tells the Corinthians that they are still carnal, ruled by the flesh, spiritually immature. The proof of this is the fact that they are still acting according to the flesh through envying, strife and divisions. The Greek for the word *envying* was quite interesting—"heat, i.e. (figuratively) "zeal" (in a favorable sense, ardor; in an unfavorable one, jealousy..." *Strife* includes the idea of "quarrels, wrangling, debate." The word *divisions* is an emphasis on lack of unity. These are all fleshly actions, not actions that are produced as fruit of the Spirit in one's life. Each sin seems to spawn the next sin—jealousy produces quarreling that results in division. That seems to be a formula for what produced the factions in the body of Christ, the different denominations.

1Cor. 3:4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I *am* of Apollos; are ye not carnal?

1Cor. 3:5 Who then is Paul, and who *is* Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?

Paul now makes reference to the problem he identified in chapter 1. The envying, strife and division were reflected in the attitudes of the people regarding whom they claimed as their spiritual leader—Paul or Apollos. This is a fleshly response. You can almost hear the taunting in their voices as they

compared their teachers—like a child bragging about his father, “My daddy is stronger than yours.” This is an example of immaturity. It certainly doesn’t reflect knowledge of scripture, which teaches that man is but a vessel of the Potter—God is the Creator, the only one worthy of praise.

Is. 64:8 But now, O LORD, thou *art* our father; we *are* the clay, and thou our potter; and we all *are* the work of thy hand.

Paul and Apollos are just men—just like every other man in the family of believers. They are vessels that God is using to minister to (serve) others. Their ministry includes the sharing of the gospel message in order to bring men to believing faith in Christ Jesus.

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

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

Paul explains that he and Apollos are like workers in God’s garden. One plants, one waters, but it is God who causes the seed to produce fruit.

I got to wondering why Paul declared himself the planter and Apollos the one that followed with water. A word search of *Apollos* took me back to Acts 18-19. Paul went to Corinth from Athens and connected with Priscilla and Aquila, fellow tentmakers. The Jewish people rejected his teaching of Jesus as the Christ (Messiah), so he went to minister to the Gentiles in the city. He was there over a year and a half (18:11, 18). Then Paul (and evidently Priscilla and Aquila) went to Ephesus before Paul continued on his way to Jerusalem. Apollos enters the picture as a “certain Jew...born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures.” He comes to Ephesus and speaks boldly in the synagogue where Priscilla and Aquila hear him. At this point Apollos’ knowledge was limited to the baptism of John—the baptism of repentance. Evidently he was a very humble man, because he accepted instruction from Priscilla and Aquila to learn “the way of God more perfectly” (18:26). He learned well in that he “mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.” (18:28) Apollos then ends up in Corinth. Therefore, Paul was the first to plant the seeds of truth; Apollos came along and watered that seed. Their work in and of itself would have produced nothing without God’s work through the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those to whom the truth was taught and reinforced.

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

The word for *one* is an indication of people in agreement. The person who plants the seeds of the gospel and its truths and the one that waters or nourishes that truth so that it produces growth/fruit in the individual are a team, two people serving the same God laboring to accomplish the same goal. Though working as a team unified in spirit, each laborer will be rewarded according to his own efforts. The word for *labour* includes the idea of toil that produces pain and weariness. In other words, the more one suffers and extends oneself in service to the Lord, the greater will be his reward. It stands out that the reward is for the energy expended, the faithfulness in obedience, not for the resultant outcome or fruit produced.

1Cor. 3:9 For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.

Paul now includes the Corinthian believers as serving on the same team, for the same purpose, as he and Apollos. They are all co-workers in the service of the Lord—in fact, they are all co-workers with God in bringing people into the kingdom.

Paul emphasizes the truth with word pictures in the last half of the verse. God is the owner/master/builder of the farm/building. Those who come to Him in faith are pictured as the field being planted and watered and as a building that becomes solid and strong through the laying of a good/strong foundation and using material that will reinforce the strength and quality of the building. God is the overseer; we are the workmen. God is responsible for the resultant crop/building; we are the tools He uses to accomplish His purposes.

1Cor. 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.

Paul is very clear that his abilities are God-given; they are his because of the grace (divine influence, gifting) of God. He is not being boastful, just factual. He recognizes that he has been gifted so as to be considered a *wise masterbuilder*, not just an ordinary laborer. At this point, Paul sticks with the word picture of a building. Paul, as a very skilled worker, has laid a strong foundation of the truth of the gospel, the work of Jesus Christ. He realizes the importance of a strong foundation as Jesus taught.

Luke 6:49 But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.

His work has prepared the way for the construction of a strong and beautiful building. Paul only has influence over the strength and quality of the foundation. Those who build upon that foundation are responsible for the quality of labor that goes into the rest of the building. Each person is rewarded for his own individual efforts in producing the finished product—not in the product itself.

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

In this verse Paul is emphasizing that he is not making a choice in the foundation that is laid. This is God's building. God has supplied the foundation, His Son, Jesus Christ. This truth is supported by the prophet Isaiah:

Is. 28:16 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner *stone*, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.

Isaiah references the Messiah as the "precious corner stone, a sure foundation." In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul identified Jesus Christ as this corner stone.

Eph. 2:20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*;

Eph. 2:21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:

Eph. 2:22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Eerdman's Dictionary defines the cornerstone as "the stone in a new building laid first with great care and ceremony so as to ensure a straight and level foundation." Another dictionary defines it as "An indispensable and fundamental basis." I think both of these definitions contain the truth.

Isaiah equates the corner stone with the sure foundation. In Ephesians, Paul includes the faith of the apostles and prophets as part of the foundation, but he makes it clear that it is the cornerstone, Jesus, through Whom the building grows into a holy temple. The only other stones that carry God's approval for use in this building are those that fit closely together because of their likeness to the cornerstone.

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

1Cor. 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.

Although God has a strict building code, He has entrusted the construction of the building to His servants. As human nature proves over and over again, most of us work better with strict accountability based on constant supervision. God has delegated responsibilities and chosen to assess each person's work at the judgment seat of Christ. (A reminder that Paul is writing to Christians, fellow believers.) Every man's works will be tested and its quality revealed by fire. Fire is used to get rid of impurities and waste matter.

Mal. 3:2 But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he *is* like **a refiner's fire**, and like fullers' soap:

Matt. 3:11 I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and *with* fire:

Matt. 3:12 Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but **he will burn up the chaff** with unquenchable fire.

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

1Cor. 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 service of some believers will be revealed as valuable as gold, silver, and precious stones; they will be rewarded. Other believers will have their labors revealed as wood, hay and stubble that won't survive the fire; they will receive no reward (*suffer loss*), but they will be saved. The fire is only allowed to test the works; it is not allowed to touch the individual. Salvation is a gift; it is not based on works.

Eph. 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God:

Eph. 2:9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

What would make one's works not survive the fire? Wrong motives and wrong methods would be high on the list I am sure.

I think the main context of the teaching in this section is regarding the truth/doctrine of the gospel of Christ and His teachings. The context thus allows that a person's work be a mixture of that which is valuable and that which is impure and classified as waste. Because of the denominations that have resulted, I believe that will be true of most believers since the Reformation in particular. It's always bothered me that we all have the same teacher, the Holy Spirit, yet there is so much division in the body of Christ as to the truth of scripture. It doesn't reconcile in my mind. All I can do is live according to the direction and teaching of the Spirit in my life. In all my studies I do my best to test the truth of the teaching through searching the scriptures as did the Bereans.

Acts 17:11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

God is going to hold me accountable for how I represent Him in truth and deed, and I will not depend on someone else to tell me what that truth is. Obviously, God has used many learned people to enlighten me along the way, but it is interesting that what I have found to be truth is composed of nuggets gathered from different teachers representing different factions in the body of believers. I earnestly pray that the Holy Spirit will prevent me from leading someone astray from God's truth. I continually pray for God to reveal the truth to me through the teaching of the Spirit.

I don't believe that the works being tested will be limited to the truth of what we proclaim, but will also include our service to others on His behalf. He who is faithful and committed to the teaching of Christ will reflect that in the way he lives. As the scripture states so many times, your actions prove your faith.

James 2:17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

1Cor. 3:16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

1Cor. 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.

As I looked up the words in this verse, the word "temple" stood out to me as singular. I immediately thought of the following verse in John.

John 14:17 *Even* the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

My logic tells me that the Spirit can't indwell the whole without indwelling every part of the whole. The interesting thought was that the emphasis was on the temple (singular) of God—not the temples (plural) of God. That would fit right in with our recent discussions on the importance of unity in the Spirit in the heart of God.

