

# 1 Corinthians 3 Commentary

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1 CORINTHIANS - PROBLEMS OF A LOCAL CHURCH

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**FROM CHART: Note 2 major divisions:**

- **FIRST DIVISION** - Chapters 1-6 = Problems of Congregation - Divisions & Depravities,
- **SECOND DIVISION** - Chapters 7-16 = Personal Problems, Worship Problems

**Paul Apple's Summary DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH -- EXALT GOD RATHER THAN MAN**

(1 Cor 1:18 - 2:16) The effective communication of the wisdom of God by powerfully preaching the crucified Christ = Exalting God rather than Man

(1 Cor 1:18-25) Wisdom of God: The word of the cross is true power and wisdom --

Only the message of Christ crucified impacts man with the power and wisdom of God

(1 Cor 1:26-31) Nullifying man's pride: Divine election leaves no room for man's pride --

The divine initiative in election nullifies man's pride so that God gets all the credit

(1 Cor 2:1-5) Powerfully preaching Christ --

The effectiveness of preaching derives from its focus on the crucified Christ and its dynamic of the power of God rather than from the eloquence or personality or popularity of the particular preacher

(1 Cor 2:6-8) The mystery aspect of the wisdom of God --

The message of the cross is only foolishness to those who don't understand the coming glory

(1 Cor 2:9-16) Spirit taught truth -- Spirit reveals . . . Spirit inspires . . . Spirit illumines --

The Holy Spirit directs the communication and understanding of divine wisdom through three fundamental processes

(1 Cor 2:17 - 4:5) Ego-less construction of the church of God by following the blueprint of the wise master builder = Exalting God rather than Man

(1 Cor 3:1-4) The danger of sectarianism --

Fleshly sectarianism is an unnatural state for the believer and stunts spiritual growth

(1 Cor 3:5-9) Sectarianism defeated by giving all glory to God --

All of the accolades for spiritual ministry should go to God who causes the growth -- not to the particular servants laboring together on God's behalf

(1 Cor 3:10-15) Divine blueprint for spiritual construction --

The hard work of spiritual ministry can reap eternal rewards when we build wisely on the proper foundation

(1 Cor 3:16-17) The sanctity of the local church as the temple of God --

Because the local church is God's holy sanctuary, anyone who damages (destroys / corrupts) it will be punished accordingly

(1 Cor 3:18-23) God's wisdom always trumps man's wisdom --

Two foolish mistakes that undermine God's wisdom and cause division within the local church: - Thinking too highly of self- Thinking too highly of any prominent men (notable teachers, spiritual leaders)

(1 Cor 4:1-5) Performance review for Christian ministers --

The judgment of the Lord is all that matters when it comes to ultimate accountability for Christian ministry

(1 Cor 4:6-21) Power to Discipline those Causing Divisions in the church (4:6-13) Exposing arrogant pride and self sufficiency --

Boasting in particular prominent preachers demonstrates arrogant pride and self sufficiency

(1 Cor 4:14-21) Tough love --

Effective spiritual leadership aggressively confronts sin and provides just the right balance of nurture and discipline for the need of the moment to achieve the desired change in behavior

### **1 Corinthians 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.**

Amplified HOWEVER, BRETHREN, I could not talk to you as to spiritual [men], but as to nonspiritual [men of the flesh, in whom the carnal nature predominates], as to mere infants [in the new life] in Christ unable to talk yet!]

Wuest - As for myself, I also, brethren, was not able to speak to you as I would to those dominated by the Holy Spirit, but as I would to those dominated by the evil nature, as I would to those in Christ who are still immature spiritually. ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

NET 1 Corinthians 3:1 So, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but instead as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ.

NLT 1 Corinthians 3:1 Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in the Christian life.

ESV 1 Corinthians 3:1 But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ.

NIV 1 Corinthians 3:1 Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly--mere infants in Christ.

GNT 1 Corinthians 3:1 Κ γ , δελφο , ο κ δυν θην λαλσαι μ ν ς πνευματικο ς λλ ς σαρκ νοις, ς νηπι οις ν Χριστ .

KJV 1 Corinthians 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.

YLT 1 Corinthians 3:1 And I, brethren, was not able to speak to you as to spiritual, but as to fleshly -- as to babes in Christ;

ASV 1 Corinthians 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ.

CSB 1 Corinthians 3:1 Brothers, I was not able to speak to you as spiritual people but as people of the flesh, as babies in Christ.

NKJ 1 Corinthians 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.

NRS 1 Corinthians 3:1 And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ.

NAB 1 Corinthians 3:1 Brothers, I could not talk to you as spiritual people, but as fleshly people, as infants in Christ.

NJB 1 Corinthians 3:1 And so, brothers, I was not able to talk to you as spiritual people; I had to talk to you as people still living by your natural inclinations, still infants in Christ;

GWN 1 Corinthians 3:1 Brothers and sisters, I couldn't talk to you as spiritual people but as people still influenced by your corrupt nature. You were infants in your faith in Christ.

BBE 1 Corinthians 3:1 And the teaching I gave you, my brothers, was such as I was able to give, not to those who have the Spirit, but to those who are still in the flesh, even to children in Christ.

- **as to spiritual:** 1Co 2:6,15 Ga 6:1
- **as to men of flesh:** 1Co 3:3,4 2:14 Mt 16:23 Ro 7:14
- **infants:** 1Co 14:20 Eph 4:13,14 1Jn 2:12
- 1 Corinthians 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **BORN AGAIN BUT STILL IN "DIAPERS!"**

[Robert Murray McCheyne](#) was a minister in Scotland in the last century. He was only thirty years old when he died, but he made an enormous spiritual impact on Scotland that still continues. He said, "It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likenesses to Jesus... A man cannot be a faithful minister until he preaches Christ for Christ's sake, until he gives up striving to attract people to himself, and seeks only to attract them to Christ." In this chapter we see how Paul embodied this principle.

**Albert Barnes** sums up Chapter 3 - The design of this chapter is substantially the same as the former. It is to reprove the pride, the philosophy, the vain wisdom on which the Greeks so much rested; and to show that the gospel was not dependent on that for its success, and that that had been the occasion of no small part of the contentions and strifes which had arisen in the church at Corinth. ([Barnes Notes](#))

**John MacArthur** - From 1 Cor 1:18 through 1 Cor 2:16 Paul points out that the Corinthians were divided because of worldliness, because of their continued love for human wisdom. In 1 Cor 3:1–9 the apostle shows them that they also were divided because of the flesh, because of their continued yielding to the evil in their humanness. The cause of division in the church was more than an external, worldly influence. It was also internal, fleshly. The Corinthians had succumbed to the pressures of the world, but they were also succumbing to the pressures and enticements of their own flesh. ([MNTC-1 Cor](#))

**Paige Patterson** - The apostle began this discussion with an astonishing turn in light of the closing verse in chapter 2. Having just discussed the natural man's inability to receive the things of the Spirit of God, while confirming that the Corinthian believers had the mind of Christ, he, nevertheless, was forced to say that while the Corinthians enjoyed this decided spiritual advantage, they had not availed themselves of all its potentials. (Troubled and Triumphant Church: An Exposition of First Corinthians)

**D A Carson** has some wise introductory remarks on aberrant interpretations of 1 Corinthians 3 - Few passages of the New Testament have been abused by preachers and writers more than this one. **First**, large branches of Christendom have appealed to this chapter to support a doctrine of **purgatory** (ED: [see note below](#)). Unlike hell, the experience of purgatory is said to be temporary. Believers with unconfessed sin go there to suffer for awhile until God judges that they are ready for heaven. Such a person will be saved, "but only as one escaping through the flames" (1 Cor. 3:15). This is the only passage in the New Testament that has even a remote chance of supporting a doctrine of purgatory, so what we understand it to mean is clearly important. Generally speaking, those who adhere to a doctrine of purgatory rest much of the weight of their argument not on the Old or New Testaments, but on [apocryphal books](#) and [church tradition](#). **Second** (and more commonly in evangelicalism, especially American evangelicalism), some appeal to this passage for a **threefold division of the human race**. At one end is the "**natural man**" (KJV), the person without the Spirit (1 Cor 2:14), the unregenerate. At the other end is the "spiritual man" (1 Cor 2:15), the Christian who is walking with the Lord in joyful obedience and fruitfulness. **In between is the "carnal" man** (KJV; "worldly" in the NIV, 1 Cor 3:1-4), **the person who is a Christian and who is assured of heaven, but who is living a life indistinguishable from the world. Such a person, we are told, "will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames." Whatever work he or she has done "is burned up"; such people "suffer loss"** (1 Cor 3:15). At a superficial level, this interpretation sounds plausible enough, until one observes (as we shall) that verse 15, which talks about suffering loss and escaping through the flames, **does not apply such language to the "worldly" person or the "carnal" Christian at all**. Certainly there is such a thing as a **carnal** or **worldly** Christian, but the "**carnal Christian**" theory has in recent years taken on some fairly weird extremes that bear little relation to what this chapter actually says. When we remember that this is the only place where the New Testament uses this language, we are forced to recognize that it is important to get the interpretation of the passage right....Although Paul directly addresses the bitter factionalism of the Corinthian believers in these chapters, he does so in part by tackling two deeper problems that lie behind the factionalism and undergird it. The first is the Corinthians' implicit misunderstanding of the gospel, and in particular of the centrality of the cross. Pragmatically, their love of pomp, prestige, rhetoric, social approval, publicly lauded "wisdom"—in short, their raw triumphalism—demonstrated that they had not reflected very deeply on the entailments of the gospel of the crucified Messiah. That is why Paul spends so much time on these points in the first two chapters of his epistle. But the second implicit misunderstanding displayed by these squabbling Corinthians concerned the nature of Christian leadership. As long as some Christians are saying, "I am of Paul [or Apollos, or Cephas, or Wesley, or Calvin]," making some Christian leader the prime point of their identification, they do not truly grasp the nature of Christian leadership. Clearing up these misapprehensions is what largely occupies the apostle in 1 Corinthians 3-4. (See context in [The Cross and Christian Ministry](#) or borrow a copy of [The cross and Christian ministry : leadership lessons from 1 Corinthians](#)).

**And I** - yet: marker of emphasis, involving surprise and unexpectedness

**Brethren** ([adelphos](#)) - Before Paul "unloads" on them, he reminds them of their spiritual relationship to him - they are brothers in Christ. He is their brother, not their judge. He has just stated "we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16+) which affirms their brotherhood (which he again affirms noting that the Spirit of God dwells in them - 1 Cor 3:16). This emphasizes that they had grasped the message of the Cross, which Paul earlier stated he "determined to know nothing among (them) except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." (1 Cor 2:2). It was important that the saints know that they were genuine believers because of their continued tendency to fall into sins described in this letter. Their salvation was [eternally secure](#). Of course Paul is not excusing their frequent lapses into sin nor taking them lightly, as the remainder of the letter emphasizes.

**Could not speak to you as to spiritual men** ([pneumatikos](#)) - Who are **spiritual men** in context? "He who is **spiritual** appraises ([anakrino](#) - present tense- continually examines carefully) all things." (1 Cor 2:15+) But these believers were not **spiritual men**, I like the way Wuest paraphrases it "was not able to speak to you as I would to those dominated by the Holy Spirit." ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

**MacArthur** explains that the Corinthians "had come through the door of faith but had gone no farther. Most of them had received Jesus Christ years earlier but were acting as if they had just been born again....So a Christian is not characterized by sin (THAT IS BY A LIFESTYLE OF SIN); it no longer represents his basic nature. But he is still able to sin, and his sin is just as sinful as the sin of an unbeliever. Sin is sin. When a Christian sins, he is being practically unspiritual, living on the same practical level as an unbeliever. Consequently Paul is compelled to speak to the Corinthian *believers* much as if they were *unbelievers*" (See context in [1 Corinthians Commentary](#))

It is interesting that a number of commentaries interpret Paul's initial description in 1 Cor 3:1-2 as applying primarily to the Corinthians **present** immature condition. But if one reads the text carefully, it actually describes Paul's original visit to Corinth, when he gave sinners the pure milk of the Gospel and they became saints (1 Cor 1:2+), born again by the Spirit. He continued to give them milk (for 18 months) which would be expected since they were still spiritual infants, so to speak. Just as newborn babies cannot eat solid food, newborn believers cannot eat solid food. Of course, while 1 Cor 3:1-2 describes a **past** event, in context, Paul is clearly using their past experience to help them (and us) understand their **present** spiritual state, some 4-5 years later.

**Zodhiates** on **could not speak to you as to spiritual men** - The Greek verb translated "**could not**" is *ēdunēthēn*, which is in the second aorist tense, taking Paul back to the time when he was among them ministering the Word of God (ED: ESTIMATED TO BE SOME 5 YEARS EARLIER). It does not mean that Paul was incapable of preaching spiritual realities to them (AS NEWBORN BELIEVERS), but that they were unable to receive them, nor did they desire to receive them."

**D A Carson** - At some point the number of years they have been Christians leads you to expect something like mature behavior from them, but they prove disappointing. They are infants still and display their wretched immaturity even in the way that they complain if you give them more than milk. Not for them solid knowledge of Scripture; not for them mature theological reflection; not for them growing and perceptive Christian thought. They want nothing more than another round of choruses and a "simple message"—something that won't challenge them to think, to examine their lives, to make choices, and to grow in their knowledge and adoration of the living God. So the Corinthians, then, are wretchedly immature believers. (See context in [The Cross and Christian Ministry - Lessons in Leadership from 1 Corinthians](#) or borrow a copy of [The cross and Christian ministry](#)).

**Wayne Barber** echoes this thought writing "and it is so critical to understand this, there is a time to be a babe. It is okay. There is a time to be a babe in Christ. He says, "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ." When he says "could not," that is aorist indicative. He seems to be pointing back to a time in the past when he was with them and he could not speak to them as unto spiritual men. He obviously is pointing back to the time when he was there, when they were first birthed into the kingdom because of the preaching of himself and then later on Apollos and others."

**MacArthur** - When Paul first preached to the Corinthians he taught the more easily digestible elementary truths of doctrine, the milk. But now, some five years later, they still needed to be fed milk. They could not yet spiritually digest solid food. (See context in [1 Corinthians Commentary](#))

**R C H Lenski** explains 1 Cor 3:1-2 this way "As he did in the first paragraph of chapter 2, Paul again reaches back to the time when he first worked in Corinth, but he does so only briefly in order to compare the present state of the Corinthians with their beginnings in the faith, a comparison that must fill them with shame, for they (were still acting) like babes, babes who had not grown up. This was bound to hurt their pride, but Paul intends that it should....The historical [aorist \(could not\)](#) takes us back into the past when the Corinthians were beginners in the faith, and the [aorist infinitive \(speak\)](#) sums up the speaking and the preaching of Paul at that time. The pronoun "I" is emphatic, for the apostle was their preacher at that time. The Corinthians were beginners in those early days and as such could not then be treated as [pneumatikos](#), real spiritually minded people, but only as [sarkinos](#), people still fleshy in their way of thinking and acting and not able, like a truly spiritual man, to judge aright all things, 1 Cor 2:15. Paul does not fault the Corinthians for this early condition of theirs, for he adds the apposition "**as infants in Christ.**" We must all be "**infants**" at first in the natural course of our spiritual development. There is something tender in the term, and it implies maternal solicitude on Paul's part and motherly care in helping these infants to grow up and to become strong and mature spiritually. Thank God that the Corinthians were converted by Paul's preaching and were united to Christ in faith and thus began their Christian career! While [nepios](#), "**infants,**" removes all blame, it still suggests a...condition of immaturity that ought soon to pass away....Paul tells the Corinthians: "When you were still quite fleshy and infants in Christ as to the Spirit, mere ABC scholars in the faith, I had to treat you as such in order to make you grow, and I did so." (See context in [The Interpretation of I Corinthians](#))

**MacArthur** gives an excellent explanation on how the Bible uses **spiritual** in reference to men -

When applied to men, however, it is used of their relationship to God in one of two ways **positionally** or **practically**. Unbelievers are totally unspiritual in both senses. They possess neither a new spirit (Ezek 11:19+, Ezek 36:26+) nor the Holy Spirit (Ezek 36:27+). Their position is natural and their practice is natural (1 Cor 2:14+). Believers, on the other hand, are **totally spiritual in the positional** sense, because they have been given a new inner being that loves God and is indwelt by His Holy Spirit. But practically, believers can also be unspiritual. In 2:14–15 Paul contrasts believers and unbelievers, and his use of "spiritual" in that context refers, therefore, to positional spirituality. The "natural man" (v. 14) is the unsaved; "he who is spiritual" (v. 15) is the saved. In the positional sense, there is no such thing as an unspiritual Christian or a partially spiritual Christian. In this sense every believer is equal. This spiritual is a synonym for possessing the life of God in the soul, or as we saw in 2:16, having the mind of Christ....**Practically**, however, believers may be anything but spiritual. Such were the Corinthian Christians. Paul addressed them as brethren, but he made it clear that he had to speak to them on the lowest possible spiritual level. He had to speak to them as if they were men of flesh. (See context in [The MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#)) (Bold added) (See also MacArthur's discussion on [1 Corinthians 3 Carnal Christians](#))

**Spiritual** (4152) ([pneumatikos](#) from [pneuma](#) = wind, spirit <> in turn from [pneo](#) = to blow) is an adjective which means pertaining to the wind and then relating to the realm of the spirit referring to the inner, invisible sphere of a human being. As **Barclay** says "the man who is **pneumatikos** is the man who is sensitive to the

Spirit and whose life is guided by the Spirit." Pneumatikos primarily is used of impersonal things - law (Ro 7:14), gift (Ro 1:11), blessing (Eph 1:3), songs (Eph 5:19, Col 3:16), food (1Cor 10:13), understanding (Col 1:9 - as given by the Spirit). Believers are a spiritual (pneumatikos) house and offer spiritual sacrifices (1Pe 2:5). **Pneumatikos** can refer to what belongs to, or is actuated by, the Divine Spirit and so speaks of **persons**: 1 Cor 2:13, 2:15, 3:1, 14:37; Gal 6:1; 1 Pet 2:5. **Pneumatikos** refers to Jesus (1Cor 15:47). Vine says "**Pneumatikos** "always connotes the ideas of invisibility and of power....The **spiritual man** is one who walks by the Spirit both in the sense of Galatians 5:16 and in that of Galatians 5:25 , and who himself manifests the fruit of the Spirit in his own ways." NT uses of **pneumatikos** - Ro 1:11; Ro 7:14; Ro 15:27; 1 Co. 2:13; 1 Co. 2:15; 1 Co. 3:1; 1 Co. 9:11; 1 Co. 10:3; 1 Co. 10:4; 1 Co. 12:1; 1 Co. 14:1; 1 Co. 14:37; 1 Co. 15:44; 1 Co. 15:46; Gal. 6:1; Eph. 1:3; Eph. 5:19; Eph. 6:12; Col. 1:9; Col. 3:16; 1 Pet. 2:5.

But ([alla](#) - strong term of contrast) **as to men of flesh** ([sarkinos](#)), **as to infants** ([nepios](#)) in Christ - [Wuest](#) paraphrases **men of flesh** as "those dominated by the evil nature." **Infants** is an apropos metaphor for those who were born again (Jn 3:3+) which they were because Paul says they were **in Christ**. To the Greeks an infant was one who had no power and needed the assistance of parents or guardians, both good descriptions of the saints at Corinth. Although they had the indwelling Spirit, they clearly had not "tapped into" the Power that was dwelling in their mortal bodies (1 Cor 6:19+), and thus instead of living "spiritual" lives full of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23+), they were living fleshly lives and bearing the rotten fruit of the works of the flesh as Paul described in Gal 5:19-21+ "which are: immorality (1 Cor 5:1+, 1 Cor 6:13, 18+, 1 Cor 7:2+, 2 Cor 12:21), impurity (2 Cor 12:21), sensuality (2 Cor 12:21), idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife (1 Cor 1:11+ same word eris translated quarrels, 2 Cor 12:20) , jealousy (1 Cor 3:3, 2 Cor 12:20), outbursts of anger (2 Cor 12:20), disputes (2 Cor 12:20), dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

The writer of Hebrews addressed his readers in a similar way ...

Concerning him ([Melchizedek](#)) we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing (? backslidden). 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and **you have come to need milk and not solid food**. (SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS LIKE RIDING A BIKE - STOP PEDALING, STOP GOING. STOP READING, OBEYING WORD, STOP GROWING! I FEEL ON MY BIKE YESTERDAY BECAUSE I WAS STANDING STILL! YOU CAN SEE THE SPIRITUAL IMPLICATIONS!) 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness (NOT NEW TRUTHS BUT DEEPER ASPECTS OF THE BASIC TRUTHS- SEE [NOTE](#)), for he is an infant. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. (Hebrews 5:11-14+)

**Men of flesh** ([sarkinos](#)) - Literally "fleshly ones." As believers they were no longer positionally **IN ADAM**, or "in the flesh," but were now **IN CHRIST** (cf 1 Cor 15:22+) as their new, eternal position. However they were failing to **PRACTICE** their **POSITION**, or conduct themselves in a manner concordant with their new identities in Christ. And the only alternative to living enabled by the Spirit, is to live "enabled" by the fallen [flesh](#), which is what they were doing. So while they were not **IN THE FLESH**, they were definitely acting like they were and thus they were **FLESHLY** or walking "after the flesh." Babies are cute when they are little, but when 20, 30, 40 year olds act like babies, they no longer cute and it is the same way spiritually speaking! How many Christians have set in church pews for years and failed to mature from spiritual babies to spiritual men. That is tragic and gives a weak picture of the power of Christ in a believer's life. Little wonder that so many pagans scoff at and not attracted by the genre of Christianity they see in their spiritually immature friends! The Corinthians needed to examine themselves carefully to determine whether their profession is genuine possession (2 Co 13:5, Titus 1:16). "Babes in Christ" need to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pe 3:18, 1 Pe 2:1).

**THOUGHT-** The popular term "**CARNAL CHRISTIANS**" (Latin =carneus) has been used erroneously to label those who [PROFESS](#) Christ as Lord and Savior but who live habitually (as their continual, unremitting practice) in bondage to and under domination to sin, their unchanging sinful lifestyle strongly suggesting that they were never **POSSESSORS** of the indwelling Spirit of Christ (See [What is easy believism?](#)). Writing to the Galatians, Paul solemnly declared that he had "forewarned...that those who **practice** (present tense = habitually, as their continuing lifestyle) such things (WHAT THINGS? SEE Gal 5:19-20+) **will not inherit the kingdom of God**." (Gal 5:21+) Beloved, could Paul have been any clearer? The teaching that says men with a continually sinful lifestyle are saved but are just living **CONTINUALLY** under the control of the flesh rather than the Spirit needs to be considered with extreme caution in light of Gal 5:21+, 1 Co 6:9-11+ ("will inherit the kingdom of God"), 1 Jn 3:4, 8,10+, Mt 7:23+ etc)

**MacArthur** on why they were spiritually immature even in face of having Paul teach 18 months and then Apollos - Because they

refused to give up their worldly ways and their carnal desires, they became what James calls forgetful hearers (James 1:25). A person who does not use information will lose it; and spiritual truth is no exception. Spiritual truths that we ignore and neglect will become less and less remembered and meaningful (cf. 2 Pet. 1:12–13). Nothing causes us to ignore God's truth more than not living it. A sinning Christian is uncomfortable in the light of God's truth. He either turns from his fleshly behavior or he begins to block out God's light. Only when we put aside "malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander"—that is, the flesh—are we able to "long for the pure milk of the word" and "grow in respect to salvation" (1 Pet. 2:1–2). (See [The MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

**Henry Morris** (Defender's Study Bible) has a wise comment on **men of flesh** - There is thus a distinction between "**spiritual**" believers and "**carnal**" believers, the one controlled by the Spirit, the other still largely controlled by the flesh (Romans 8:5-13; Galatians 5:16-25). Carnal Christians are not necessarily unsaved pseudo-Christians, although they need to examine themselves carefully to determine whether their profession of faith in Christ is genuine (2 Corinthians 13:5). Quite possibly they are just "babes in Christ" and need to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). (Borrow [The Defender's Study Bible](#))

**Ryrie on of flesh** - The Greek word [sarkinos](#) means "fleshly" or "of the flesh," with the idea of weakness; in verse 3 fleshly has the overtone of willfulness. Fleshly Christians (brethren) are babes in Christ (i.e., undeveloped) who cannot understand the deeper truths of the Word of God (v. 2) and who are characterized by strife (v. 3). (Borrow [Ryrie Study Bible](#))

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**Of flesh** (4560)([sarkinos](#) from [sarx](#)- flesh) is used in some contexts to refer to that which is made of or consists of flesh (physical flesh). However, **sarkinos** can also refer to the moral/ethical aspect of human nature in its base behavior (1 Cor 3:1). **Sarkinos** - 4x in 4v in the NAS - Translated flesh(1), human(1), men of flesh(1), physical(1). - Ro. 7:14+; 1 Co. 3:1; 2 Co. 3:3; Heb. 7:16+

**Summary** - 1) fleshly, carnal 1a) having the nature of flesh, i.e. under the control of the animal appetites 1a1) governed by mere human nature not by the Spirit of God 1a2) having its seat in the animal nature or aroused by the animal nature 1a3) human: with the included idea of depravity 1b) pertaining to the flesh 1b1) to the body: related to birth, lineage, etc

**Vine on sarkinos** - (a) "consisting of flesh," 2 Cor. 3:3, "tables that are hearts of flesh" (AV, "fleshy tables of the heart"); (b) "pertaining to the natural, transient life of the body," Heb. 7:16, "a carnal commandment;" (c) given up to the flesh, i.e., with almost the same significance as [sarkikos](#), Rom. 7:14, "I am **carnal** sold under sin;" 1 Cor. 3:1 (some texts have [sarkikos](#), in both these places, and in those in (a) and (b), but textual evidence is against it). It is difficult to discriminate between [sarkikos](#) and **sarkinos** in some passages. In regard to 1 Pet. 2:11, Trench (Syn. lxxi, lxxii) says that [sarkikos](#) describes the lusts which have their source in man's corrupt and fallen nature, and the man is [sarkikos](#) who allows to the flesh a place which does not belong to it of right; in 1 Cor. 3:1 **sarkinos** is an accusation far less grave than [sarkikos](#) would have been. The Corinthians saints were making no progress, but they were not anti-spiritual in respect of the particular point with which the Apostle was there dealing. In 1 Cor 3:3, 4, they are charged with being [sarkikos](#).

