

1 Corinthians

Chapter 3:1-23

March 3, 1996

- **1 Corinthians Outline:**

- Chapter 1 Ungodly divisions result from man's wisdom.
- Chapter 2 Carnal man cannot understand our Spiritual God.
- Chapter 3 All Christians will have their labors tried by fire.

- **1 Corinthians 3:1-23**

- **Introduction & Review**

In the prior two chapters Paul has focused on two primary issues, first he charges the Corinthians with the sin of division or sectarianism and secondly he declares the foolishness of man's wisdom.

In this chapter Paul primarily returns to the sin of divisions but also adds to his instruction the antithesis of God's wisdom and man's wisdom.

- **Exposition**

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.² I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able;³ for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?⁴ For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?

- Paul returns to the issue of division here and we again see that the division lines were humans. Most likely the divisions weren't of doctrinal substance but were probably of teaching style or reputation. Certainly it is not wrong to say that one agrees with Paul or Apollos. But these men themselves were not divided so why should their followers?
- The scriptures do tell us to separate ourselves from false teachers. But splitting over a clearly heretical teaching is not the same thing as dividing over some preference. Division is not something that can be traced back to the biblical doctrine.
- The more discipling that people get from one teacher the greater the temptation to be worldly. Frequently this principle manifests itself by people starting to think that something is true simply because some individual said it. If you are being instructed by someone and the point the teacher is making is clearly in the text, then give the credit to God for writing the text not to the one who may have taught the principle to you.(note verse 5)

⁵ Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.⁷ So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.⁸ Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

- Here Paul gives us an important truth about human leaders. Yes, God has given teachers as a gift to the church for the purpose of equipping the saints and growing in grace and sanctification. However, this is not to say that the growth comes from the teachers. God is the provider of growth. The emphasis should be on the wonderful part of the spiritual work-growth.
- As Paul will discuss in great detail later in this book, not all Christians have the same gifts however, all of the gifts are important to the body and God will reward each of us accordingly.

⁹ For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.¹⁰ According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it.¹¹ For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

- Here Paul explicitly says that he and Apollos are coworkers and that the Corinthian saints were the field, that is, the fruits of their labor. But notice his real point. He and Apollos were God's coworkers, the saints were God's field. The point is that we are all God's and it is Him that is worthy of the glory not the teachers.

- As a bit of additional background, we know that God established the Corinthian church through Paul. After he left it appears that Apollos came in and continued in the discipling of the saints at Corinth. In addition, there were most likely four epistles to the church at Corinth. Most scholars believe that our 1 & 2 Corinthians are really the second and fourth and that the first and third have not been preserved for us.
- We see here Paul reiterating his single minded focus, Christ crucified. He states that he came in to lay a foundation upon which someone else was building upon and that the foundation was Christ. When we are out of fellowship with God our points of reference and alignment are all misaligned. We cannot depart from the foundation when we are building the building.

12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,¹³ each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.¹⁴ If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

- If someone does depart from the foundation if it isn't immediately obvious, it will become as "the Day" approaches. There are at least two ways of understanding the Day. First it could be a time of intense persecution where we will see how effective the teacher has been in equipping the saints. An intense persecution in the United States upon the Church I believe would reveal that much of the it is actually wood, hay and stubble that is built up to look like a viable, safe building. We see Christ says something similar when He compares a house built on sand and one built on rock. The buildings may look the same but when the storm comes the true nature of the foundation is revealed. Both a temporal and God's eternal judgment will reveal the quality of our work.
- More likely is the understanding that the Day is a judgment for believers that God will perform in the last day. God will pour out His fire upon the Church (not Hell fire or the Lake of Fire, but a refining fire). Those who depart from the foundation and don't build in line with it, will be made manifest. But God through His refinement will rectify the problem of poor construction and remove the part of the building that is out of alignment although the builder may be saved albeit as one having come through a fire.

16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?¹⁷ If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.

- We see a strong warning from Paul that those who attack the Church (the Temple) God will destroy. Those institutions that have set themselves against His Church, (God hating nations, ACLU, etc.) God will destroy this either with a temporal judgment or certainly with an eternal one.
- The Greek form of the word "you" it is not the singular form of the word. Here Paul is addressing the Saints collectively which make up the temple of God. Note this instruction on the Temple of God, and in chapter 6, is not the Biblical case to be made for aerobics, avoiding refined sugar or taking vitamins. There are two different things being addressed in these verses. Here collectively the Saints make up the temple of God. In chapter 6, Paul states that only sexual sin is an assault directly on the Temple of the Holy Spirit and that all other sins are outside of the Temple.

18 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness";²⁰ and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."²¹ Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours.²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come-all are yours.²³ And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's. NKJV

- Paul reiterates the contrast between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God. Those who are wise by the standards of the world will need to forsake so that he may become wise with God's wisdom. The graduate degrees and years of developing debate skills are of no value in gaining God's wisdom if the person thinks that they don't need God's wisdom.
- Christians ought to know that the wisdom of the world is futile. Unfortunately we are frequently befuddled by their wisdom and we become intimidated and enamored with their intellect. But the truth is that this ungodly wisdom is not wisdom at all and is actually futility.
- Paul concludes by admonishing them not to divide by their teacher because all things are ours. We need not find things to drag into our corner and get our hands around, for all things are already ours. Both Paul and Apollos are a blessing to the Church.