John 17:11 And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we *are*.

John 17:21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

John 17:22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one...

I guess what I am trying to say is that I should be just as concerned about the whole building as I am about my piece of the building. It's just a matter of realizing that although God is interested in me as an individual, He is just as interested in the whole body of believers. He is concerned with the quality of the whole temple, and that includes a concern for each stone that is a part of that temple. Peter words it like this:

1Pet. 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.

The Spirit indwells me as a believer, but I alone do not provide His dwelling place on earth—the church as a whole provides that dwelling place. I often pray for God's Spirit to be at home, comfortable, and happy in His temple--referencing me. I don't think that is wrong, because Paul gets more specific in chapter 6.

1Cor. 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?

1Cor. 6:20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

If I make up a part of His temple, and I allow things in my life that grieve the Spirit and do not glorify God, then I am "defiling" (spoiling, ruining, corrupting, destroying) His temple. It's interesting that the same Greek word is used for the words *defile* and *destroy* in verse 16.

"if any man...him shall God destroy" – This phrase is very disturbing. Paul is writing to believers. I have to remind myself that the subject has been teaching and ministry in the body of believers--the building of God's temple. It seems simple to make the application to false teachers, but the wording of these two verses seem to be a clear warning to the believers that make up the temple.

God is and always has been concerned about His holiness and the holiness of His dwelling place being revered. All of the practices associated with the first tabernacle emphasized that fact. God provided a covering for man's sins against Him through the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, and then provided the final sacrifice in the person of His Son Jesus to cover the sins of men of faith once and forever.

These are all thoughts that go through my mind as I continue to contemplate defiling God's temple and the associated destruction. The destruction of the false teacher/unbeliever is easily understood. The consequences to the person of

faith who defiles the temple by his/her sin would seem to be dependent on the matter of repentance and forgiveness. It would seem that the true believer will always come to the Lord in repentance and forgiveness. With the cleansing of forgiveness comes the restoration of holiness to the temple. What do you think?

1Cor. 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.

The first phrase of this verse is very pointed. We often like to point to the enemy as the great deceiver. While that may be true, we are each one very susceptible to self-deceit. We like to think we are smarter than we are and that we know more than we do. I know that I continually have to fight to keep an open mind and submissive spirit before the Lord. I continually have to be on guard when reading/studying the “wisdom” of other people in this world. They can present their case so effectively and seemingly according to God’s word if you don’t have your spiritual antennae up and seek the guidance of the Spirit in discerning truth. One can only find wisdom in the truth of God’s word, which is considered foolishness to this world.

1Cor. 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.

1Cor. 3:20 And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.

It is written. Where?

Job 5:13 He taketh the wise in their own craftiness: and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong.

Psa. 94:11 The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they *are* vanity.

“taketh” = capture, grasp, entrap

I read the section in Job to try to get a grasp on what was being said. It would seem that both of these quotes are simple statements of God’s power and wisdom as awesome compared to the futile attempts of the wisest of humans as they try to assert themselves as forces to be acknowledged on planet earth. The wisest of man’s plans can be turned by God to accomplish His own purposes and resulting in defeating the purposes of man. There is not a thought in our head that God doesn’t know and has declared useless in thwarting His purposes.

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

1Cor. 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;

1Cor. 3:23 And ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s.

All of these last verses tie directly back to chapter one. Verses 19 and 20 tie directly back to verses 19 and 20 of chapter one. Verse 21 takes my thoughts back to verse 31 of chapter 1. Verses 22-23 take me back to verses 10-13 of chapter 1. It’s like Paul has brought his argument full circle.

Man has no business taking pride in himself or others (i.e., your teachers—even if Paul, Apollos or Peter). The only person about whom we should boast of our relationship is Jesus Christ our Lord. It’s almost easier to understand when we start at the end of these verses and go backwards. Christ is God’s Son; Father

and Son are One. Through faith we are in Christ and, therefore, in God. Our position in Christ declares us joint-heirs with Him and members of one body, His temple.

Rom. 8:16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

Rom. 8:17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ...

Everything that belongs to Christ the Son of God, belongs to us as joint-heirs with Christ. We belong to one another—we are all one body/building—teacher and student. Therefore, we should all glory in Christ.