**Infants** (babes, immature) (3516)([nepios](#) from **nê** = negative + **epos** = not able to talk) means literally not speaking and thus a small child above age of a helpless infant but probably not more than three or four years of age. Figuratively as here in Romans **nepios** refers to a person who lacks experience, is untried or ignorant or simple-minded. In context Paul is referring to the Gentiles. **Nepios** is the term used by the Jews to designate Gentile proselytes. Paul uses it of one not come of legal age (Ga 4:1). The writer to the Hebrews used it of one spiritually immature (Heb 5:13) as did Paul (1Co 3:1) for they cannot eat solid food (spiritually speaking). [Wuest Word Studies](#) comments that **nepios** in Hebrews 5:13 means...an infant, a little child, a minor, not of age, and in a metaphorical sense, "untaught, unskilled." The idea of immaturity is in the word, and according to the context in which it is found, it could refer to either mental or spiritual immaturity. Paul defines the word when he says that the person whom he calls a babe is "unskillful in the word of righteousness." Spiritual immaturity is referred to by the word "babe." Thus those spoken of as of full age are spiritually mature (**teleios**) **Nepios** used 10x - Matt. 11:25; Matt. 21:16; Lk. 10:21; Rom. 2:20; 1 Co. 3:1; 1 Co. 13:11; Gal. 4:1; Gal. 4:3; Eph. 4:14; Heb. 5:13

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**Steven Cole** has related comments in his sermon on [Hebrews 2:1-4 The Danger of Drifting Spiritually](#)

One of the mistaken ideas that the author of Hebrews confronts in this and in every other warning section is what we could call "**the myth of the carnal Christian.**" This idea was popularized by Lewis Sperry Chafer's (ED: FOUNDER OF DALLAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY AND FROM WHENCE MUCH OF THE LITERATURE ON "CARNAL CHRISTIAN" ORIGINATES) **He That is Spiritual** [Dunham] and by the **Scotfield Reference Bible** (note on 1Co 2:14 [ED: [SEE SCOTFIELD'S ORIGINAL NOTE BELOW](#)]) early in the 20th century. It was later picked up by Campus Crusade's booklet, "**How to Be Filled With the Holy Spirit.**" The idea is that there are three classes of people: the natural man (unbeliever); the spiritual man (the Spirit-filled believer); and, the carnal man (the believer who is running his own life, not subject to the Holy Spirit). For the

sake of time, I cannot go into many of the problems with this classification (see Ernest Reisinger's booklet, "[What Should We Think of 'The Carnal Christian'?](#)" See [7 ratings 16 ratings](#)).

But one problem is that it gives false assurance to the person who says, "I believe in Jesus as my Savior, so I am going to heaven. But I am not submitting to Him as my Lord." (ED: OR TO SAY IT ANOTHER WAY - THIS PERSON BELIEVES THEY BECAME A CHRISTIAN AT A POINT IN TIME IN THE PAST BUT THEREAFTER THEY EXPERIENCE ESSENTIALLY NO CHANGE IN THEIR BEHAVIOR. THEY CONTINUED TO SIN TO THE SAME DEGREE THAT THEY DID BEFORE THEY PROFESSED CHRIST!) For the author of Hebrews, either you are holding fast to your confession of faith in Christ and are striving against sin, or you are drifting spiritually and are in danger of frightening judgment. Those are the only options.

True believers may drift and may get entangled in sin. But when they are confronted with the truth, they will turn from their sin and pursue holiness (cf Heb 12:14). If they do not turn from it, they have no basis for assurance of salvation. The longer they continue in sin, the more reason they have to question whether their profession of faith was genuine. But no one has the option of saying, "I'm just a carnal Christian. I'm living for this world now, but when I die I'll go to heaven." That option does not exist.

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### Question - [What is a carnal Christian?](#)

**Answer:** Can a true Christian be **carnal**? In answering this question, let's first define the term "**carnal**." The word "carnal" is translated from the Greek word [sarkikos](#), (ED: AND ALSO AS [sarkinos](#) IN 1 Cor 3:1) which literally means "**fleshly**." This descriptive word is seen in the context of Christians in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3. In this passage, the apostle Paul is addressing the readers as "**brethren**," a term he uses almost exclusively to refer to other Christians; he then goes on to describe them as "**carnal**." Therefore, we can conclude that Christians can be carnal. The Bible is absolutely clear that no one is sinless (1 John 1:8+). **Every time we sin, we are acting carnally** (ED: READ THAT STATEMENT AGAIN!).

The key thing to understand is that while a Christian can be, **for a time**, carnal, **a true Christian will not remain carnal for a lifetime**. Some have abused the idea of a "**carnal Christian**" by saying that it is possible for people to come to faith in Christ and then proceed to live the rest of their lives in a completely carnal manner, with no evidence of being born again or a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17+). Such a concept is completely unbiblical. James 2:14-25+ makes it abundantly clear that **genuine faith** will always result in **good works**. Ephesians 2:8-10+ declares that while we are saved by grace alone through faith alone, that salvation will result in works.

**Can a Christian, in a time of failure and/or rebellion, appear to be carnal? Yes.**

**Will a true Christian remain carnal? No.**

Since **eternal security** is a fact of Scripture, even the carnal Christian is still saved. Salvation cannot be lost, because salvation is a gift of God that He will not take away (see John 10:28; Romans 8:37-39+; 1 John 5:13+). Even in 1 Corinthians 3:15+, the carnal Christian is assured of salvation: "If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." The question is not whether a person who claims to be a Christian but lives carnally has lost his salvation, but whether that person was truly saved in the first place (1 John 2:19+).

Christians who become carnal in their behavior can expect God to lovingly discipline them (Hebrews 12:5-11+) so they can be restored to close fellowship with Him and be trained to obey Him. God's desire in saving us is that we would progressively grow closer to the image of Christ (Romans 12:1-2+), becoming increasingly spiritual and decreasingly carnal, a process known as sanctification.

**Until we are delivered from our sinful flesh, there will be [outbreaks](#) of carnality.**

**For a genuine believer in Christ, though, these outbreaks of carnality will be the exception, not the rule.**

[GotQuestions.org](#)

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### Related Resources:

- [What Should We Think of 'The Carnal Christian](#) - Ernest Reisinger
- [What does the Bible mean that we are not to judge others?](#)
- [Is Romans 7:14-25 describing a believer or an unbeliever?](#)
- [How can believers be in the world, but not of the world?](#)
- [Are Christians sinners, saints, or both?](#)
- [Do we sin daily? Is it possible to go an entire day without sinning?](#)



**Question:** [What does the Bible say about Purgatory? | GotQuestions.org](#)

**Answer:** According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, Purgatory is “a place or condition of temporal punishment for those who, departing this life in God’s grace, are not entirely free from venial faults, or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions.” To summarize, in Catholic theology Purgatory is a place that a Christian’s soul goes to after death to be cleansed of the sins that had not been fully satisfied during life. Is this doctrine of Purgatory in agreement with the Bible? Absolutely not!



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Jesus died to pay the penalty for all of our sins (Romans 5:8). Isaiah 53:5 declares, “But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed.” Jesus suffered for our sins so that we could be delivered from suffering. To say that we must also suffer for our sins is to say that Jesus’ suffering was insufficient. To say that we must atone for our sins by cleansing in Purgatory is to deny the sufficiency of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus (1 John 2:2). The idea that those who are saved by grace through faith have to suffer for their sins after death is contrary to everything the Bible says about salvation.

The primary Scriptural passage Catholics point to for evidence of Purgatory is 1 Corinthians 3:15, which says, “If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.” The passage (1 Corinthians 3:12-15) is using an illustration of things going through fire as a description of believers’ works being judged. If our works are of good quality “gold, silver, costly stones,” they will pass through the fire unharmed, and we will be rewarded for them. If our works are of poor quality “wood, hay, and straw,” they will be consumed by the fire, and there will be no reward. The passage does not say that believers pass through the fire, but rather that a believer’s works pass through the fire. 1 Corinthians 3:15 refers to the believer “escaping through the flames,” not “being cleansed by the flames.”

**Purgatory**, like many other Catholic dogmas, is based on a misunderstanding of the nature of Christ’s sacrifice. Catholics view the [Mass](#) / [Eucharist](#) as a re-presentation of Christ’s sacrifice because they fail to understand that Jesus’ once-for-all sacrifice was absolutely and perfectly sufficient (Hebrews 7:27). Catholics view [meritorious works](#) as contributing to salvation due to a failure to recognize that Jesus’ sacrificial payment has no need of additional “contribution” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Similarly, Purgatory is understood by Catholics as a place of cleansing in preparation for heaven because they do not recognize that because of Jesus’ sacrifice, we are already cleansed, declared righteous, forgiven, redeemed, reconciled, and sanctified.

The very idea of **Purgatory** and the doctrines that are often attached to it ([prayer for the dead](#), [indulgences](#), [meritorious works](#) on behalf of the dead, etc.) fail to recognize that Jesus’ death was sufficient to pay the penalty for ALL of our sins. Jesus, who was God incarnate (John 1:1, 14), paid an infinite price for our sin. Jesus died for our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3). Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 2:2). To limit Jesus’ sacrifice to atoning for [original sin](#) or sins committed before salvation is an attack on the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. If we must, in order to be saved, pay for, atone for, or suffer because of our sins, then Jesus’ death was not a perfect, complete, and sufficient sacrifice. **(ED: READ comments on John 19:30 - see Tetelestai - It is Finished)**

For believers, after death is to be “away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:6-8; Philippians 1:23). Notice that this does not say “away from the body, in Purgatory with the cleansing fire.” No, because of the perfection, completion, and sufficiency of Jesus’ sacrifice, we are immediately in the Lord’s presence after death, fully cleansed, free from sin, glorified, perfected, and ultimately sanctified. ([GotQuestions.org](#))

**1 Corinthians 3:2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able,**

Amplified I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not yet strong enough [to be ready for it]; but even yet

you are not strong enough [to be ready for it],

Wuest - Milk (FIRST WORD IN GREEK FOR EMPHASIS) I fed you, not solid food, for not yet were you able to assimilate the latter. In fact, not even yet at the present time are you able to do so. ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

NET 1 Corinthians 3:2 I fed you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready. In fact, you are still not ready,

NLT 1 Corinthians 3:2 I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready,

ESV 1 Corinthians 3:2 I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready,

NIV 1 Corinthians 3:2 I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.

GNT 1 Corinthians 3:2 γ λα μ ς π πια, ο βρ μα, ο πω γ ρ δ νασθε. λλ ο δ τι ν ν δ νασθε,

KJV 1 Corinthians 3:2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.

YLT 1 Corinthians 3:2 with milk I fed you, and not with meat, for ye were not yet able, but not even yet are ye now able,

ASV 1 Corinthians 3:2 I fed you with milk, not with meat; for ye were not yet able to bear it: nay, not even now are ye able;

CSB 1 Corinthians 3:2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, because you were not yet ready for it. In fact, you are still not ready,

NKJ 1 Corinthians 3:2 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;

NRS 1 Corinthians 3:2 I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready,

NAB 1 Corinthians 3:2 I fed you milk, not solid food, because you were unable to take it. Indeed, you are still not able, even now,

NJB 1 Corinthians 3:2 I fed you with milk and not solid food, for you were not yet able to take it -- and even now, you are still not able to,

GWN 1 Corinthians 3:2 I gave you milk to drink. I didn't give you solid food because you weren't ready for it. Even now you aren't ready for it

BBE 1 Corinthians 3:2 I gave you milk and not meat, because you were, then, unable to take it, and even now you are not able;

- **I gave you milk to drink, not solid food:** Heb 5:12-14 1Pe 2:2
- **for you were not yet able:** Joh 16:12 Heb 5:11,12
- 1 Corinthians 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **SAINTS STILL NOT WEANED FROM MILK**

**THOUGHT-** Beloved, I fear the title of this passage may be sadly true for many of God's chosen, blood bought, heavenly bound children who are failing to partake of the unspeakable blessings available daily to them in "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" which are hidden in Christ. (Col 2:3+, read Proverbs 2:1-5, 6+).

