

## Chapter Three

First Corinthians, chapter three consists of a series of disappointments Paul has regarding the Corinthian believers. Their prolonged carnality was preventing their spiritual growth (vv.1-4). Their schisms prevented their appreciation for the various workers that God had used in building them up (vv.5-9). Maintaining spirituality for corporate and personal edification is critical for believers who are oriented to the Judgment Seat of Christ (vv.10-15), and who are burdened to function as a temple of God (vv.16,17). Finally, Paul admonishes the Corinthians to “foolishly” embrace God’s wisdom and embrace the blessings that God has for them (vv.18-23).

### ***Spirituality versus Carnality*** (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:1-4)

1. Although the believers of Corinth were πνευματικοί, Paul could not speak to them as πνευματικοί (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:1a).
2. The believers of Corinth (ἀδελφοί <sup>#80</sup> *brethren*) like the unbelievers mentioned in chapter two, are unable to apprehend spiritual truth, because they are carnal (fleshly) (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 2:2,3).
  - a. Fleshly (NASB, NASB95, YLT). Of the flesh (ESV, RSV, NRSV, Amplified NT).
  - b. Carnal (KJV, NKJV, ASV, Darby).
  - c. Worldly (NIV).
  - d. As the people of this world live (GNT).
  - e. Dominated by the evil nature (Wuest).
3. σάρκινος <sup>#4560</sup>: adj. *fleshly, consisting of flesh* (Rom. 7:14; 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:1; 2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 3:3; Heb. 7:16); & σαρκικός <sup>#4559</sup>: adj. *fleshly, carnal* (Rom. 15:27; 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:3<sub>x2</sub>; 9:11; 2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 1:12; 10:4; 1<sup>st</sup> Pet. 2:11); fr. σάρξ <sup>#4561</sup>: *flesh*.
4. The consequence of prolonged carnality was a stunted spiritual growth (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:1b). The Corinthians were still νήπιοι (infants) in Christ (cf. Eph. 4:14).
  - a. The babe needs milk, but if the believer remains carnal, they cannot even handle milk.
  - b. The babe who succeeds in digesting the milk is going to grow quickly (1<sup>st</sup> Pet. 2:2).
5. The personal sins of jealousy and strife resulted in the Corinthian believers falling into a sphere of carnality (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:3,4).
  - a. Habitual and prolonged carnality becomes a walk.
  - b. This walk is “like” or “according to” man. The believer does not lose his salvation, but his manner of life (walk) is virtually identical to that of an unbeliever.

### ***Appreciation for Workers*** (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:5-9)

1. The Corinthians’ habitual and prolonged carnality prevented them from appreciating the wealth of teaching they had been blessed with (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:5-9).
  - a. Paul laid the foundation when he established the local church (Acts 18:1-17; 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:6,10,22).
  - b. Apollos built upon that foundation with additional teaching (Acts 18:27; 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 1:12; 3:6,10,22; 16:12).
  - c. Other workers included Silvanus (Acts 18:5; 2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 1:19), Timothy (Acts 18:5; 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 4:17; 16:10,11; 2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 1:19), Titus (2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 7:13,14; 12:18), and Cephas (Peter) (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 1:12; 3:22).
2. Bible teachers are servants (διάκονοι) that the Lord uses for “planting” and “watering” ministries, but ultimately God Himself produces the growth (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:6). διάκονος <sup>#1249</sup>: *servant, deacon*.
  - a. The variety of Pastor-Teachers, teachers, etc. that teach you the Word of God throughout your life do so as the Lord gives opportunity (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:5).
  - b. No one Bible teacher can claim personal glory as his individual contribution to another believer’s growth is only a small fraction of the overall work of growth that God produces (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:7).
  - c. Bible teachers should maintain their perspective as a part of one unified building effort, and endure in the ministry for their own reward (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:8).
3. The servant-minded Bible teacher is truly a fellow worker (συνεργός) with God, as God produces the growth of individual believers (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:9). συνεργός <sup>#4904</sup>: *fellow worker*.

