

I Corinthians 3

Verse 1 – speaking to believers since he addresses them as “brethren”. Describing two types of believers, spiritual and carnal. Spiritual is obviously a higher level of maturity in God since he equates carnal as babes in Christ.

Verse 2 – his teaching up to this point has been simple and elementary due to their maturity level (carnal) so he has been feeding them milk or foundational food. He uses the analogy of a baby trying to eat meat before they are mature. An infant can’t digest or handle solid food or meat. Likewise, Paul is saying baby Christians cannot handle or digest deeper spiritual truths or they will choke on it. It seems they may have been in this condition for a while.

Verse 3 – Paul describes the evidence of their maturity level and carnality. The proof of their status as babes is that they have envy, fighting among themselves, are divided....is not this also common with young children at play? The flip side of this must be when these behaviors are not evident, it may point to a higher level of maturity in Christ.

Verse 4 – 8 – Paul further details more specifically of their carnality. They were taking pride in who they were under or who their teacher was, it seems to claim some sort of superiority over others. Paul explains that these ministers have their role, but it is God that really gives the increase. God is the always the source....so their emphasis on the minister was misplaced and carnal. In fact, their prideful claims caused division while Paul teaches that the ministers are one. While their roles may differ, they operate in one accord. Each person receives a reward according to their work.

Verse 9 – Paul points out the importance of being on one accord in the work for the Kingdom. Not only are we to be one with each other, but one with God (reference Jesus’ prayer in John 17). He points out that we are one with God and He dwells in us....we are His “building”. So, these believers, carnal as they were, had a foundation in God through Christ.

Verse 10 – Paul now talks about the foundation. I assume this foundation as a “wise masterbuilder” is based upon the Rock of Christ. So again, this foundation differs from the foundation of the foolish man in Jesus’ parable who built his house’s foundation on sand/earth. Others may build onto this foundation, but here Paul gives a warning as to how and what to build upon the foundation once it is laid. Application: just having the foundation is not enough. So, just being saved is not enough, there is much more work to be done. Christians who just sit are missing the mark/prize.

Verse 11 – Paul clarifies that the true foundation is only laid in Jesus Christ. If Christ is not the foundation, then all is in vain. So, we are working again from the premise that this message is for believers who have the foundation of Christ.

Verse 12 – We can build upon this foundation of Christ, things which are precious and will last or things which may work for the moment but won’t last in the end.

Verse 13 – Judgement is coming. This points to a believer’s judgment where the labor we have placed upon the foundation will be tested. It will be revealed openly whether it was a good work or not. The

judgment will determine what kind of work we performed....we will know clearly whether it was a good work or not.

Verse 14 – 15 – If the work added to the foundation remains after the trial, then the laborer will receive a reward. What great news. Everyone gets paid and a reward from God for the good work they have performed.

- However, if the work doesn't survive the trial, it will not remain. That work would have been wasted and of no use. There is no reward given for this effort. What they have labored for and worked toward will be gone. However, because of the foundation that was laid, the person is saved....but it won't be pleasant since Paul states they are saved but through the fire.

Verse 16 – 17 – Paul makes the comparison that the building is us and that we are the temple in which God dwells. Of course, the building can also represent the church. The point seems to be that we should be careful how we build upon the foundation since God's Spirit dwells in us....this house. Growing up I often heard people refer to this scripture in terms of physical defilement such as no smoking, drinking of alcohol, etc., as these things defile the body. However, there appears to be a much more spiritual application here from this analogy. Perhaps it is not so much what we bring into the house, but how the house is built. I have seen plenty of examples where people have self-righteously proclaimed that they abstained from certain things, yet the building itself was already defiled because of sin, unbelief, pride, etc. If the house is already defiled, what you bring into it might not make much difference. I'm not condoning smoking as it is a health concern anyway, I am saying we should not ignore the weightier spiritual matters.

Reference Matthew Henry:

- "It looks from other parts of the epistle, where the apostle argues to the very same purport (see [ch. 6:13-20](#)), as if the false teachers among the Corinthians were not only loose livers, but taught licentious doctrines, and what was particularly fitted to the taste of this lewd city, on the head of fornication. Such doctrine was not to be reckoned among hay and stubble, which would be consumed while the person who laid them on the foundation escaped the burning; for it tended to corrupt, to pollute, and destroy the church, which was a building erected for God, and consecrated to him, and therefore should be kept pure and holy. Those who spread principles of this sort would provoke God to destroy them. Note, those who spread loose principles, that have a direct tendency to pollute the church of God, and render it unholy and unclean, are likely to bring destruction on themselves."

Verse 18-20 – the people of Corinth prided themselves I understand on knowledge and learning. This is a condition that probably contributed significantly to the lack of spiritual maturity. Paul seems to be saying that carnal or worldly knowledge is not going to help you understand spiritual things or mature in Christ. If we are trying to be spiritual and build a solid temple through the world's lens, then we are fools and will miss the wisdom of God. If we think we are so smart in the world, we should become as fools and unlearn this knowledge so we can become wise in the wisdom that comes from above.

Application: somethings we may have to "unlearn" in order to become wise spiritual builders. Logic

doesn't always work in the spiritual realm. Remember the verse that reminds us to "lean not on your own understanding.." See also, Proverbs 16:1-5

- Example, Andy, one of the smartest guys I know. His knowledge puffs him up and makes it difficult for him to humbly recognize his need for Christ.

Verse 21-23 – here is a warning to not place more glory on ministers or leaders or men when it is God who gives the increase. I've seen people, churches, organizations, etc., give more credit in following men, than in glorifying God. The problem, men are not perfect, God is!

- All things are ours. Perhaps this means all the ministers and all knowledge, and all things promised to us through Christ belongs to us. To cause divisions by claiming one over another is an error.
- He reminds us that as we remain in Christ, we remain in God, and therefore, all things are ours.

Reference A.R. Fausset (JFB Commentary):

- "He that glorieth, let him glory in THE LORD." Also [1Cr 4:6](#), "That no one of you be puffed up for one against another."
For all things--not only *all men*. For you to glory thus in men, is lowering yourselves from your high position as heirs of *all things*. All men (including your teachers) belong to Christ, and therefore to you, by your union with Him; He makes them and all things work together for your good ([Rom 8:28](#)). Ye are not for the sake of them, but they for the sake of you ([2Cr 4:5, 15](#)). They belong to you, not you to them.

Sandra (class member) says the word unites, the world divides. Amen, Al agrees.

Other observations and summary:

- This is for believers (Bema Seat Judgement)
- Carnal Christian is a child of God, born again and on their way to heaven, but he is travelling 3rd class (Redpath)
- Our reward is based upon our labor
- God wants our participation; He supplies the plan (blueprints) and the building materials.
- The work of Jesus is the only true foundation...know what that work is and follow Him
- You can have a good foundation and not build on it properly. Build unworthily
- God will test the building. Everyone's work will become manifest when tested
- Some who believe will realize their service and work amounts to nothing
- You can be saved and have a wasted life
- Wood, hay, etc., can be on the foundation but depart from the mind of Christ; substitute our own doctrine or corrupt opinions
- Some will be barely saved or plucked out of the fire