

I Corinthians - Lesson 03

I Corinthians Chapter 3

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Memory verses for this week: *1 Pet 2:20 For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.*

Introduction: Last week in Chapter 2, Paul told the church there in Corinth that he came not to them in the wisdom of man but in demonstration of the Holy Spirit. He told them later in the chapter that none of us knows what all awaits those who know Christ as Savior. This week in Chapter 3 we will be discussing the conflict that goes on in our lives daily between the spiritual man and the carnal fleshly man.

I. The Characteristics of Carnality

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

1 Cor 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.

Notice that the Scriptures describe three different kinds of men.

1. **The natural man** 1 Cor. 2:14. The natural man is the unsaved man. He does not have spiritual life, because he has never experienced the new birth. He is unsaved and unspiritual, therefore he cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God in the Bible.

2. **The spiritual man** 1 Cor. 2:10-13,15,16. The spiritual man has physical life he received at the time of his first birth. He also has spiritual life that he received at his second birth See John 3. The spiritual man begins as a spiritual infant, but grows and matures by eating spiritual food and taking spiritual exercise.

3. **The carnal man** I Cor. 3:1. The carnal man is a spiritual man with certain limitations. The carnal man has not kept growing from the time of his second birth, but has starved himself spiritually by not eating the right spiritual food and taking the right spiritual exercise. The word **carnal** in this verse means, "having the nature of flesh, governed by mere human nature not by the Spirit of God."

Paul leaves little doubt about the condition of these people in the Corinthian church. He first speaks of them as brethren, denoting that they were saved individuals. He then calls the carnal and babes in Christ. They were born again,

but still allowing the old nature to control them. We know when we raise our children that we must care for every detail of a baby to allow it to grow and begin to walk and make decisions on its own. The relationship is very similar in spiritual things. We can come to know Christ, and fail to grow in spiritual maturity, and wind up a “baby” in the things of God.

God’s desire is for us to nurture and uplift the young Christians and by our example and teaching, bring them to spiritual maturity. A carnal Christian can not do this, as he or she needs to be re-taught the “milk” of the word. As a new born Christian, we are to desire the milk of the word. But as we grow, we should learn and begin to digest the meat of the scriptures. (the deeper things of God and the Spirit.) The young Christian who is a babe in the scripture many times is offended by strong doctrine.

1 Pet 2:2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

Heb 5:11 Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.

Heb 5:12 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

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.

We see that the strong meat of the word is to belong to them that are older Christians and by use and study have grown in the word of God. Nothing beats on the job training, and we get that every day if we will but look at how God is molding and shaping our lives. But if we never read our bibles, fail to seek the Spirit’s guidance, we can remain in state of immaturity.

Paul was condemning those Hebrews that were in that situation. After a period of time, we should all grow and be able to teach others. But they remained carnal and were totally ineffective in their Christian walk. The pastor has a duty to feed the church with the Word of Truth.

Acts 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

John 21:15 So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

John 21:16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas,

*lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.
John 21:17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.*

In this teaching in John, Jesus points out how that there are both “sheep” and “lambs.” The sheep refer to the older, more mature Christians while the lambs speak of those who have recently been saved. There should be growth in every Christian while we remain here on earth.

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

The carnal Christian is dominated by the old fleshly nature. Many times he is the source of strife and divisions in the Church.

2 Cor. 12:20, For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults:

James 3:16 For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

Note that three things identified the carnal Christians.

- I. Envyng
- II. Strife
- III. Divisions

All of these are manifestations of the flesh, not the Spirit. All of these things are listed in Galatians as “works of the flesh.”

*Gal 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these;
Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,
Gal 5:20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies,
Gal 5:21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*

The word “divisions” is translated as “seditions” in Galatians. By grouping themselves after certain human teachers, they would then argue and quarrel with one another rather than building up one another in the spirit. We are not to argue, but rather to exhort and encourage.

2 Tim 4:2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

The church is to follow the pastor as he follows Christ.

1 Cor 11:1 Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.

Heb 13:7 Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.

Heb 13:8 Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.

Heb 13:9 Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.

II. Christian Service Should be to God Only

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

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

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

The carnal man does not know who produces the fruit. Of course that is God, not the Christian. Man's part is the planting and the watering. God's part is giving the increase.

2Co 4:5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

2Co 4:6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

2Co 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

Rom 12:3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

Paul and Apollos were simply men who had planted and watered. If God had not given the increase, nothing would have been forthcoming. All of their efforts would have been in vain. But when we do things God's way, He is faithful to bless and save those that hear the Gospel and believe. Human channels in themselves are nothing, but working with God, they can accomplish great things. We read the verse last week and about the being a branch out of the true vine. Without God, we can do nothing. That is exactly the opposite of the teachings of

the world. They teach that we are the center of the universe, and that with enough self motivation, we can do great things. In human endeavors, there may be some truth in this. But when it comes to spiritual things, God must be the one who gives the increase.

There was no division among Paul and Apollos. They both knew their human frailty and looked to God for strength each day. These cliques that had been established were by men, nothing that they had attempted to do on their own. We must be careful to keep our eyes on Jesus, and not on men. If we don't, we can be very disillusioned when those we respect so much fail. And being human, all of us will ultimately fail without the grace of God.

III. Labouring Together with God

1 Cor 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.

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

God clearly is the preeminent one, not the workmen.

John 15:5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

The planters and the waterers were one in doctrine and not divided.

John 4:36, And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.

All of us work together to accomplish the results of seeing the lost come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior. We may go out and knock on doors, and never see that person come to know Jesus. But we may have been the one that planted the seed, then another comes along and waters, then a third (or a fiftieth) comes along and gathers the increase. And sometimes, we get to be the one who sees the lost soul turn to Jesus due to the efforts others have put forth for years. We truly are just labourers in the vineyard, seeking to do the bidding of the master. Our goal as servants of the Lord is to labor in the fields and bring the fruits into the storehouse. Those that reach others for the Lord are wise the bible says.

Prov 11:30 The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.

John 4:35 Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.

IV. Building on the True Foundation

1 Cor 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.

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

Paul had laid the proper foundation for the Church at Corinth. It was of course the Lord Jesus Christ. They were to take heed to what they built thereupon.

1 Cor. 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

The proper foundation for the church, and for the Christian life is Christ.

Matt. 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Acts 4:11 This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

When you lay out the plans for a building, you begin with a strong foundation. If the foundation is not deep enough and strong enough, the walls will fall in. In the spiritual context, the one and only perfect foundation is Jesus Christ. And He is the one that we can build upon and accomplish great things. Paul had been the first one to preach the gospel in Corinth, and Paul knew that if we want to build a church or build a successful life, we must do it on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

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

1 Cor 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.

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

1 Cor 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.

Verse 12 speaks of having the proper materials for building on the foundation. Today a few still build with imperishable materials which are the works done by God. Unfortunately, many build with perishable materials which are the works of man in man's power. The gold, silver, and precious stones come out of the

earth created by God. The are hard to get. The wood, hay, and stubble is on top of the earth and easy to get. They can be produced by man. One is perishable and the other is imperishable. One is permanent the other is temporary. One is purified by fire, the other is destroyed by fire.

One is found in small quantities, the other is found in large quantities. The proper materials speak of Christian work and building that is done according to the teaching of the Bible. The improper materials speak of work that is done contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures. God is more interested in quality than quantity. Scriptural labor will be rewarded.

1Pe 5:4 And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

Those who do unscriptural work will suffer loss. While some people will be saved, but will have no rewards. Lot lost his possessions in Sodom, but he was saved out of Sodom. Every Christian needs to realize that his life's work is going to be tested. Let us labor for God according to the Bible, so we will not suffer loss.

2 John 1:8 Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.

If a person did not believe in eternal security of the believer, I'd like to know what they think these verses teach. This is pure, simple, and perfect teaching about how works have nothing whatsoever to do with our salvation. They come in to play in our rewards as we "work out" our salvation. The "gold, silver, and precious stones" speak of the things that pass the test. These are the things of God done God's way and they will bring a reward. The "wood, hay, and stubble" all speak of things done in the flesh that can not stand the test of fire. And those things done this way will cause a "loss of rewards", but praise God, even if no works remain, we still shall be saved. In other words, if we never do something for God, we will lose a lot of rewards, but Christ will still be faithful to us.

2 Tim 2:9 Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound.

2 Tim 2:10 Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

2 Tim 2:11 It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him:

2 Tim 2:12 If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us:

2 Tim 2:13 If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

V. Warning Against Destruction of the Temple

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

1 Cor 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.

Every true Church is a temple of God, and in a sense, so is every Christian.

Eph. 2:21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: 22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

1 Pet. 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.

We see the entire church being pictured in these verses as the temple of God. The Holy Spirit comes in and takes up dwelling inside the Christian the day he or she comes to know Christ as Savior. And anyone who injures or mars this temple of God will have to give an account to God one day.

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

Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible had this to say about verses 16 and 17.

"From other parts of the epistle, it appears that the false teachers among the Corinthians taught unholy doctrines. Such teaching tended to corrupt, to pollute, and destroy the building, which should be kept pure and holy for God. Those who spread loose principles, which render the church of God unholy, bring destruction upon themselves. Christ by his Spirit dwells in all true believers. Christians are holy by profession, and should be pure and clean, both in heart and conversation. He is deceived who deems himself the temple of the Holy Ghost, yet is unconcerned about personal holiness, or the peace and purity of the church."

VI. The Thoughts of the Wise

1 Cor 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.

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

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

Self deception is perhaps the worst form of deception.

Gal. 6:3 For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.

Prov. 3:7 Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.

Prov. 26:12 Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him.

The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.

Isa. 29:14 Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.

Rom. 1:21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

God knows the thoughts of the wise of this world, and they are vain.

Col. 2:18 Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,

*1 Cor 3:21 Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours;
1 Cor 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;
1 Cor 3:23 And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.*

The apostle rebukes the Corinthians for their love of worldly wisdom. The love of worldly wisdom was producing unhappy divisions among them. Paul suggests that if any man thinks himself to be wise in this age, he needed to change and become what the world considers a fool. The world does not see the things of God for what they truly are. We need to seek God's approval, even if we are considered fools in this life. Simple childlike faith is what pleases God. With God, the wisdom of the philosophers of this world is utter and absolute foolishness.

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.

We should not glory in the wisdom or in the praises of man.

2 Cor. 4:5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

We should glory in what we have as believers.

- a. We have unlimited protection. **Ye are Christ's.**
- b. We have marvelous possessions. **All things are yours.**
- c. We have a precious position. **Ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.**

Gal. 3:29 And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

1 Cor. 8:6 But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.

* notes from E.L. Bynum added in May 2013

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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Practice Random Acts of Kindness. Each act spreads, and many will be blessed.