## **Orientation to the Judgment Seat of Christ (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:10-15)**

1. Proper orientation to the Judgment Seat of Christ begins with grace (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:10). Κατὰ τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν δοθεῖσάν μοι.
  - a. κατὰ <sup>#2596</sup> + acc. [maker of norm of similarity or homogeneity] *according to, in accordance with, in conformity with, according to.*
  - b. God's grace is given to believers so that believers can function with & under grace.
2. Proper orientation to the Judgment Seat of Christ entails the proper understanding of our architectural responsibilities. ὡς σοφὸς ἀρχιτέκτων.
  - a. σοφός <sup>#4680</sup>: *wise.*
  - b. ἀρχιτέκτων <sup>#753</sup>: *a master builder, an architect, the superintendent in the erection of buildings* (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:10; LXX Isa. 3:3). From ἀρχή <sup>#746</sup>: *ruling, first.* τέκτων <sup>#5045</sup>: *carpenter* (Matt. 13:55; Mk. 6:3). According to Plato: "you might be able to buy a carpenter for 6 minas, but you'd need more than 10,000 drachmas for a master builder." 2 Macc. 2:29; Sir. 38:27. Hom. Il. 15,412 σοφία τέκτονος "some skilled workman whom Athena has instructed in all kinds of useful arts."
  - c. Every believer is tasked by God to be a builder (Rom. 14:19; 15:2; 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 14:26; Eph. 4:29), but each one of us should strive to become a master-builder, and then ultimately a wise master-builder.
3. Proper orientation to the Judgment Seat of Christ motivates our understanding of the momentary role we play in the edification of other believers.
  - a. Paul understood that his momentary role among the Corinthians was to lay the foundation.
  - b. Apollos' momentary role among the Corinthians was to build upon Paul's previously laid foundation.
4. Proper orientation to the Judgment Seat of Christ admonishes the believer to exercise caution regarding the manner with which edification occurs (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:10,11,12).
  - a. "Be careful how" βλέπω πῶς. Pres.act.imper. βλέπω <sup>#991</sup>: *to see*; to process information by giving thought, *direct one's attention to something, consider, note.*
  - b. ἐποικοδομέω <sup>#2026</sup>: *to build onto* (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:10,12,14; Eph. 2:20; Col. 2:7; Jude 20).
  - c. "Be careful how you build" parallels "take care" with your liberty (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 8:9), "take heed" lest you fall (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 10:12), and "be careful how you walk" (Eph. 5:14)—all Pauline passages that highlight our opportunity to edify fellow believers (with imperative instances of βλέπω <sup>#991</sup>).
5. Proper orientation to the Judgment Seat of Christ challenges the believer to use only the finest of building materials in edifying a fellow believer (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:12).
  - a. Gold, silver, and precious stones represent eternal, heavenly building materials (Rev. 21:10-21).
  - b. Wood, hay, and straw represent temporal, earthly building materials.
  - c. Heavenly building materials will pass the δοκιμάζω <sup>#1381</sup> testing by fire, but earthly building materials will be consumed (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:13-15).

No meaning is assigned to the particular materials mentioned from Scriptural background. However, gold is often used to represent the glory of deity; silver is the metal of redemption, and precious stones reflect wealth of other kind. The use of these materials undoubtedly reflects Christian life and witness which as gold manifest the glory of God, as silver the extension of the gospel, and, as precious stones, accomplish many things which are of value in God's sight. By contrast, wood, hay, and stubble represent three degrees of worthlessness, stubble being fit for nothing. Hay is suitable only for beasts. Wood, while being a useful tool of man, can also be destroyed by fire. The final test of all man's work is what evaluation is placed upon it at the judgment seat of Christ. Christians, accordingly, are urged to build a life which embodies eternal values.<sup>1</sup>
6. Proper orientation to the Judgment Seat of Christ focuses the believer upon daily personal self-examination.
  - a. Each believer's work will become evident (φανερός <sup>#5318</sup>), shown (δηλώω <sup>#1213</sup>), revealed (ἀποκαλύπτω <sup>#601</sup>), and quality tested (ὅποιος <sup>#3697</sup> & δοκιμάζω <sup>#1381</sup>) (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:13). "The day" refers to the ultimate judgment day.
  - b. In the meantime, each believer must perform daily quality testing (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 11:28).
  - c. Each work will be evaluated on a good/bad standard (2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 5:10). (ἀγαθός <sup>#18</sup> / φαῦλος <sup>#5337</sup>)

<sup>1</sup> *Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 123* (Vol. 123, Page 101). Dallas Theological Seminary. John F. Walvoord, "The Judgment of the Church in Heaven" (1966).

## **The Temple of God (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:16,17)**

1. The context for this argument is an appendix to the previous development on the Judgment Seat of Christ (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:10-15).
2. As if the need to edify the Saints was not already obvious enough, Paul incredulously asks “Do you not know?”
  - a. οὐκ οἶδατε v.2pl.perf.act.ind. οἶδα #1492: *to know*. *Do you not know* is a negative rhetorical question that is equal to the positive statement “You certainly know that you are God’s temple...,” “I am sure that you know that...,” or “I am sure that you are aware of the fact that...”<sup>2</sup>
  - b. Paul employs “do you not know” to express content of Doctrine that his students should already be aware of (Rom. 6:16; 11:2; 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:16; 5:6; 6:2,3,9,15,16,19; 9:13,24). James also employs the phrase (Jms. 4:4).
3. The paired Truth of v.16 is that you (plural) are (collectively) a sanctuary (singular) of God and consequently the Holy Spirit dwells in (each of) you (plural).
  - a. The entire Church, Body of Christ, is a sanctuary unlike any that has existed upon this world before.
  - b. ναός #3485: *temple, sanctuary*. Careful distinctions must be drawn between the ναός inner sanctuary and the ἱερόν #2411 temple with its porches and outbuildings.
  - c. Since the Body (of Christ) is a temple, individual Members of that (spiritual) Body ought not defile their individual (physical) bodies (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 6:19).
  - d. The Body’s role as a temple demands separation from all forms of idolatry (2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 6:16).
  - e. Each individual Member is a special stone that fits into the overall temple in His Perfect way (Eph. 2:19-21).  
Note: we are not only the Temple in Christ, but we are also the Priesthood in Christ (1<sup>st</sup> Pet. 2:5).
4. The early Church was impressed greatly by this Truth.
  - a. A variety of writers wrote on the Church as the ναός of God. Iren(aeus) Haereses 5,9,4; Hippol(ytus), Ref(utatio omnium haeresium) 5,19,15; Sextus (Pythagoras) 35, 46a; Barnabas 6:15; 16:6-10; Synesius Dio 9; 2 Cl. 9:3.
  - b. Ignatius of Antioch, especially wrote on this subject (I Phld. 7:2; IEph. 9:1; 15:3; IMg. 7:2).  
Nevertheless, I have heard of some who have passed on from this to you, having false doctrine, whom ye did not suffer to sow among you, but stopped your ears, that ye might not receive those things which were sown by them, as being stones of the temple of the Father, prepared for the building of God the Father, and drawn up on high by the instrument of Jesus Christ, which is the cross, making use of the Holy Spirit as a rope, while your faith was the means by which you ascended, and your love the way which led up to God. Ye, therefore, as well as all your fellow-travellers, are God-bearers, temple-bearers, Christ-bearers, bearers of holiness, adorned in all respects with the commandments of Jesus Christ, in whom also I exult that I have been thought worthy, by means of this Epistle, to converse and rejoice with you, because with respect to your Christian life ye love nothing but God only. **Ignatius of Antioch to the Ephesians, Chapter 9.**
5. The Body of Christ, with Christ as the Head, form the only ναός that the Heavenly Jerusalem needs (Rev. 21:22).
6. “Pillar Status” is one of the highest rewards that a Member of the Church can attain to (Rev. 3:12).
7. “If any man” brings back the context of the Judgment Seat of Christ (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:17 cf. v.12,14,15).
  - a. Employing wood, hay, or straw is tantamount to destroying the temple of God.
  - b. φθείρω #5351: *to destroy, ruin, corrupt, spoil*.
  - c. Ruining a fellow believer in Christ results in Divine discipline of the harshest sort (2<sup>nd</sup> Pet. 2:12; Jude 10).

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<sup>2</sup>Ellingworth, P., Hatton, H., & Ellingworth, P. (1995). *A handbook on Paul's first letter to the Corinthians*. Rev. ed. of: A translator's handbook on Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. UBS handbook series; Helps for translators (1 Co 3:16). New York: United Bible Societies.

## **Becoming Foolish (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:18-23)**

1. The practical daily application of “if any man” (v.12,14,15,17) is “let no man” (vv.18,21).
  - a. Μηδείς <sup>#3367</sup>: *nobody, no one, nothing* is directly tied to τις <sup>#5100</sup> *any man*.
  - b. The two prohibitions are expressed by 3p.sing.pres.imper. directed towards “Nobody.”
2. Two verbs are given as prohibitions: (negative imperatives)
  - a. Do not deceive yourself (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:18). ἐξαπατάω <sup>#1818</sup>: *to cause someone to accept false ideas about something; deceive, cheat* (Rom. 7:11; 16:18; 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:18; 2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 11:3; 2<sup>nd</sup> Thess. 2:3; 1<sup>st</sup> Tim. 2:14). Fr. ἀπατάω <sup>#538</sup>: *to cheat, beguile, deceive* (Eph. 4:6; 1<sup>st</sup> Tim. 2:14; Jms. 1:26).
  - b. Do not boast in men (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:21).
    - 1) This was the failure of Corinth (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 1:12; 3:4).
    - 2) Application for all believers is to view all things with God’s Divine wisdom (Divine Viewpoint) (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:21b-23).
3. Believers who substitute the wisdom of this age for God’s wisdom are actively plunging themselves into self-deception (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:18a).
4. The antidote for self-deception is a positive imperative—he must become foolish (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:18b). μωρὸς γενέσθω. v.3p.sing.aor.mid.imper. γίνομαι <sup>#1096</sup>: *to be, to become*. μωρός <sup>#3474</sup>: *foolish*.
5. Boasting over one item is ridiculous since all things belong to the Body of Christ (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 3:21b-23).
  - a. Since “all things” belong to the Body of Christ, boasting in one thing (or any finite number) is pointless.
  - b. Since all things belong to the Body of Christ, no believer has anything that any other believer does not have. Every believer is in the Body of Christ, and therefore owns all things in common with the Body.
    - 1) Every believer possesses every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3).
      - a) Believers need to have their eyes open to this spiritual wealth (Eph. 1:18).
      - b) Believers need to actively engage in the heavenly, spiritual economy (Rev. 3:18).
    - 2) Every believer possesses every temporal blessing in the world consistent with his need for the glorification of Jesus Christ (Phil. 4:19; 2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 9:8), and consistent with his capacity to handle it (Phil. 4:12; 2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 9:10-12).
6. Jesus Christ is the Heir of All Things (Heb. 1:2), and we are fellow heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). Our position in Christ gives us a total confidence for any circumstance and detail of life (Rom. 8:31-39).