**John MacArthur** introduces 1Cor 3:1-9 writing "the Christian life is not easy. In many ways living is far more demanding than before we were saved. How is this so? How—when we have God's own Spirit within us, the mind of Christ, and the power of God—could it become more difficult to do what is right, to do what our Lord wants us to do? There are two reasons: the world and the flesh. The first is outside us, the second is inside us. They are Satan's supreme instruments in tempting believers and keeping them from faithfulness and victory.....The one word that best characterizes the flesh, our humanness, our Adamic nature, is selfish (ED:

REARRANGE THE LETTERS AND YOU FIND "FLESH" IN SELFISH)...a Christian is not characterized by sin (ED: AS HIS LIFESTYLE OR HABITUAL PRACTICE); it no longer represents his basic nature. But he is still able to sin, and his sin is just as sinful as the sin of an unbeliever. Sin is sin. When a Christian sins, he is being practically unspiritual, living on the same practical level as an unbeliever.... A person who does not use information will lose it; and spiritual truth is no exception. Spiritual truths that we ignore and neglect will become less and less remembered and meaningful (cf. 2 Pet. 1:12–13). Nothing causes us to ignore God's truth more than not living it. (See context in [1 Corinthians Commentary](#))

**I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it**- As alluded to above, **I gave** is past tense and thus Paul is going back to the time when these Corinthians were first born again and as is normal for infants, at that time they could only be given **milk to drink not solid food**. So far, so good, as they say. That was just fine. But that was then and now is now and they are still able to ingest only infant food, having not matured normally into spiritual men.

Paul uses the metaphor of **milk** in a different sense than in 1 Peter 2:2+ for Peter writes "like newborn babies (term of comparison = simile), long for **the pure milk of the word**, so that (purpose of pure milk intake) by it you may grow in respect to salvation (aka progressive sanctification)." Peter uses **milk** as a picture of the nourishment provided by the Word of God when it is dispensed in "**pure**" ([adolos](#) - undiluted, unadulterated) form. When a parent, pastor or teacher feeds those in his care with "pure" milk, and that milk is accepted and "[assimilated](#)" by the recipient hearers, God (His Spirit) will grow them in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 3:18+). Lord, let it be so for all who read this note. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

**W E Vine** has an interesting remark - The "**milk**" recalls what was said in 1 Cor 2:2; the meat, the **solid food**, is described in 1 Cor 2:6–13.

**John MacArthur** makes a great point about the difference between **milk** and **solid food** - There is no difference at all between the truths of a spiritual **milk** diet and a spiritual **solid food** diet, except in detail and depth. All doctrine may have both **milk** and meat elements. It is not that we are to be continually learning new doctrines in order to grow, but that we are to be learning more about the doctrines we have known for years. A new Christian might explain the [atonement](#), for example, as, "Christ died for my sins." A long-time student of the Word, on the other hand, would go into such things as regeneration, justification, [substitution](#), and [propitiation](#). One explanation would not be truer than the other; but the first would be **milk** and the second, **solid food**. (See context in [1 Corinthians Commentary](#))

**Solid food** ([1033](#))(**broma**) means food of any kind, anything you chew for nourishment, anything used as food (often translated "meat" in KJV but not restricted to meat) **Broma** is used most often as a general references to "food" (Mt 14:15; Mk 7:19+; Ro 14:20; 1Co. 6:13; 1Ti. 4: 3; Heb. 9:10. In 1 Cor 10:3**broma** denotes the food God supernaturally supplied to his people in the wilderness. **Broma** is used metaphorically by Jesus in Jn 4:34+ "'My **food** (broma) is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work" denoting Jesus' innermost desire and His fundamental purpose in His short life. In 1Cor 3:2 broma signifies teaching that is more advanced, can be understood only by the more mature and is instrumental in their continuing maturation. Paul contrasts solid food (broma) with milk, figuratively mature doctrine (1Co 3.2). Broma is a key word in 1 Corinthians - 1 Co. 3:2; 1 Co. 6:13; 1 Co. 8:8; 1 Co. 8:13; 1 Co. 10:3.

**Broma** is used 17x in 15v -food(14), foods(3). Mt. 14:15+; Mk. 7:19+; Lk. 3:11+; Lk. 9:13+; Jn. 4:34+; Ro 14:15+ (see context Ro 14:16-17); Rom. 14:20+; 1 Co. 3:2; 1 Co. 6:13; 1 Co. 8:8; 1 Co. 8:13; 1 Co. 10:3; 1 Ti 4:3; Heb 9:10; Heb. 13:9

**Broma in Septuagint** - Gen. 6:21; Gen. 14:11; Gen. 41:35; Gen. 41:36; Gen. 41:48; Gen. 42:2; Gen. 42:7; Gen. 42:10; Gen. 43:2; Gen. 43:4; Gen. 43:20; Gen. 43:22; Gen. 44:1; Gen. 44:25; Lev. 11:34; Lev. 25:6; Lev. 25:37; Deut. 2:6; Deut. 2:28; Deut. 23:19; 2 Sam. 13:5; 2 Sam. 13:7; 2 Sam. 13:10; 1 Ki. 10:5; 1 Ki. 12:24; 1 Chr. 12:40; 2 Chr. 2:10; 2 Chr. 9:4; 2 Chr. 11:11; Ezr. 3:7; Job 6:5; Job 20:21; Ps. 69:21; Ps. 74:14; Ps. 78:18; Ps. 79:2; Ps. 107:18; Prov. 23:6; Prov. 31:15; Isa. 3:6; Isa. 62:8; Ezek. 4:10; Joel 1:16; Joel 2:23; Hab. 1:16; Hag. 2:12; Mal. 1:7; Mal. 1:12;

**Indeed, even now you are not yet able** - NIV = "you are still not ready." **Not...able** ([oude dunamai](#) in the present tense) means that they are continually and absolutely are **not able** to receive solid food. **Not yet** ([eti](#)) is used in a temporal sense which by best estimates is despite being believers for 4-5 years, they are still **not yet able!** So when they were born again, they were like little babies needing milk which was normal for newborn believers. But now (after 4-5 years) they were STILL like infants who were not weaned from the bottle and could not be given **solid food**. And so he "could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ," as he had spoken to them when they were first born again.

**Fee** - Paul avoids accusing them of not having the Spirit altogether, but at the same time he bitingly forces them to have to face up to their true condition. (See [The First Epistle to the Corinthians](#) NICNT)

[Robertson](#) - Paul did not glory in making his sermons thin and watery. Simplicity does not require lack of ideas or dullness. It is pathetic to think how the preacher has to clip the wings of thought and imagination because the hearers cannot go with him. But nothing hinders great preaching like the dullness caused by sin on the part of auditors who are impatient with the high demands of the gospel.

**Vine** - a skillful teacher, while imparting elementary instruction to those who require it, does so in such a way as to prepare for what is to follow, and while this is true of the apostle's teaching yet his hearers were standing in the way of their own development.

**MacArthur** - Spiritual retardation...is always primarily our own doing. We may not have the best human preacher or teacher, but every believer has the perfect Teacher within, who longs to instruct him in the things of God (cf. 1 Jn 2:20+, 1 Jn 2:27+). **If we do not grow spiritually, the reason is always that we are still fleshly.** (See context in [1 Corinthians Commentary](#))

**THOUGHT** - MacArthur's preceding explanation begs a question we would all be wise to ask ourselves (this writer included!) - Are you growing spiritually? Are you more like Jesus today than you were 12 months ago? If not the problem is not with God but with you and either your minimalistic intake of "pure milk" or your failure to obey what you take in, for as Jesus taught us "Blessed ([makarios](#)) are those who **hear** the word of God and **observe** (ESV = "keep it;" NET = "obey it"; Greek verb = [phulasso](#) in the present tense) it." (Lk 11:28+)

### 1 Corinthians 3:3 for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?

Amplified For you are still [unspiritual, having the nature] of the flesh [under the control of ordinary impulses]. For as long as [there are] envying and jealousy and wrangling and factions among you, are you not unspiritual and of the flesh, behaving yourselves after a human standard and like mere (unchanged) men?

Wuest - For, in so far as there are among you jealousy and strife, are you not those dominated by the evil nature, and are you not ordering your manner of life as an unsaved man would do? ([Wuest Word Studies](#))

NET 1 Corinthians 3:3 for you are still influenced by the flesh. For since there is still jealousy and dissension among you, are you not influenced by the flesh and behaving like unregenerate people?

NLT 1 Corinthians 3:3 for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren't you living like people of the world?

ESV 1 Corinthians 3:3 for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?

NIV 1 Corinthians 3:3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?

GNT 1 Corinthians 3:3 τι γρ σαρκικο στε. που γρ ν μν ζλος κα ρις, οχ σαρκικο στε κα κατ νθρωπον περιπατε τε;

KJV 1 Corinthians 3:3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

YLT 1 Corinthians 3:3 for yet ye are fleshly, for where there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not fleshly, and in the manner of men do walk?

ASV 1 Corinthians 3:3 for ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you jealousy and strife, are ye not carnal, and do ye not walk after the manner of men?

CSB 1 Corinthians 3:3 because you are still fleshly. For since there is envy and strife among you, are you not fleshly and living like unbelievers?

NKJ 1 Corinthians 3:3 for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?

NRS 1 Corinthians 3:3 for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations?

NAB 1 Corinthians 3:3 for you are still of the flesh. While there is jealousy and rivalry among you, are you not

of the flesh, and behaving in an ordinary human way?

NJB 1 Corinthians 3:3 for you are still living by your natural inclinations. As long as there are jealousy and rivalry among you, that surely means that you are still living by your natural inclinations and by merely human principles.

GWN 1 Corinthians 3:3 because you're still influenced by your corrupt nature. When you are jealous and quarrel among yourselves, aren't you influenced by your corrupt nature and living by human standards?

BBE 1 Corinthians 3:3 Because you are still in the flesh: for when there is envy and division among you, are you not still walking after the way of the flesh, even as natural men?

- for whereas: 1Co 1:11 6:1-8 11:18 2Co 12:20 Ga 5:15,19-21 Jas 3:16 4:1,2
- and walk: Ho 6:7 Mk 7:21,22 Eph 2:2,3 4:22-24 Tit 3:3 1Pe 4:2
- 1 Corinthians 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passage:

Galatians 5:15+ But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

Is This Diagram Misleading?  
Read Below for the Answer.

## THE DIVISIVE EFFECT OF STRIFE AND JEALOUSY

**For** ([gar](#)) - term of explanation. Always begs question "What is being explained?" This one is easy to discern, for Paul is explaining why they Corinthians were not able to take in solid food.

**You are** (present tense - continually, habitually) **still fleshly** ([sarkikos](#)) - **Amplified** = "under the control of ordinary (SINFUL) impulses" **Wuest** = "those dominated by the evil nature." Here is the root problem. They were **still fleshly**, still like immature infants. As noted above (see [discussion](#)), Paul does not say they are still "in the flesh," for that is a description of a non-believer. All believers are now in Christ, but despite our privileged position, our practice does not always match our position. And such was the case with the saints at Corinth. They were not walking by the Spirit, but walking by the [flesh](#) (cf Gal 5:16+), as indicated by the rotten fruit they were bringing forth (**jealousy and strife**).

**THOUGHT** - Paul had proclaimed Christ crucified and they were born again and then Paul, probably the best teacher in the history (other than Christ), had fed them spiritually for the next 18 months and now he hears that they are acting like spiritual babies. Here is the point -- you can sit under the best preaching in the world but if you fail to act upon the truth you are taught, you will not grow spiritually. If you do not practice what they preach, you are deluding yourself (and remaining in a state of relative spiritual immaturity). James says "**prove** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude ([paralogizomai](#) - present tense - continually deceive) themselves." (James 1:22+).

**S Lewis Johnson** note that "An important word change must be noted. Carnal here is not sarkinos, but sarkikos, which means, literally, characterized by the flesh, being the equivalent of after the flesh (cf. Rom 8:4). Back of it is the thought of willfulness, and Paul does attach blame to those in this condition. Weakness prolonged becomes willfulness. Refusal to respond to the milk of the Word prevents reception of the meat of the Word." (Borrow [Wycliffe Bible Commentary](#))

**For** ([gar](#)) - term of explanation. Paul explains how he is able to determine that these saints are still immature spiritually, **still fleshly**. He has already stated that they were like spiritual infants, like men without the Spirit (even though they had the Spirit). Now he will give specific manifestations that are a reflection of their fleshly mindsets.

**Robertson**- Wrangling follows jealousy. These two voices of the spirit are to Paul proof that the Corinthians are still σαρκικοί [sarkikoi] and walking according to men, not according to the Spirit of Christ.

**Since there is jealousy** ([zelos](#)) **and strife among you, are you not fleshly** - These deeds of the [flesh](#) indicated that they were not walking by the Spirit as mature believers, but were walking according to the desires of the fallen flesh. The Corinthians possessed the indwelling Spirit, but were failing to let Him possess them. In fact by their sins of **jealousy and strife** they were quenching the power of the Spirit. **Strife** ([heated, even violent conflict](#)) is same Greek word ([eris](#)) in 1 Cor 1:11+ where Paul had heard there were "**quarrels** ([eris](#)) **among you.**" Paul does not stop with these sins, but as sin always does leading to more sins, he will go on to describe their sin of "choosing sides," ("[factionalism](#)").

**MacArthur** - Because self-centeredness is at the heart of fleshly behavior, jealousy and strife are always found in an immature congregation. Jealousy is the attitude, and strife is the action that results from it. One is the inner emotional condition, the other the outward expression of selfishness....Jealousy and strife are not the least of the symptoms of fleshly living. Those sins are more destructive than many Christians seem to think. They are far from being petty sins, because, among other things, they cause division in the church, Christ's body, for whom He gave His life. They are among the surest marks of fallen humanness, just as unity is one of the surest marks of divine transformation. Jealousy is a severe form of selfishness, begrudging someone else what we wish were ours. And selfishness is one of the most obvious characteristics of babyhood. An infant's life is almost totally self-centered and selfish. Its whole concern is with its own comfort, hunger, attention, sleep. It is typical of a young child to be self-centered, but it should not be typical of an adult, especially a Christian adult. It is spiritually infantile to be jealous of and to cause strife among fellow believers, and it betrays a fleshly perspective. Division can only occur where there is selfishness. Fleshly, immature people cooperate only with those leaders and fellow believers with whom they happen to agree or who personally appeal to them or will flatter them. Factions cannot help resulting where there is jealousy and strife, or any other form of carnality. When a congregation develops loyalties around individuals, it is a sure symptom of spiritual immaturity and trouble. It was sinful for factions to develop around Paul and Apollos, and it is sinful for divisive factions to develop around any leader in the church today. (See context in [The MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

**Jealousy** (2205)(**zelos** from **zeo** = to be hot, to boil [from the sound of bubbling water], figuratively to be fervent or show great enthusiasm; see related studies [zeloo](#); [zelotes](#)) was originally a good word which described fervour in advancing a cause or in rendering service. In the NT **zelos** can also convey a negative meaning, especially jealousy (Acts 5:17, 13:45, Ro 13:13, 1 Cor 3:3, 2 Cor 12:20, Gal 5: 20, Phil 3:6, James 3:14, 16). **Robertson** comments that **zelos** "In itself it means only warmth, ardour, zeal, but for a bad cause or from a bad motive, jealousy, envy, rivalry results." **Jealousy** describes envy of someone else's possessions, achievements, or advantages. It describes the spirit which cannot be content with what it has and looks with jealous eye on every blessing given to someone else and denied to itself.

**Jealousy** and **strife** are used again in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians "For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there will be **strife, jealousy**, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances;(2 Cor 12:20)

**Strife** (2054)(**eris**) means contention, wrangling, quarrels. It refers to engagement in rivalry, especially with reference to positions taken in a matter! It conveys ideas of self-centered rivalry and contentiousness and is an expression of enmity with bitter sometimes violent conflict or dissension. It has no place even for simple tolerance, much less for humility or love. **Barclay** adds that **eris** "is the contention which is born of envy, ambition, the desire for prestige, and place and prominence. It comes from the heart in which there is jealousy. ... **Eris** is the spirit that is born of unbridled and unholy competition. It comes from the desire for place and power and prestige and the hatred of being surpassed. It is essentially the sin which places self in the foreground and is the entire negation of Christian love. It is the characteristic of the man who has forgotten that only he who humbles himself can be exalted." **Eris** - 9x in NT - Ro 1:29; Ro 13:13; 1 Co. 1:11; 1 Co. 3:3; 2 Co. 12:20; Gal. 5:20; Phil. 1:15; 1 Tim. 6:4; Titus 3:9

**Fleshly** (flesh, material things)(4559)(**sarkikos** from **sarx**) means of flesh and can refer to physical flesh or to the moral/ethical aspects of flesh. In this context sarkikos speaks of behavior, having the characteristics of sa,rx (flesh) in its sensual, sinful tendencies worldly, carnal. 6v - Rom. 15:27; 1 Co. 3:3; 1 Co. 9:11; 2 Co. 1:12; 2 Co. 10:4; 1 Pet. 2:11. Barber explains the difference between sarkinos in 1 Cor 3:2 and sarkikos -- "Sarkinos, in 1 Cor 3:1, comes from the word sarkikos, and sometimes it is translated that way. However, I see a difference in **sarkinos** in 1 Cor 3:1 and **sarkikos** in 1 Cor 3:3....It is like a black and white TV becoming a color set. **Sarkinos** has the idea of the attitude of a baby, whereas **sarkikos** has more of the action of a baby. One is the attitude, one is the activity or the action of the child. He begins to describe that in 1 Cor 3:3-4. He says, "You still have a fleshly attitude."

**Carson** on difference of **sarkinos** and **sarkikos** - these people Paul holds responsible for their "worldliness." This Paul makes clear even by a small change in vocabulary from verse 1 to verse 3. The word behind "worldly" in verse 1, as we have seen, is **sarkinos**. In the two occurrences of "worldly" in verse 3, the word is **sarkikos**. If there is a difference in meaning between the two words, it is this: while **sarkinos** means "made of flesh" or "composed of flesh" (and thus refers to those who are acting as if they did not have the Spirit, but are merely human, "fleshly"), **sarkikos** means something like "characteristic of human flesh." In other words, this word immediately takes on moral overtones. Human life apart from the Spirit of God is not neutral; it has certain characteristics that are entirely reprehensible. This meaning of

**sarkikos** is made clear from its use in 2 Corinthians 1:12, where Paul testifies, "we have conducted ourselves ... not according to **worldly wisdom** but according to God's grace" (emphasis added). In other words, Paul has behaved not in line with the "wisdom" that reflects the point of view of sinful human nature, but in line with God's grace. Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 3:3 Paul tells the Corinthians that they are acting in ways that are characteristic of people without the Spirit—of people who, precisely because they do not have the Spirit, have nothing to fall back on but their own sinful human nature, their "fleshly" nature. They are acting like pagans. ([The Cross and Christian Ministry - Lessons in Leadership from 1 Corinthians](#)).

**and are you not walking (peripateo) like mere men** - [Wuest](#) = "are you not ordering your manner of life as an unsaved man would do?" This is a rhetorical question. They were indeed **walking like mere men**, like natural men (1 Cor 2:14), like men who are unregenerate. They possessed the Spirit, but were living as if they did not possess Him! Or stated another way, they did not allow Him to possess them! As **Vine** says they were walking "according to the practices of fallen humanity."

**THOUGHT** - You can tell a man's relationship with God by looking at his relationships with his fellow men.

**MacArthur** writes that the saints in Corinth "were not ignorant of the faith because they were dumb, but because they were fleshly. The cause was not mental but spiritual. Because they refused to give up their worldly ways and their carnal desires, they became what James calls forgetful hearers (James 1:25+). A person who does not use information will lose it; and spiritual truth is no exception. Spiritual truths that we ignore and neglect will become less and less remembered and meaningful (cf. 2 Pet. 1:12–13+). Nothing causes us to ignore God's truth more than not living it. A sinning Christian is uncomfortable in the light of God's truth. He either turns from his fleshly behavior or he begins to block out God's light. Only when we put aside "malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander"—that is, the flesh—are we able to "long for the pure milk of the word" and "grow in respect to salvation" (1 Pet. 2:1–2+). (See context [The MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#))

**THOUGHT** - There are really only two ways to walk spiritually speaking - either by the Spirit or the flesh. The unregenerate person can only walk by the flesh. The born again person is the only one who can walk by the Spirit. But the born again person can also walk by the flesh, as were these saints at Corinth. Paul describes these two ways of walking in Galatians calling on the readers to "**walk (present imperative see our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey)** by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh (continually) sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are (continually) in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. (Gal 5:16-17+).

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**(DISCLAIMER - I STRONGLY DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING NOTE - IT IS INCLUDED TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND WHY "CARNAL" CHRISTIANS BECAME A SUPPOSED "CLASS" OF CHRISTIANS) -**

**Scofield Study Bible Comment on 1 Cor 2:14** - Paul divides men into three classes: **psuchikos**, "of the senses" James 3:15; Judges 1:19 or "natural," i.e. the Adamic man, unrenewed through the new birth John 3:3; John 3:5 **pneumatikos**, "spiritual," i.e. the renewed man as Spirit-filled and walking in the Spirit in full communion with God Ephesians 5:18-20 and **sarkikos**, "carnal," "fleshly," i.e. the renewed man who, walking "after the flesh," remains a babe in Christ 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 (**ED**: SEE [NOTE ON CARNAL CHRISTIAN](#)). The natural man may be learned, gentle, eloquent, fascinating, but the spiritual content of Scripture is absolutely hidden from him; and the fleshly, or carnal, Christian is able to comprehend only its simplest truths, "milk" 1 Corinthians 3:2

**ED COMMENT**: Instead of dividing all of mankind into 2 camps, **saved** and **unsaved**, Scofield adds another class, thereby dividing all mankind into 3 groups, which I submit is a highly questionable interpretation the teaching of which has serious ramifications regarding what constitutes a genuinely Spirit born, heavenly bound believer. If there was ever a text calling for an Acts 17:11+ Berean mindset, 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 would be at the top of the list! You may say "Well can't a believer be "carnal" or "fleshly"?" The answer is of course is yes they can (I speak from personal experience!). In fact any time any of us as believers commits sin, we are in effect acting or living as "**fleshly men** (and women)!" But here is the critical question -- can a believer claim on one day they believe in Christ and ostensibly be regenerate, born again, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and then thereafter for the remainder of their life (which might be for years or even for decades), live an unholy life, continually dominated by sin?

This is more than a peripheral issue, because influential Christian teachers have promoted the teaching that there are **two classes of Christians, spiritual and carnal**. (E.g., the well known leader Bill Bright, former president of Campus Crusades for Christ, espoused this view). This teaching implies that you can say you believe in Jesus one day and then spend the remainder of your life mired in sin without any evidence of

holiness or spiritual fruit. These teachers base their interpretation mainly on the passage in 1 Corinthians 3. Because this teaching is so pervasive and potentially so deceptive and destructive (giving assurance to habitual sinners that they are going to Heaven when they die) there is a short excursus below on "**The So-Called Carnal Christian.**"

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Here is another example from **Dr Thomas Constable's** popular expository notes (2022 edition)

Students of this section of the epistle have understood Paul as describing several different kinds of people. Some believe that he saw only a difference between unbelievers (natural) and believers (spiritual). Others have seen three kinds of people in view: unbelievers, spiritual believers, and carnal believers.<sup>134</sup> Still others have seen four: unbelievers (psychikos), believers (pneumatikos), immature believers (sarkinos), and carnal believers (sarkikos). **I believe the last view is the best. A saved person can behave like a Christian or like a non-Christian.** Paul called the Christian who behaves like a non-Christian sarkikos or **carnal**. Galatians 5:16 proves that there is such a thing as the carnal Christian: "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh." To turn this verse around, it is possible for a Christian not to walk by the Spirit and so to carry out the desire of the flesh: to be a carnal believer.

**COMMENT** - THIS GREAT VERSE SHOULD NOT BE "TURNED AROUND" IN AN ATTEMPT TO JUSTIFY AN ERRONEOUS DOCTRINE. THAT IS VERY CLOSE TO ADDING TO OR TAKING AWAY FROM SCRIPTURE (Pr 30:6), WHICH IS A SERIOUS ERROR! PAUL IS TALKING ABOUT HOW TO BE A "VICTORIOUS" CHRISTIAN AND HAVE VICTORY OVER THE FLESH. IT IS POSSIBLE BY LEARNING TO DEPEND OR RELY ON THE SUPERNATURAL POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. SEE Romans 8:13+)

## The So-called "Carnal Christian"

Mark Dever -

I think a more natural way to read the verse is that Paul is shaming his readers by speaking of these self-confessed Christians as worldly. In calling them "worldly" or "**carnal**," Paul is intentionally using an oxymoron. An oxymoron is the joining of two words not meant to go together. In that sense, a carnal Christian would be like hot ice. It's just not supposed to make any sense. By writing in these terms, Paul is basically telling his readers, "Get off the fence! You are living differently than you are professing. You cannot do that. Those horses go in opposite directions—so jump on one or the other!" That's what Paul is saying. **Many people, by a wrong use of this verse, have been convinced that they are some kind of truly saved person, some kind of real Christian, even though they have not really repented and believed.** No wonder the Christian lives of so many are such messes, if the churches of which they're a part are so confused on such a basic matter. Consider what it means to be a Christian. It's not that you're perfect, but that your heart does intend to seek the Lord. If you are a Christian, it is because God, by His own gracious action in your life, has grown a desire in you to live a life that pleases Him more and more. Such growth is a sign of true spiritual life, and another mark of a healthy church. (Nine Marks of a Healthy Church)

**D A Carson** - [The Cross and Christian Ministry - Lessons in Leadership from 1 Corinthians](#)

So this (REFERRING TO THEIR PARTY JEALOUS, STRIFE AND PARTY FACTIONS) is what Paul means by a "worldly" Christian, by a "carnal" Christian (if we adopt older English). Paul does not have in mind someone who has made a profession of faith, carried on in the Christian way for a short while, and then reverted to a lifestyle indistinguishable in every respect from that of the world. After all, these Corinthian believers are meeting together for worship (1 Cor. 14), they call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (1:2), they are extraordinarily endowed with spiritual gifts (1:5, 7; 12–14), they are wrestling with theological and ethical issues (1 Cor. 8–10), and they are in contact with the apostle whose ministry brought them to the Lord. Far from being sold out to the world, the flesh, and the devil, they pursue spiritual experience, if sometimes unwisely. Of course, if professing Christians slip far enough, some further category has to be found for them. Paul has one. In 2 Corinthians, after he has discovered that the Corinthian church, despite temporary restoration, has succumbed yet again to false apostles (2 Cor. 11:13) and to a lifestyle that does not glory in the cross (2 Cor. 10–13), Paul finally feels forced to this extreme injunction: "**Examine** ([present imperative](#)) Yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; **test** ([present imperative](#)) yourselves. Do you not realize that



Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?” (2 Cor. 13:5+). In other words, **if their drift away from the Gospel becomes serious enough, Paul questions whether they are Christians at all. And this takes place at a point when the Corinthian congregation is still holding together as professing Christians.** What this means is that it will not do to apply “**carnal Christian**” or “**worldly Christian**” to every person who has made a profession of faith, perhaps years ago, but who for umpteen years has lived without any evidence of Christian faith, life, repentance, values, or interest. In such instances it is far more likely than not that we are dealing with spurious conversions. Once this is clear, Paul’s point becomes potent. Those who have the Spirit, and who therefore come to grips with the message of the cross (1 Cor. 2), are expected to mature rapidly. Such maturation will disclose itself in a growing ability to take in more and more Christian truth (3:2). It will also show itself in a large-hearted attitude that avoids quarreling and jealousy, and refuses to sink into narrow factionalism. If some who have the Spirit are slow to display this rising maturity, the kindest interpretation is that they are “worldly.” In these matters they are acting like “mere men” instead of like Christian men and women, men and women empowered by the Spirit of God. They are wretchedly, unacceptably, spiritually immature. (Bold added)

**Al Martin - Carnal Christian?** (Brief Excerpt)

Carnal Christian? Are you one? Is there such a thing?

There is in our day a teaching that has become very popular, and this teaching nullifies in the minds of many the clear and unmistakable truth of 1 John 3 which is nothing but a systematic statement of what we find from Genesis to Revelation, namely, that a man saved by the grace of God will be a holy man. A man saved from the penalty of his sin will be a man who seeks day by day to walk from the defilement of sin. And yet there is a teaching in our day, which has negated the clear implications of 1 John 3.

**Andrew D Naselli** from [Let Go and Let God - A Survey of Keswick Theology](#) - This book is excellent survey and the author has gone into incredible detail with countless cross references related to this topic - fascinating reading!

(from page 158) (ED: DISCLAIMER - I DO NOT ESPOUSE OR AGREE WITH CHAFER'S CATEGORIZATION OF TWO CLASSES OF CHRISTIANS - CARNAL AND SPIRITUAL BUT PRESENT THIS INFO FROM ANDREW NASELLI TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND THIS TEACHING WHICH IS WIDESPREAD IN EVANGELICALISM). The best source summarizing Chafer’s view of sanctification is his 1918 work **He That Is Spiritual**. His opening words delineate the three categories into which he divides all human beings: natural (unregenerate), carnal, and spiritual. The “carnal man” is a believer who is “characterized by a ‘walk’ that is on the same plane as that of the ‘natural’ man.”<sup>377</sup> The “spiritual man” is “the divine ideal” and “the normal, if not the usual, Christian.” People may experience “two great spiritual changes”: “the change from the ‘natural’ man to the saved man, and the change from the ‘carnal’ man to the ‘spiritual’ man.”<sup>379</sup> “All believers have the Spirit” via his indwelling, but not all believers experience “a Spirit-filled life.” Spirit-filling is so crucial that Chafer devotes an entire chapter to it.<sup>381</sup> “By various terms the Bible teaches that there are two classes of Christians,” and table 2.2 records Chafer’s contrasts verbatim.

<b>Chafer’s two categories of Christians: carnal and spiritual</b>	
<b>Category 1: Carnal</b>	<b>Category 2: Spiritual</b>
Those who “walk in darkness”	Those who are “walking in the light”
Those who “walk as men”	Those who “walk by the Spirit”
Those who “walk after the flesh”	Those who “walk in newness of life”
Those who have the Spirit “in” them, but not “upon” them	Those who have the Spirit “in” and “upon” them
Those who are “carnal”	Those who are “spiritual”
Those who are not [“filled with the Spirit”]	Those who are “filled with the Spirit”

(from page 230-233) **All Christians Are Spiritual; None Are Permanently Carnal (1 Cor. 2:6–3:4)** All people are in one of two categories variously contrasted as unregenerate or regenerate, unconverted or converted, unbelievers or believers, and non-Christians and Christians. In 1 Corinthians 2:14–15, Paul describes people in those two universal categories as either ψυχικός or πνευματικός. Those who are ψυχικός are natural or unspiritual, that is, they do not have the Spirit (cf. Jude 19). Those who are πνευματικός are spiritual, that is, they have the Spirit. Paul then rebukes the Corinthian believers for not acting like who they are:

3:1 And I, brothers, was not able to speak to you as [ς] to people having the Spirit [πνευματικο ς] but as [ς] to people of the flesh [σάρκινους, from σάρκινος], as [ς] to infants in Christ. 2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able [to receive it]. But even now you are still not able [to receive solid food]. 3 For you are still fleshly [σάρκικοι, from σαρκικός]. For since jealousy and strife [are] among you, are you not fleshly [σάρκικοι] and walking like people not having the Spirit [lit., according to man]? 4 For whenever someone says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I [am] of Apollos,” are you not acting like people not having the Spirit [lit., are you not men]?

There is no question that Paul calls the Corinthians “**carnal**.” The question is whether **spiritual** (πνευματικός) and **carnal** (σάρκινος and σαρκικός) are two distinct, exclusive categories into which believers fit. Based on the way the Corinthians were acting, Paul could not address them as who they actually were. Although they were people having the Spirit (πνευματικός), they were acting like (ς) people not having the Spirit because people having the Spirit characteristically live a certain way. That is Paul’s point for addressing them this way. **Paul is not setting forth three categories into which all people fall: natural, spiritual, and carnal. Ψυχικός people characteristically act in a σάρκινος and σαρκικός way. The reverse is true as well: those who live in a characteristically fleshly way are unbelievers. Believers may temporarily live in such a way, but believers by definition live in a characteristically righteous way.**

The meaning of πνευματικός as described above is important to this interpretation, but many proponents of the Reformed view interpret πνευματικός differently. To them, the first reference to πνευματικός (2:15) refers to all believers without exception, but the second reference (3:1) refers only to mature believers in contrast with immature believers, who are described as σάρκινος and σαρκικός and are like “infants” unable to handle “solid food.” Πνευματικός in 2:15 refers to “positionally” spiritual believers (i.e., all believers), and πνευματικός in 3:1 refers to “practically” spiritual believers (i.e., only some believers). Nevertheless, proponents of the Reformed view who take this position do not apply the passage to teach three categories of people as Keswick proponents do. The key difference is that the Reformed view acknowledges that believers who are σάρκινος and σαρκικός are only temporarily so, not permanently so: “The carnal Christian is simply a genuine Christian (Spirit-man) temporarily gone astray.” Furthermore, the “carnality” does not necessarily extend equally to every area of a believer’s life, nor does it characterize his entire lifestyle. In the case of the Corinthians, Paul called them fleshly specifically because of their factionalism. In this sense one could say that all believers prior to their glorification are fleshly to some degree in some areas but not characteristically so overall.<sup>48</sup> On this all theologians advocating the Reformed view are agreed: there is not a permanent category called “carnal Christians” in which fruitless, fleshly professing believers may fit throughout their entire “Christian” life. **Bruce A. Demarest** accurately explains,

No sharp dividing line exists to separate an alleged “carnal Christian” from a “spiritual Christian.” ...**Every Christian is characterized by a measure of holiness and truth on one hand, and by a dose of carnality and worldliness on the other.** The Christian is a pilgrim who progresses along the spectrum toward holiness and maturity in Christ. The believer does not arise one morning as a “carnal Christian” and settle in that night as a “spiritual Christian.” ... **The terms “spiritual” and “carnal” apply to every Christian, although not in equal measure or in the same respects. Each of us struggles with carnality in different ways and with varying intensity as we press toward the goal of our high calling in Christ.** (The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation)

**Critique 9. Non-lordship Salvation: Comforts Spurious “Christians” with False Assurance** - Keswick theology (unintentionally) undermines the doctrines of perseverance and assurance by dividing Christians into two distinct categories. Perseverance is the teaching that genuine believers can neither totally nor finally fall away from the faith (i.e., sound doctrine and good works) but will certainly continue (i.e., persevere) in the faith to the end and be eternally saved (Col. 1:22–23; Heb. 3:14). The areas in which believers must persevere include their personal faith (John 8:31; 1 John 4:15; 5:1, 4; Heb. 3:14; 6:11; 10:22; Jude 21), sound doctrine (John 7:17; Col. 1:22–23; 1 John 4:6), and good works (John 10:27; Eph. 2:10). The warning passages in Scripture are a God-ordained means for believers to persevere. Both believers and unbelievers must beware

of false faith.<sup>207</sup> Professing believers with false assurance inevitably end up in hell contrary to their expectation (Matt. 7:21–23). Paul had fears that his ministry would be in vain if his converts did not persevere (Gal. 4:11; Phil. 2:16; 1 Thess. 3:5). All believers will persevere in the faith.

Assurance, on the other hand, is the realization or personal knowledge of genuine believers that they certainly possess eternal life. There are levels of assurance. Not all believers have it, and some believers are more sure of it than others. It is both objective and subjective (Rom. 15:4).

The basis of assurance is objective. It is based solely on Christ's finished cross-work as revealed in the word of God. Direct biblical statements are an objective basis for assurance (John 3:16; 5:24; Acts 16:31; Rom. 8:31–39; 10:9–13; Heb. 13:5) because they are as sure as the character of God. Other salvation doctrines are an indirect objective basis for assurance, including election, regeneration, redemption, union with Christ, the intercession of Christ, the nature of eternal life, and perseverance.

The means of assurance is subjective. The Holy Spirit's ongoing work in a believer's life is a subjective means (not objective basis) of assurance. The Holy Spirit seals (Eph. 1:13; 4:30; cf. Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5), indwells, leads, and influences believers (Rom. 5:5; 8:9–17; 1 John 4:13). Perseverance in the faith is a subjective means (not objective basis) of assurance that evidences a believer's salvation. Believers live characteristically righteous lifestyles (1 John 2:3–6, 15–17, 29; 3:3, 6–10, 24; 5:4, 18) and love one another (1 John 2:9–11, 15, 19; 3:14–18; 4:7–8, 12, 16, 20–21; 5:1–3).

A major problem with Keswick theology is that rather than causing professing believers to examine themselves to see whether they are genuine believers persevering in the faith, it exhorts them to move from category 1 to category 2. An unintentional result of dividing Christians into two distinct categories (e.g., making "carnal Christians" a permanent category) is that it may have a comforting, soothing effect on professing believers who are not actually genuine believers by giving them a false assurance of salvation. This tends to happen particularly when such professing believers are involved in habitual sins that should cause them to question whether they are really genuine believers. Furthermore, affirming two classes of Christians "makes the biblical commands to exercise church discipline difficult or impossible to apply" and misses "the scriptural emphasis upon the oneness of the body of Christ."<sup>211</sup>

(page 285-287)

(Second Quote related to "Carnal Christians" on page 310) - 1 Cor. 2:15; 3:1. Paul's references to spiritual people in 1 Cor 2:15 and 1 Cor 3:1 have relatively recently been taken out of context to support a view of sanctification that chronologically separates justification and sanctification. This view asserts that there are **three** categories of people: (1) unbelievers, (2) believers who are spiritual (πνευματικός), and (3) believers who are carnal (σάρκινος and σαρκικός) as opposed to πνευματικός. **While there is a sense in which believers temporarily living in a carnal way may be called unspiritual, Paul views all people in two categories: (1) unbelievers or natural (ψυχικός) people and (2) believers or spiritual (πνευματικός) people. All believers are πνευματικός people in this sense.** The ψυχικός person is the person without the Spirit, and the πνευματικός person is the person with the Spirit. **The "carnal Christians" Paul addresses are πνευματικός people who were temporarily carnal in the area of factionalism.** ([Let Go and Let God - A Survey of Keswick Theology](#)).

**Ernest Reisinger - The Carnal Christian** - Excerpt from a longer article (see [full article below](#)), this excerpt dealing with interpretation of 1 Corinthians 3 -

The Issue in Controversy

At a church service that I attended recently, the preacher, a sincere minister, was expounding 1 Corinthians chapter 3, and he said to a large congregation, 'Now after you become a Christian you have another choice -- either to grow in grace, follow the Lord and become a spiritual Christian, or to remain a babe in Christ and live like natural men.' He used 1 Corinthians 3: 1 -- 4 to state that there were three categories of men -- the natural man, the spiritual man, and the carnal man. He described the carnal man as being like the natural man who was unconverted.

This is the essence of the 'carnal Christian' teaching. One reason why it is so widespread is that it has been popularized for many years in the notes of the Scofield Reference Bible. A statement from these notes will indicate the precise nature of the teaching: 'Paul divides men into three classes: "Natural" i.e. the Adamic Man, unrenewed through the new birth; "Spiritual" i.e. the renewed man as Spirit-filled and walking in the Spirit in full communion with God; "Carnal", "fleshly", i.e. the renewed man who, walking "after the flesh", remains a babe

in Christ." (Scofield Reference Bible, pp. 1213, 1214.)

It is very important to observe the two main things in this Scofield note. First, the division of men into three classes; second, we are told that one of these classes of men comprises the 'carnal', the 'fleshly', 'the babe(s) in Christ', 'who walk after the flesh'. To 'walk' implies the bent of their lives; their leaning or bias is in one direction, that is, towards carnality.

We ought not to miss three very salient and important facts about the teaching:

First, we note again that it divides all men into three classes or categories. With this fact none of its proponents disagree, though they may present it differently and apply it differently.

Second, one class or category is set out as containing the 'Christian' who 'walks after the flesh'. The centre of his life is self, and he is the same as the unrenewed man as far as the bent of his life is concerned.

Third, all those who accept this view use 1 Corinthians 3: 1 -- 4 to support it. Consequently, if it can be established that the preponderance of Scripture teaches only two classes or categories of men -- regenerate and unregenerate, converted and unconverted, those in Christ and those outside of Christ -- the 'carnal Christian' teaching would be confronted with an insurmountable objection. It would be in conflict with the whole emphasis of Scripture and of the New Testament in particular.

Before I turn to some of the errors and dangers of the 'carnal Christian' teaching it may be wise to indicate what I am not saying. In this discussion of the 'carnal Christian' theory I am not overlooking the teaching of the Bible about sin in Christians, about babes in Christ, about growth in grace, about Christians who back-slide grievously, and about the divine chastisement which all Christians receive. I acknowledge that there are babes in Christ. In fact there are not only babes in Christ, but there are different stages of 'babyhood' in understanding divine truth and in spiritual growth. I also recognize that there is a sense in which Christians may be said to be carnal but I must add that there are different degrees of carnality. **Every Christian is carnal in some area of his life at many times in his life.** And in every Christian 'the flesh lusteth against the Spirit' (Gal. 5:17+).

All the marks of Christianity are not equally apparent in all Christians. Nor are any of these marks manifest to the same degree in every period of any Christian's life. Love, faith, obedience, and devotion will vary in the same Christian in different periods of his Christian experience; in other words, there are many degrees of sanctification. The Christian's progress in growth is not constant and undisturbed. There are many hills and valleys in the process of sanctification; and there are many stumblings, falls and crooked steps in the process of growth in grace. There are examples in the Bible of grievous falls and carnality in the lives of true believers. Thus we have the warnings and the promises of temporal judgment and of chastisement by our heavenly Father. These truths are all acknowledged and are not the point of this present discussion. The question we have to consider is: Does the Bible divide men into three categories? This is the issue at the heart of the 'carnal Christian' teaching.

**The teaching that I am opposing involves nine serious errors:**

### **1. The misuse of I Corinthians 3**

First: This 'carnal Christian' doctrine depends upon a wrong interpretation and application of 1 Corinthians 3:1-4, 'And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ... are ye not carnal?' To understand the true meaning of these words it should be remembered that 1 Corinthians is not primarily a doctrinal epistle. Like all Scripture it contains doctrine, but it was not written -- as was the Epistle to the Romans -- to lay doctrinal foundations. Paul's immediate concern in writing this Epistle was to deal with practical problems in a young church. In the third chapter, and earlier, he is dealing with the danger of division arising out of a wrong esteem for those from whom they heard the gospel. They were looking at second causes and forgetting the God to whom alone all glory belongs. Instead of saying, 'We are Christ's disciples' and recognizing their union in him, they were forming parties and saying, 'We are Paul's for he founded the church in our city'; or 'Apollos is more eloquent than Paul and he edifies us more'; or, 'We are of Peter'. Thus opposing parties were set up.

It is important to see that the whole context is dealing principally with this one problem of unwholesome division. However, it has a common root with all the other problems in 1 Corinthians -- the defrauding of one by another, the disorder at the Lord's Table, and so on. All the problems were the result of carnality, the outcome of that remaining principle of sin in all believers which Paul describes in Romans 7:21-23+: "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I

see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

In endeavouring to understand how Paul thinks of those he addresses in 1 Corinthians 3 we must bear in mind the designation he gives to them in chapter 1. He says they are 'sanctified in Christ Jesus', they are recipients of 'the grace of God', enriched by Christ 'in all utterance, and in all knowledge' (1 Cor 1:2--5). **They are rebuked in chapter 3, not for failing to attain to privileges which some Christians attain to, but for acting, despite their privileges, like babes and like the unregenerate in one area of their lives. This is very different from saying that the Apostle here recognizes the existence of a distinct group of Christians who can be called 'carnal'.** When Paul comes to speak of classes, he knows only two, as is clear in chapter 2 of this same Epistle where he divides men into '**natural**' and '**spiritual**', and says, 'But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man' (1 Cor. 2:14-15+). Under the term **natural** the Apostle includes all those persons who are not partakers of the Spirit of God. If the Spirit of God has not given to them a new and higher nature then they remain what they are by their natural birth, namely, **natural men**. The **spiritual** may be but babes in grace and babes in knowledge. Their faith may be weak. Their love may be in its early bud, their spiritual senses may be but little exercised, their faults may be many; but if 'the root of the matter' is in them and if they have passed from death unto life (1 Jn 3:14+) -- passed out of the region of nature into that which is beyond nature -- Paul puts them down in another class. They are all spiritual men although in some aspects of their behaviour they may temporarily fail to appear as such.

**Certainly these Christians at Corinth were imperfectly sanctified, as indeed are all Christians to a greater or lesser degree. But Paul is not saying that they were characterized by carnality in every area of their lives. He is not expounding a general doctrine of carnality but reproofing a specific outcropping of carnality in one certain respect.** When Paul does state a foundational truth respecting the position of all Christians it is in such words as, 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature', and for all who are 'in Christ' it is also true that, 'old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new' (2 Cor. 5:17). **There is no place for two classes of Christians in Paul's letter to the church at Corinth, and indeed no place for it anywhere in the teaching of Scripture.** To interpret 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 in such a way as to divide men into three classes is to violate a cardinal rule for the interpretation of Scripture, namely, that each single passage must be interpreted in the light of the whole. It was a wise saying of one of the church fathers, '**If you have one Scripture only on which to base an important doctrine or teaching you are most likely to find, on close examination, that you have none**'. ([Click here to read the entire article](#); See also his article on [The Carnal Christian](#)).

#### Ligonier Ministry - [The Carnal Christian](#)

"For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?" (1 Cor. 3:3b). 1 Corinthians 3:1-4

As we continue our discussion of topics related to perseverance, we come to a discussion about the "carnal" Christian. Proponents of carnal Christianity assert that it is possible to trust in Christ as Savior without necessarily confessing Christ as Lord. **According to advocates of this position, a person is saved if they confess Christ, even if they never live, or even care about, a life of obedience to Him as Lord.**

This position marks a significant innovation in the history of Christian theology. Even those of us who deny the meritorious nature of good works, affirm their necessity in the Christian life. Advocates of carnal Christianity charge that if we affirm that good works are necessary in the life of the believer, they assert that we necessarily deny that justification is by faith alone.

This claim only reveals that the proponents of carnal Christianity misunderstand the biblical position on faith alone. The Bible is crystal clear that we are justified not by works, but by faith alone (Gal. 2:16). But the Bible is equally clear that the faith that justifies us is never alone. True faith is demonstrated through the presence of good works and obedience to Christ in the life of the believer (James 2:17-18).

**If we never see good works in another person, we must doubt whether they are really a Christian.** Loving Christ means that we obey Him (John 14:15). Our obedience will not be perfect in this lifetime. The presence of sin guarantees that. Nevertheless, true faith will result in obedience, however imperfect it may be. Many claim to be Christians but do not possess true faith (Matt. 7:21). Proponents of carnal Christianity give some people false assurance of salvation when they claim it is possible to trust in Jesus as Savior but not

as Lord.

True Christians live a life characterized by a war between the Holy Spirit and the flesh (our old sin nature) (Rom. 7:13–20; Gal. 5:16–24).

**According to 1 Corinthians 3:1–4, sometimes the flesh seems to be winning more battles than the Spirit, especially when we are spiritual infants. This does not mean we are not saved; the presence of a desire for obedience and some good works prove otherwise. It does mean that as we grow into maturity, the victory over sin that Christ has won for us will be increasingly manifest in our lives through more and more victories of the Spirit over our flesh.**

Coram Deo - Being conformed to the image of Christ does not happen quickly. There is no secret formula for victory over the flesh or a second blessing that creates instant maturity. One of the most important means for growing to maturity is the diligent study of Scripture. We should make it our aim to spend consistent and quality time studying God's Word. (See also related post - [No Such Thing](#)).

**R C Sproul** - [Watch his video](#) recording Sproul's rejection of the teaching of the "Carnal Christian." Here is the transcript...

One of the great and ghastly errors—not just error but heresy—that permeates the evangelical world today is the doctrine of the carnal Christian. The doctrine of the carnal Christian was first set forth in a theological framework that taught this: that at regeneration the Holy Spirit can come in and save a person without changing the person at all. There had to be a second stage where there was lordship introduced on the throne of the soul for a person to be Spirit-filled and so on and not be carnal. But the idea was that you could be a believer and be altogether carnal. Now the Bible says we are carnal, we're sold under sin, and as long as we're in this life we still have a certain "fleshiness" that accompanies our walk as Christians, but **if you're 100 percent flesh and 100 percent carnal, you're 100 percent unconverted.** ([Carnal Christian](#))

**John MacArthur** - [The Gospel According to Jesus, 1988, p. 129.](#)

Contemporary theologians have fabricated an entire category for this type of person – the "carnal Christian." Who knows how many unregenerate persons have been lulled into a false sense of spiritual security by the suggestion that they are merely carnal? Christians can and do behave in carnal ways, but **nothing in Scripture suggests that a real Christian might pursue a life-style of unbroken indifference or antagonism toward the things of God.** Christians do not masquerade as children of the devil. The very reverse is true; Satan pretends to be an angel of light, and his servants imitate the children of righteousness (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). (Related Resource - See his answer to the question regarding [Carnal Christians](#))

**Steve Lawson** - [clip from youtube video](#) -

"There must be progressive ongoing growth in personal holiness...that is why **the life long 'carnal Christian' is a total myth.** That person does not exist. That is a false theology, because everyone who *is positionally sanctified* will be *being progressively sanctified.*" ([See the entire sermon Sanctified in Truth](#) - Dr Steven Lawson)

**Vance Havner** - [Repent or Else](#)

The cause of Christ has been hurt more by Sunday-morning benchwarmers who pretend to love Christ, who call Him Lord but do not His commands, than by all the publicans and sinners. They say they are evangelical but not evangelistic. They glory in being... disciples of the Lowest Common Denominator. They traffic in unfelt truth and refuse to get excited over religion. Their ideal service is "a mild-mannered man standing before a group of mild-mannered people, exhorting everybody to be more mild-mannered"... How many nice, comfortable, lovely people rest smilingly in church pews, their conscience drugged, their wills paralyzed, in self-satisfied stupor, utterly unconscious of their danger while the Lord of the Lampstands warns them, "I am about to spit you out of My mouth.

