

1 Corinthians, Chapter 3

The Corinthians had shown spiritual immaturity (“infants in Christ” – 1 Cor. 3:1) in wanting to follow human leaders, whether Paul, Peter, or Apollos. St. Paul reminds emphatically that it is not man but God who is the true tiller of spiritual soil and builder of His church. It is important, then, that workers in God’s employ build up the Christian congregation on the basis of the Word of God. Those who construct the church on the sure foundation of the Gospel of Christ will see their work survive. But those who build otherwise interfere with the orderly growth of the church and bring themselves and their work under divine judgment. It is both futile and foolish, as well as contrary to its duties and rights, for a Christian congregation to subject itself to the opinions of human leaders who depart from the Word of God. **Read: 1 Corinthians 3.**



1. In 1 Cor. 3:1, St. Paul picks up the concept of “mature” from 1 Cor. 2:6, but here uses the term “spiritual” and contrasts it with “flesh.” How do you understand the following passages to mean by milk and solid food?
 - a. 1 Cor. 3:1-2
 - b. Hebrews 5:11-14

2. As an infant must start with a diet of milk, but as time goes along the infant begins to eat solid food as well. How do the following passages say about how Christians mature?
 - a. Acts 20:32
 - b. Ephesians 4:11-16

3. St. Paul calls himself and Apollos “servants” (1 Cor. 3:5) to whom God had assigned specific tasks.
 - a. What tasks had God entrusted to Paul and Apollos regarding the church at Corinth?

 - b. While their tasks differed, Paul and Apollos served one purpose (1 Cor. 3:8). What was that purpose? (1 Cor. 3:5)

 - c. St. Paul refers to a reward God will give to all His faithful servants who go about their several tasks (1 Cor. 3:8). How does the master reward his faithful servants in the Parable of the Talents? (Matthew 25:19-23)

 - d. Consider your role in God’s Kingdom. What specific tasks has God assigned to you in your daily vocation?

4. St. Paul refers to the church by using several descriptive terms: “God’s field” (1 Cor. 3:9); “God’s building” (1 Cor. 3:9); and “God’s temple” (1 Cor. 3:16). The first step in the construction of a building is laying the foundation. St. Paul identifies Jesus Christ as the foundation upon which the building rests (1 Cor. 3:11). In what way(s) does Jesus provide a solid foundation? (Consider: Matthew 7:24-27)

5. St. Paul declares that he laid the foundation in Jesus Christ in Corinth.
 - a. How did he lay this foundation? (1 Cor. 2:2)
 - b. What do you conclude about St. Paul's view of himself as a church builder from the phrases "according to the grace of God given to me" and as "a skilled master builder" (1 Cor. 3:10)
6. In 1 Cor. 3:12-15, St. Paul contrasts building materials that will endure (gold, silver, precious stones) to those that will not endure (wood, hay, straw). The quality of workmanship will be made evident when the Lord returns (1 Cor. 3:13).
 - a. How might churches be tempted to build using other materials than the Gospel of Jesus Christ?
 - b. Examine your own priorities: How are you spending your time, talents, and treasure in ways that will endure beyond this life? Are any changes of priorities in order?
7. The third word picture "God's temple" refers here not to Christians as individuals but to the whole church as the body of believers. Just as the Holy Spirit dwells within the church as a body of believers. How can viewing the church as the dwelling of the Holy Spirit, as sacred and as under God's watchful protection, encourage us when we are disappointed in the failings or weaknesses of other church members?
8. What is the solution for divisions in the church? (1 Cor. 3:21-23)
9. Reflect on your own spiritual growth. In what areas do you need most to grow through a more intensive use of the Word of God in your daily life? In what areas do you feel you have grown the most? How can you grow spiritually (Consider: Acts 20:32; Ephesians 4:1-5, 14-15)

Closing Prayer: (from LSB 644 - The Church's One Foundation)

- 1 The Church's one foundation Is Jesus Christ, her Lord; She is His new creation By water and the Word.
From heav'n He came and sought her To be His holy bride; With His own blood He bought her,
And for her life He died.
- 2 Elect from ev'ry nation, Yet one o'er all the earth; Her charter of salvation: One Lord, one faith, one birth.
One holy name she blesses, Partakes one holy food, And to one hope she presses With ev'ry grace endued.
Amen.

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Sources: God's Word for Today: 1 Corinthians (CPH: 1997), LifeLight: 1 Corinthians (CPH: 2007), Luther's Works (CPH, Fortress), Concordia Commentary: 1 Corinthians (CPH: 2000)