



1 Corinthians 3

INTRODUCTION:

- Paul dealt with divisions in the congregation briefly in chapter 1. From there he dove into the Wisdom of God versus the wisdom of the world. Now in chapter 3 he goes back to the topic of divisions in the church. Think of a few reasons why he would do that:
- Agree / Disagree: *While every congregation has its share of petty squabbles, the more spiritual immaturity in a church the more problems, issues, and divisions they will have.*
- Agree / Disagree: *If a congregation grows in spiritual maturity through Bible study the divisions and problems will lessen and even go away.*

A Church full of Babies:

1 Corinthians 3:1-4

1 Brothers, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but as people who are led by the flesh, as infants in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk, not solid food, because you were not yet ready. Why, even now you are still not ready, 3 because you are still people who are following the flesh. Indeed, insofar as jealousy, strife, and factions have a place among you, are you not people who are following the flesh? Are you not behaving in a merely human way? 4 When one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not being merely human?

- Paul had just been talking about God's true wisdom—what is it?
 - Do you think the Corinthians were accusing his preaching / teaching of being too "simple" for "brilliant" Greek minds like they had?
- How does Paul prove their immaturity here?
- Agree / Disagree: *Boy, if jealousy, strife, and factions are proof of immaturity, then our culture has taken immaturity to a whole new level!*
 - List examples of spiritual immaturity we see in this "Christian" country:
 - How / why has this happened to our country so dramatically in such a short period of time?
- Define what Paul means by calling them "merely human" at the end of verse 4. Aren't we all merely human?

- While this church definitely had immaturity issues, what word can you point to in those verses that tell us Paul still considered them fellow believers?
- Agree / Disagree: *Almost every congregation nowadays, in the western world at least, is filled with spiritual babies.*
- Where does jealousy and envy show up in our circles?
- Why does God reward His servants if they are essentially nothing and God is doing all the work anyways?
 - What exactly are God's servants rewarded **for**?
 - What is God's reward apparently *not* based upon?

The Role of God's Workers:

1 Corinthians 3:5-9

5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? They are ministers through whom you believed, and each served as the Lord gave him his role. **6** I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. **7** So then, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but it is God who causes the growth. **8** The one who plants and the one who waters are united, and each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. **9** For God is the one whom we serve as coworkers, and you are God's field, God's building.

- Clearly many people in this church didn't truly understand what ministry is really all about. What might have been *their* view of ministers / ministry?

- Do we see modern examples of that kind of thinking?

- What truly is ministry—according to God / according to Paul?
- Agree / Disagree: *We're all on the same team here! There should be no jealousy or envy when it comes to ministry in God's church.*

- Apply this truth to modern ministry in the church:

- Agree / Disagree: *According to verse 9 God looks at those in ministry and treats those in ministry differently from those in the pews.*

God's Ministers Build God's Temple:

1 Corinthians 3:10-15

10 In keeping with the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder, I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. But let each person be careful how he builds on it. **11** In fact, no one can lay any other foundation than the one that has been laid, which is Jesus Christ. **12** But if anyone is building on the foundation with gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw, **13** each person's work will become evident. The Day will make it plain, because it is going to be revealed in fire, and the fire will test each person's work to show what sort of work it is. **14** If what someone has built remains, he will receive a reward. **15** If someone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but it will be like an escape through fire.

- What is the Foundation of God's Church?

- How might a Roman Catholic answer that question?
- How might liberal Christians answer that question?
- Explain what Paul means and what building with the following materials might look like:
 - Gold / Silver / Costly Stones:
 - Wood / Hay / Straw:
- Explain verse 13 and what the “fire” is that will reveal what materials have been used in the building of a particular church:
 - What might a Roman Catholic think the “fire” is?
- Agree / Disagree: *On Judgment Day everybody standing will now be a confessional Lutheran.*
- Describe the pastor who survives like one escaping through the flames:

Destructive “wisdom” and God’s Wisdom:

1 Corinthians 3:16-20

16 Do you not know that you yourselves are God’s temple, and that God’s Spirit lives in you? 17 If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and that is what you are.

18 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this world, let him become a fool so that he may become wise. 19 To be sure, the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their craftiness,” 20 and again, “The Lord knows the reasoning of the wise; he knows that it is worthless.” 21 Therefore let no one boast about men. For all things belong to you— 22 whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come. All things belong to you, 23 and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

- What is “God’s Temple”? Paul used this illustration on both an individual level (our bodies) and a collective level (the Church). What point is he making in verses 16-17?
 - Point to examples of those who are destroying God’s Temple:
 - Is Paul here talking about terrorists and those who attack / burn churches and kill Christians?
(Use the context to defend your answer)
- Agree / Disagree: *The worst thing a person could ever do in God’s eyes is be a bad pastor in the church.*
- How does one “become a fool” in order to become wise?
- Agree / Disagree: *All of higher education today in public universities is worthless garbage.*

- Are we guilty of “boasting about men” and if so, then how?
- Explain that last sentence from the end of verse 22 into verse 23:

CONCLUSION:

- What’s the strong connection Paul makes here between worldly “wisdom” and congregational problems?
- *Agree / Disagree: Embracing worldly wisdom is still the biggest problem in the church, and the effects of it are totally destructive.*
- What practical lessons can we take from this chapter of Scripture?

CLOSING PRAYER: