

Intro. How many of you ever upset or disappointed your parents because you did something that ran contrary to how they had taught you? I remember disappointing my father when I quit the basketball team during my 9th grade year, not so much because Dad wanted me to play, but because he didn't raise quitters. In a similar fashion, the Bible addresses Christians who aren't living like Christians & that can be one of the “Growing Pains” a church experiences. As the church grows, we reach people from all walks of life & people at different stages in their spiritual journey & people who have been influenced by less than the best in terms of Christian teaching (like many televangelists). This problem is “Carnality among Christians” & 1 Corinthians 3 addresses it.

Theme: Unity in true spirituality

Background: Paul writes to the Corinthian church a few years after he planted it to address problems in the growing church, one of which was divisiveness.

- The first 4 verses of chapter 3 is Paul's way of re-addressing the main problem in the church at Corinth—divisions rooted in carnality. Paul mentions 3 types of people at the end of chapter 2 & beginning of chapter 3—(1) natural (unbeliever), (2) spiritual (believer), & (3) carnal (believer living like the unbeliever)—believers living like the world, following its wisdom & boasting in certain leaders over others.
 - In light of this issue of “Carnality among Christians,” God's Word provides 2 remedies for you
- I. Build Yourselves Up Spiritually in the Lord (3:5-17)**
- A. As equal workers in God's field (3:5-9a)**
- Every believer is ultimately a co-servant in the work of God (3:5)
 - Just because someone plants at the most opportune time & another irrigates (a water boy, if you will) & cultivates, only God can make a plant grow (3:6f)—as tedious as farmers might be in their fields, they ultimately depend on God to bring forth the finished product
 - “we are God's fellow workers” (3:9)—we are God's employees

Illus: One of the many advantages at starting our country in the latter part of the 18th century is that our nation was clearly set up without a state church—this broke a 1500 year pattern in Europe, South America, & parts of Asia & Africa. Some people like to mock denominationalism where people decide for themselves what they want to believe & how they want to practice their faith, but with all the trouble denominationalism brings, it is far better than the alternative of a state church, where the government decides what you must believe & how you must practice your faith. Furthermore, whereas a state church depends on the clergy to do the work (with the help of the state passing along tax money), the most effective denominations tapped into voluntarism (Bible tract societies & mission societies of the 1790s & early 1800s). Such voluntarism teaches that while clergy are important in leading God's people, everyone is responsible for doing the work of ministry in building up the body of Christ & helping it grow & reach a community

B. As lasting material in God's building (3:9b-17)

- Paul switches the analogy of how we are to work for the Lord in demonstration of our faith from farmers in a field to builders of a structure
- “master builder” (3:10)—from *architektos* (architect)
- Build upon the foundation of Jesus Christ (3:10-11)—what we learn from & about Jesus from the prophets & apostles (cf. Ephesians 2:20) is foundational to the Christian faith, with the Person & work of Christ as the chief cornerstone (cf. Acts 4:11)

Illus: Foundations are not only important in building structures to stand, but they are absolutely crucial to a building's lasting success. Virtually everyone is familiar with the Leaning Tower of Pisa. What began from a desire for others to know of the magnificence of Pisa in the 13th century quickly became a joke. A few years after construction began, architects realized that they had built it over a dried up river bed & they began to correct it. It ultimately took several decades to build & has a

slight banana curve to it. In the 1990s, architects realized that unless they corrected it, it was going to topple over in a few years, because measurements taken indicated that it was still shifting ever so slightly each year. Thus, they tied off steel cables & re-stabilized the foundation to help it last many more centuries. That tower teaches us the importance of solid foundations

- Once you have a solid foundation, however, what you use to build on it is still important, for certain material wastes away much more quickly than other material. Paul looks at the Christian life & the works one does for the Lord as a result of salvation & compares it to building material. Certain material is rare & of great value (gold, silver & precious stones) while other is common & of little value (wood, hay & stubble). The former survives & purifies through fire while the latter is burned up & consumed. Christians shouldn't look at the average Christian in getting their cues on how to live their lives, but they all to use God's grace in their lives to perform works that are rare, valuable, & will be purified by fire
- Such a judgment of works will occur for every believer at the judgment seat of Christ (cf. Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10)—this isn't a judgment of salvation but of reward. Some say, "I don't care what rewards I get as long as I'm saved," but that's the wrong view of these passages. What if a person said, "Well, I got married to my spouse & that's all I really wanted, so it doesn't matter if I do anything good for him/her so long as we're married"—would that be a relationship worth having? So the Christian has received the grace of God in Christ in their life & then worked for the Lord as a result of salvation, receiving additional crowns (incorruptible, 9:25; rejoicing, 1 Thess 2:19; life, James 1:12; Revelation 2:10; righteousness, 2 Timothy 4:8; unfading, 1 Peter 5:4), which will then be laid before the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Revelation 4:10)
- Paul relates the way a believer works for the Lord & the building material he uses with the believer as the temple of God where the Spirit of God dwells (3:16-17)
- Paul doesn't use the word *hiera* for the entire temple precinct but the word *naos*, the holy of holies—God dwells with His people in relationship with Christ (cf. John 1:14) just as He dwelt with His people in the OT (Exodus 40; Ezekiel 10)
- The one who "destroys" God's temple is the idea of "spoiling" it—treating the Christian life as nothing, then God will spoil him & the church characterized by such (3:17)

II. Boast in the Lord (3:18-23)

A. Shun the wisdom of this world (3:18-20)

- Believers in the church must shun the wisdom of the world, because such wisdom relies on the strength of man rather than the strength of God (cf. 1:18-30)
- Paul supports his claim with 2 OT passages—Job 5:13 & Psalm 94:11

B. Seek the wisdom of God in Christ (3:21-23)

- Believers shouldn't boast in men (mere mortals), but in whatever you have, you have in Christ, & Christ belongs to God & boasting in that which is His is genuine wisdom

Illus: We like to play games as a family. Sometimes it is sit-down games like Monopoly or Life or Uno & sometimes it is laser guns outside in the dark. One of my kids' favorite games is hide-n-seek & my kids enjoy finding each other, but they especially like finding Daddy. Just as my kids like to seek their father, so we should seek the wisdom of our heavenly father & boast in His work.

Conc. I mentioned that I had quit the 9th grade basketball team & my Dad didn't raise quitters. After 1 day of facing my Dad's displeasure, I went back to the coach & repented & got back on the team (though I paid a price for it). But at the end of that year, I had been in better shape than any other time & had my best all-around year. So maybe you've been living in a way that hasn't pleased the Lord. You can repent & start building your life with lasting material. The key issue to building, however, is the foundation. Do you have the foundation of Christ & His work in your life? Turn from your sin & trust in Him so you can begin to build a life that lasts.