

First Corinthians 3

Paul has been addressing the issue of pursuing worldly wisdom instead of the cross and moves to another (related) problem – division in the church over leaders.

3:1

και εγω αδελφοι ουκ ηδυνηθην υμιν λαλησαι ως πνευματικοις αλλ ως σαρκικοις
And I brethren not could unto you speak as unto spiritual but as unto carnal

ως νηπιοις εν χριστω
even as unto babes in Christ

Problem: Corinthians have pursued “wisdom” and not the cross.

Result: Divisions with in the church

Paul had described spiritual in the previous chapter.

Paul now announces that the Corinthians are “worldly” and not “spiritual”.

“Worldly” is **sarkikoi** or “fleshly” from the word sarkh “flesh”

In 2:14 “the man without the Spirit” is called the “psychikio” or **yucikoV** or “natural” man.

In Chapter Two it was about the “natural” man with out the Spirit of God (unsaved)

In Chapter Three it is about the “fleshly” man with the Spirit of God (saved) who is living in sin or evil.

The Corinthians want to call themselves spiritual but Paul says (even though they are saved) they are not living a life that is spiritual.

In chapter two Paul made it clear that the spiritual man is a man with the spirit.

Paul’s focus concerning the work of the Spirit of God was that He makes God’s thoughts known to men.

Chapter 3 begins with Paul calling the Corinthians “worldly”.

The reason they are “worldly” is because they think like the world.

In 3:3 Paul says “you are still worldly” and gives the reason for this identification as being they “quarreling”

First they were in error in their thinking. And, then in error in their actions and interactions with others.

Here is a classic case of people being born again (with the Spirit) but thinking and living like the world (carnal, worldly, fleshly)

They did not lose their salvation (relationship) but they lost their fellowship.

Paul addresses the “brothers” and uses the plural “you” indicates Paul is addressing the entire church. Everyone has been affected by this “worldly” thinking and behavior in some way.

“Mere Infants” connects back to 2:6 “mature” who can hear the wisdom.

“Mere Infants” picks up on imagery from Paul’s day that was used to reflect a person’s progress in their understanding. It refers to moving from the basic or elementary truths to the more complete, fuller understanding.

“Babes” or “infants” is the word “nepios” and not the word Paul uses for child or children (“teknon”)

Their actions qualify them as “infants” in Christ. They have no application of truth so they really do not know the truth.

NOTICE AGAIN: They are still (and always will be) saved since they are called “mere infants in Christ.” (“Fallen from Grace” in Galatians 5:4)

House on the rock - Matthew 7:24-28
Hebrews 5:11-6:4

3:2

γαλα εποτισα υμας και ου βρωμα ουπω γαρ εδυνασθε αλλ
with milk I have fed you and not with meat hitherto for ye were but

ουτε ετι νυν δυνασθε
neither yet now not able to bear it neither + yet now are ye able

“Milk” and “solid food”??

Is Paul saying that the gospel message is “milk” for infants?

Or, is Paul using their term “milk” that they used to identify Paul’s teaching. They may think they have gone onto solid food when they went into worldly philosophy and debates.

Paul wanted to continue explaining the gospel (consider the book of Hebrews which focuses entirely on the work and ministry of Jesus).

“for you were not yet ready for it”

The problem was not in the message but in their understanding.

They had not processed the information he gave them so they could not understand the following information.

3:3

ετι γαρ σαρκικοι εστε οπου γαρ εν υμιν ζηλος και ερις και
For yet carnal ye are whereas for there is among you envying and strife and

διχοστασιαι ουχι σαρκικοι εστε και κατα εστε και κατα ανθρωπον περιπατειτε
divisions are ye not carnal and as men walk

James 4:1-8 – “quarrels . . . desires that battle within you. . . friendship with the world. . . the Spirit . . . double minded.”

“still worldly” means living and acting against God’s word.

“mere men” is the translation of the Greek “ανθρωπον περιπατειτε” or “man walk”

Paul says, ‘you are still “worldly” because you are still living like a natural, unsaved man.’

“Jealousy” is an inward attitude. It involves a person’s thinking toward others. The key being “thinking”

“Quarreling” is an outward action that results from the inward thinking. The result of bad thinking is bad actions.

3:4

In this verse it all ties together with chapter 1 verses 10-12 were it all began: Divisions based on individual men and men’s wisdom.

3:5

διακονος - deacon, minister, servant

εκαστω ως ο κυριος εδωκεν
every man the Lord bestow, bring forth, commit, deliver, give, grant, minister, have power,

This verse answers the question in 3:4: “Are you not mere men?”

The Corinthians had:

1. misunderstood the gospel
2. inadequate perception of the church
3. inadequate perception of ministry

Paul and Apollos are servants not masters
 These verse state there is one goal: the harvest.

The Corinthians perception of the servants is both too high and too low:

1. too high because they have given them authority beyond their calling and God's plan
2. too low because they have subjected them to their own human judgment.

Pastors and teachers are servants:

2 Cor. 3:6	2 Cor 6:4	2 Cor. 11:23	Rom. 16:1	Col. 1:7, 23, 25
Col. 4:7	Eph. 3:7	Ep. 6:21	1 Tim. 4:6	

Jesus teaching on servants:

Mark 10:41-45; Luke 22:25-27; Mark 10:42-45

The Cross is:

1. the center and pivot of the gospel
2. God's way to contradict the world and man's ways
3. A basic model for ministry

Paul wants the Corinthians to recognize Apollos and Paul are different because of God's plan and their growth. It should not be a source of strife.

Paul wants the Corinthians to focus on the Lord not the servants.

3:6

εγω	εφυτευσα	απολλως	εποτισεν	αλλ	ο	θεος	ηυξανεν
I have	planted	Apollos	watered	but		God	gave the increase

3:7

ωστε	ουτε	ο	φυτευων	εστιν	τι	ουτε	ο	ποτιζων	αλλ
So then	neither is	he	that plants	any thing		neither	he	that waters	but

ο	υξανων	θεος
that giveth	the increase	God

Intro to 3:10

Paul switches from the farming illustration to that of construction of a building.

Paul switches from comparing Apollos and himself (Paul plants, Apollos waters) to comparing himself (the expert builder who laid the foundation) to those who are currently building in the Corinthian church.

Romans 15:20

These are called (indefinite pronouns):

1. "someone else"
2. "no one"
3. "each one"
4. "anyone"

These others are currently building in the Corinthian church with inferior building materials.

In this analogy:

1. The building is the local Corinthian church
2. God is the owner of the building (local church)
3. Paul is the one who laid the foundation and is the founder of the Corinthian church

3:10

Κατα την χαριν του θεου την δοθεισαν μοι
“By the grace (charis) God has given me,

The “grace” (charis) is Paul’s apostolic ministry.

As an apostle Paul was responsible for revealing divine revelation and establishing the church universal and establishing local churches.

Romans 12:3 – “by the grace given me”

Paul continually returns to tell the Corinthians he is their apostle:

1. 4:15-17
2. 9:1-2
3. 2 Cor. 3:1-3
4. 2 Cor. 10:12-16

ως σοφος αρχιτεκτων θεμελιον εθηκα
“as a wise master builder a foundation I laid”

“I laid a foundation as an expert builder,

σοφος is from sophia and means “wise”

αρχιτεκτων /archetekton/ -

1. This word is more than the word simply for “carpenter” which is tektwn.
2. This is not the word for “workman” which is “”
3. “αρχιτεκτων” or “expert builder” refers to a person who is both the architect and the chief engineer.
4. “arcitektwn” means “architect, master worker, skilled craftsman”
5. A workman (*ergastikos*) provides the labor for the project but the αρχιτεκτων προωιδεσ the knowledge (This is how Plato differentiates the two.)

“Someone else is building on it.”

“Someone else” is not Apollos or Peter because:

1. In verse 3:5-8 Paul is working together with them.
2. Paul is addressing those who are currently working and building in Corinthian church. Apollos and Peter are not there.

εποικοδομει “*epoikodomei*” is “builds on” and is in the present tense giving it the meaning of continual action. This is contrast to Paul’s “laid” a foundation which is aorist.

“Each one should be careful how he builds.”

“Each one” is “hekastos” (‘ekastoV)

1. It speaks of individual responsibility
2. “Each one” refers to:
 - a. the Corinthian teachers
 - b. the church leaders
 - c. the individual church members

3:11

The only true foundation of the Christian faith, the Christian church, the Christian believer is Jesus Christ.

The Corinthians (teachers, leaders, members) are replacing Jesus Christ with the foundation of worldly wisdom.

1:23 – “Christ crucified”

2:2 – “I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

Acts 4:12, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

3:12

“If any man builds on this foundation”

“using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw”

“costly stone” is “λιθους τιμιους” (“stones precious”) means:

1. here valuable stones for building structures such as granite and marble
2. It can also refer to stones used for ornamentation

“Wood, hay or straw” were all building materials also.

“Hay” - χορτος is “grass or hay”

“Straw” - καλαμη is “stalk, straw” which was used as a roofing material for thatching roofs.

3:13

“His work will be shown for what it is”

“The Day will bring it to light.”

“The Day” is η γαρ ημερα is “the for day” and refers to a specific well-known day.

1 Thessalonians 5:4; Hebrews 10:25 – refer to “the Day”

This “Day” is the day of judgment

Malachi 3:1-4 – “who can endure the day of his coming?”

Malachi 4:1 – “the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace.”

Romans 4:10 – “bema seat”

Romans 14:12 – “each of us will give an account (“logos” a word or saying which one gives by word of mouth)

2 Cor. 5:10 – κομισοται – to receive back. It is rewarding or punishing by giving back the deeds (Col. 3:23-25)

Rev. 22:12 – reward is

“It will be revealed with fire”

“The fire will test the quality of each man’s work.”

3:14

“If what he has built survives”

“If” is in the first-class condition and the statement is assumed to be true.

“He will receive his reward.”

“reward” is μισθοσ and refers to the wages if the building worker whose work has been approved.

This word is also used in Rev. 22:12

Luke 19:16-19

3:15

“If it is burned up”

“burned up” means it is burned up completely

“He will suffer loss”

“He himself will be saved”

“But only as one escaping through the flames.”

3:16

“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple”

This is a rebuke.

This negative questioning and expecting a positive answer “yes, we do know” is used by Paul 10 times in this letter. (only one other time outside of 1 Cor.)

Two words for Temple in Greek:

1. $\eta\tau\epsilon\rho\upsilon\nu$ – the temple shrine including all the buildings, etc. in the complex.
2. Ναοσ – the sanctuary or the shrine where the deity was present. Used in 1 Cor. 3:16.

“God’s Spirit lives in you”

“Temple” is singular and refers to the church.

“you” is plural and refers to the individual as the temple as also in 1 Cor. 6:19

3:17

“If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him”

“destroy” means “to corrupt, to ruin, to spoil”

“God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple.”

The Corinthians are exalting worldly teaching with the main emphasis being on the men who do the teaching. Paul’s point has been do not let men and their worldly wisdom distract you from God and his revelation.

Paul takes the building image and reveals that the building is a temple, the temple of God.

Temple Image

This image is used again in 2 Cor. 6:16 and in Ephesians 2:21

Both Paul the Jew and the Pagan Corinthians had a culture that centered on temple worship.

“Temple” is the word “naos” ($\nu\alpha\omicron\varsigma$) and refers to the holy place, sanctuary or the actual shrine.

It is not the word “ $\eta\tau\epsilon\rho\upsilon\nu$ ” which referred to the buildings around the temple in addition to the sanctuary.

Psalm 114:2 “Judah became God’s sanctuary.”

These Corinthians were a sanctuary or temple for God in the city of Corinth.

This has eschatological ring to it:

1. Jesus said he would rebuild the temple in three days (Mark 14:58; John 2:19-21)
2. God will rebuild his temple in the last days:
 - a. Tribulation temple
 - b. Millennial temple
 - c. Eternal temple – “Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God.” Rev. 3:12

Rhetorical Question

The use of the rhetorical question (asking if they know obvious information) is used 10 times in this book:

- 3:16
- 5:6
- 6:2
- 6:3

- 6:9
- 6:15
- 6:16
- 6:19
- 9:13
- 9:24

Paul only uses this sarcastic rhetorical question 1 other time: Romans 6:16

The statement “If anyone destroys God’s temple” refers to teachers, leaders and people who destroy God’s church. In the Corinthian’s case it referred to worthless teaching.

The Corinthians were to be an alternative to the worldly ways and thinking of Corinth. They were to be God’s sanctuary in the midst of Corinth.

Destroy

The Greek says:

“If anyone the temple of God destroys, destroy this person will God.”

φθειρει/φθερει or “. . . destroys, destroy . . .”

Destroy - φθειρει “phtheirei” – these verbs mean “to corrupt, to ruin, to spoil”.

The first is present indicative active.

The second is future indicative active.

This has the sound of a holy law.

When interpreting the meaning of “destroy” it should be understood that this word is still in the context of verses 3:10-15. Two things are noted from the above illustration and one thing is note from 5:5:

- 1) The destruction is not total annihilation or eternal damnation since in 3:15 the corrupt teachers were saved through the fire.
- 2) The destruction appears to be more than temporal since the judgment of the previous image was in eternity.
- 3) “Destroy” probably should also mean some form of physical destruction when the immoral brother is handed over to Satan for that very purpose in 5:5.

Interpretation:

- 1) To interpret all this within theological borders some say that Paul is talking about 2 different groups of people. The saved in the church are mentioned in 3:10-15, but the unsaved imposters are mentioned here in 3:16-17. I disagree with that on the basis that the only way you would recognize that was if your theology demanded it.
- 2) Paul is talking hypothetically and with an unrealistic threat.
- 3) There is a level of destruction that we do not know or understand.
- 4) The destruction is of the physical life now and in eternal rewards in the future.

It is a serious matter to consider the church as God’s temple where he manifests his presence.

3:18

In this verse Paul begins to tie up 1:18-3:4

The reason they should not be deceived is that all the “great teachers” belong to the church of Corinth, the church belongs to Christ and Christ to God.

The hierarchy of the church then looks like this:

- God
- Christ
- Corinthians (Corinthian Church)
- Apostles, teachers, and then everything else that is listed.

•
“Do not deceive yourself” addresses the issue that the people of the Corinthian church (the spiritual temple of God) had settled for worldly wisdom instead of God’s revelation.

The self-deceived are destroying the church in Corinth.

Notice: “do not deceive yourself”. There is no one else to blame.

“If anyone thinks he is wise by the standards of this age” includes most of the Corinthians. This is used in 8:2 and 14:3.

“Wise” to the Corinthians is described as “the standards of this age”

3:19-20

The wisdom of the world, which was what the church in Corinth had settled for, is foolishness in God’s eyes or compared to the divine viewpoint.

This is reverse of 1:18-25 where the wisdom of God was foolishness to the world.

Now he says the wisdom of the world is foolishness to God.

Human effort to understand or even try to outsmart God has always failed.

1) Text Verse One:

“He catches the wise in their craftiness.”

2) Text Verse Two:

“The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.”

3:22

“So then. . .” is the closing of this argument.

The closing is in three parts:

1) Exhortation in 21 “Let no one boast”

2) Theological basis in 21b-23 – no more saying “I am of Paul”. The field analogy said “you are of God.” Paul’s point: All things are for you and you are of God.”

3) Doxology 23

“All things are yours” (three men, five items). These things were given to the Corinthians as tools to lead them to God and through which they could experience God. These “TOOLS” were not the main point nor the target, but tools by which to reach the target which is God. And, God is accessed through Christ.

And, Christ sent these “TOOLS” to help him lead his people into a deep relationship with God.

1) Paul

2) Apollos

3) Cephas

4) The world

5) Life

6) Death

7) Present

8) Future

“Having nothing, and yet possessing everything.” (2 Cor. 6:9-10)

3:23

“You are of Christ” and “Christ is of God”

• Here Christ is the servant of God.

• This is not a discussion on the person of Christ, but on the role of Christ.