**[Erroll Hulse](#)**

When the reality of sin and its radical effects on the whole man are bypassed the idea takes over that it simply takes a decision for Christ to bring about the new birth. A decision for Christ is all that is needed. This is "easy-believism," in which repentance from sin is sidelined. Those who make a decision receive a pronouncement that they are saved. This proves premature. False converts are the outcome. The theory of the carnal Christian has been invented in order to accommodate those who have made a decision but who bear no marks of the new birth.

### The Carnal Christian Teaching (1 Cor 3:1–4)

The founder and first president of Dallas Theological Seminary (originally The Evangelical Theological College), Lewis Sperry Chafer (D.D.) (**ED**: NOTE CHAFER WAS STRONGLY INFLUENCED BY SCOFIELD AND TOOK OVER HIS CHURCH WHEN SCOFIELD DIED IN 1921 - SURPRISINGLY CHAFER HAD NO FORMAL THEOLOGICAL DEGREES), published *He That Is Spiritual* in 1918. In that work, now dubbed in its reprinted subtitle, “A Classic Study of the Biblical Doctrine of Spirituality,” he gave full exposition to the “*carnal Christian*” teaching, which had been briefly articulated in the Scofield Reference Bible, just one year before.

In Chafer’s work, he opens up the first chapter with “Three Classes of Men.” Chafer based his teaching on 1 Corinthians. 2:9–3:4. He states:

The Apostle Paul, by the Spirit, has divided the whole human family into three groups: (1) The “natural man,” who is unregenerate, or unchanged spiritually; (2) the “carnal man,” who is a “babe in Christ,” and walks “as a man”; and (3) the “spiritual” man.

In that opening chapter, Chafer describes the “carnal Christian” in the following terms:

Though saved, the carnal Christians are walking “according to the course of this world.” They are “carnal” because the flesh is dominating them (see Romans 7:14).... The objectives and affections are centered in the same unspiritual sphere as that of the “natural” man.

According to Chafer, Paul, in 1 Corinthians 3:1–4, is teaching that a saved person can be under the dominion of sin. Amazingly he uses Romans 7:14 to support this idea! Further, he asserts that a regenerate man may have his objectives and affections completely untouched by the regenerating grace of the Spirit! Finally, he summarizes, “There are two great spiritual changes which are possible to human experience—the change from the ‘natural’ man to the saved man, and the change from the ‘carnal’ man to the ‘spiritual’ man.”

Lewis Sperry Chafer had claimed to be “strictly Calvinistic.” Yet, his teaching in *He That Is Spiritual* departed from a traditional Reformed understanding of the work of salvation, and, as B. B. Warfield rightly stated, Chafer’s teaching comes from the “laboratory of John Wesley” and is “incurably Arminian.” Unfortunately, Chafer’s “carnal Christian” teaching from 1 Corinthians 3:1–4, gained widespread acceptance, and has been given new life time and again.

One of the most popular heirs of the Chaferian interpretation of 1 Corinthians 3:1–4 is Charles Ryrie. Ryrie even marshals Herman Bavinck and John Calvin in support of making a distinction between the carnal believer and the spiritual believer.

What is important to notice is that Chafer, and those who have followed him, have taken 1 Corinthians 3:1–4 and used it to justify that there are actually three classes or kinds of people: natural, spiritual, and carnal. In Chafer’s scheme, there are two types or kinds of Christians, those who are spiritual and those who are carnal.

Furthermore, what characterizes this “carnal” Christian is that his life can be completely unchanged; his objectives and affections can remain untransformed. There is no observable difference between him and the natural man. He can be walking according to the course of this world. In fact, he can even be completely indifferent to the work of the Holy Spirit. Certainly there are other related problems with Chafer’s teaching—for instance, regarding the nature of man, the nature of regeneration and sanctification. However, for our purpose we are simply focusing on his use of 1 Corinthians 3:1–4 to justify the “carnal Christian” doctrine. ([Click here to read the entire article - Rethinking a Much Abused Text: 1 Corinthians 3:1-15](#))

### Thomas Leake - Are There Spiritual and Carnal Christians?

#### Introduction: How carnal can a Christian be? And for how long??

Refutation of the doctrine of the “carnal Christian” developed by [Chafer](#) and Dallas Seminary; a prominent teaching that **someone can be a believer with no changed life; no fruit at all**; therefore what is needed is some type of second blessing or dedication of the life or commitment to Christ as Lord when He has only been Savior = bad theology; Need a proper understanding of 3:1-4 to refute this

#### 3 DESCRIPTIONS OF MEN

##### I. The Natural Man (2:14) = without the Holy Spirit = all the unsaved

Unresponsive to God; needs the new birth; thinks God’s wisdom is foolishness; no capacity to receive and

understand God's wisdom; Only the Spirit can impart life (1 Pet. 1:3); new birth caused by God. Not a reform of your old life; 2 Cor. 5:17 = new creation. Holy Spirit imparts God's life into the human soul; unsaved has a soul already ... but it is unresponsive to God

## **II. The Spiritual Man (2:15-16) = indwelt by the Holy Spirit = all the saved**

### A. His Title / Designation

Not some special category or subset of believers; but describes all believers

### B. His Activity - What does he do?

Discerns, investigates, evaluates all things; appraises them; then passes judgment; sees everything differently and clearly; the fog has been lifted; new life; new eyes; new understanding; Application: Don't go to unbelievers for our education

### C. His Distinction

Unbeliever doesn't know what's going on in my life; we are appraised by no one (no unbeliever); world didn't know or understand Christ; ended up hating Him and will hate us as well

### D. His Capabilities = We have the mind of Christ

Review of the process of revelation/inspiration/illumination = how God's thoughts become recorded in the Scriptures as words and come into our minds where we understand through the illumination of the Holy Spirit - thus we have the mind of Christ

Is. 40:13 quote - Speaks to the sufficiency of the Scriptures for Christian living

## **III. The Carnal/Spiritual Man (1 Cor 3:1-4)**

### A. What Paul does NOT mean:

Not saying that this group is just men of the flesh = unsaved; clearly he calls them brethren in this passage; cf. 1 Cor 1:2 where despite their evidence of carnal living and serious sins they are described as owning Christ as Lord of their lives; by virtue of calling them infants in Christ - acknowledges they have been born into God's family

### B. What DOES Paul mean here?

They are walking AS mere men; therefore Paul in some sense has to treat them as if they did not have the mind of Christ [or at least very limited capacity to discern spiritual truth] Their practice is not matching their spiritual reality; these are saved individuals here; it was quite a rebuke to call them fleshly in their practice; like selfish little babies; nobody likes a seven year old baby. They had been taught by the best = Apostle Paul himself; but still couldn't digest the meat of the Word

**No one denies that true believers can act carnally for a time - Question is How Carnal and For How Long??**

But they must evidence some fruit of a changed life or there was never any root; Only 2 categories: either in Adam or in Christ - no third category

**Evidences against the "carnal Christian" category popularized by [Scofield Study Bible](#) (and Lewis Sperry Chafer)**

1) Corinthian church only been around for 4-5 years - so not like they had been mired in carnality for 35 years with no evidence of fruit

2) Paul certainly expected some greater level of maturity from them; expected spiritual growth; this state (even for relatively young believers) was unnatural

3) 1 Cor 5:11 - This person who had sinned so grievously was designated as a "so-called" brother - Paul willing to open up for question the genuineness of his faith

4) Not carnal through and through; you can point to some evidence of a changed life Cf. 1 Cor 6:9-11

5) By the writing of 2 Corinthians the church had experienced godly sorrow; genuine repentance; changed heart; etc.

6) 2 Cor. 13:5 - admonition still to test yourself to see whether you are in the faith; Paul perhaps still unsure of some of them

7) 1 Cor 6:9-11 - Direct statement that people who persist in these types of sinful mindsets and activities are not saved - flies in the face of the "carnal Christian" view; cf. Ga. 5 and Eph. 5

8) Argument from silence - Paul never exhorts them to seek some type of second blessing or dedicate



themselves to the Lordship of Christ, etc.

**Conclusion:** Sometimes trust in the Lord and a changed life will be slow to come and difficult to see ... but it will be there

**Cautions:**

- 1) **Don't be fooled if you don't see any evidence of a changed life - don't be naïve in just assuming someone is a believer**
- 2) **Don't be too quick to call someone a non-believer; be humble and careful and balanced and realistic in our discernment**

**Jon Pratt** - All believers are carnal...sometimes. Any time they sin, they act in a fleshly manner. But this does not require bifurcating Christians into one of two distinct categories: sinful or righteous. Rather, the emphasis in the New Testament is on the reality that all believers are bearing fruit, being sanctified, and persevering in the faith. This does not mean that holy living is completed or perfected during one's earthly existence, but it does mean that God graciously brings to fruition the good work He begins at justification. May the Lord hasten the day when our struggle with sin is replaced by glorified perfection in holiness! (Excerpt - for full article see [Carnal Christians? - Part 2](#) and [Carnal Christians? Part 1](#))

**Related Resources:**

- Multiple Online Resources related to the unusual teaching of Zane Hodges (which at its core is **Carnal Christianity**).- See resources at top of the page
- Brian Schwertley [The Necessity of Sanctification: A Brief Refutation of the Carnal Christian Heresy](#)

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**Howard Hendricks** - Shortly after I became a Christian, someone wrote in the flyleaf of my Bible these words: **"This book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book."** That was true then, and it's still true today. **Dusty Bibles always lead to dirty lives.** In fact, you are either in the Word and the Word is conforming you to the image of Jesus Christ, or you are in the world and the world is squeezing you into its mold (Ro 12:2+). And yet the great tragedy among Christians today is that too many of us are **UNDER** the Word of God, but not **IN** it for ourselves. I met a man once who had driven his entire family all the way across the country to attend a Bible conference. Amazed, I asked him, "Why did you come so far?" "Because I wanted to get **UNDER** the Word of God," he said. On the face of it, that sounds wonderful. But later it hit me: Here was a man willing to drive twelve hundred miles to get **UNDER** the Word of God; but was he just as willing to walk across his living room floor, pick up a Bible, and get into it for himself? You see, there's no question that believers need to sit **UNDER** the teaching of Gods Word. But that ought to be a stimulus—not a substitute—for getting into it for ourselves. Even though the Bible remains the most sold book in the world, it's also one of the most neglected ones. The Barna Research Group of Glendale, California reports that in a typical week, only 10 percent of Americans read the Bible every day. And even that figure may be high, states George Barna, president of the research firm. Many people who claimed to read the Bible once a week or more admitted that they had not read it during the week prior to a 1991 nationwide survey. Gallup polls confirm those findings. One survey found that 82 percent of Americans believe that the Bible is either the literal or "inspired" Word of God. More than half said they read the Bible at least monthly. Yet half couldn't name even one of the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And fewer than half knew who delivered the Sermon on the Mount. (Borrow [Living by the Book](#))

**1 Corinthians 3:4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men?**

Amplified For when one says, I belong to Paul, and another, I belong to Apollos, are you not ordinary (unchanged) men?

Wuest - For whenever someone says, As for myself, I indeed am a follower of Paul, but another of a different character says, As for myself, I am a follower of Apollos, are you not mere men? ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

NET 1 Corinthians 3:4 For whenever someone says, "I am with Paul," or "I am with Apollos," are you not merely human?

NLT 1 Corinthians 3:4 When one of you says, "I am a follower of Paul," and another says, "I follow Apollos," aren't you acting just like people of the world?

ESV 1 Corinthians 3:4 For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being

merely human?

NIV 1 Corinthians 3:4 For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men?

GNT 1 Corinthians 3:4 τὸν γὰρ λέγουσιν, ἔγωγε εἰμι Παύλου, ἄλλος δὲ, ἔγωγε Ἀπολλῶν, ὁ κτν ἄνθρωπος;

KJV 1 Corinthians 3:4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?

YLT 1 Corinthians 3:4 for when one may say, 'I, indeed, am of Paul;' and another, 'I -- of Apollos;' are ye not fleshly?

ASV 1 Corinthians 3:4 For when one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not men?

CSB 1 Corinthians 3:4 For whenever someone says, "I'm with Paul," and another, "I'm with Apollos," are you not unspiritual people?

NKJ 1 Corinthians 3:4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?

NRS 1 Corinthians 3:4 For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely human?

NAB 1 Corinthians 3:4 Whenever someone says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely human?

NJB 1 Corinthians 3:4 While there is one that says, 'I belong to Paul' and another that says, 'I belong to Apollos' are you not being only too human?

GWN 1 Corinthians 3:4 When some of you say, "I follow Paul" and others say, "I follow Apollos," aren't you acting like sinful humans?

BBE 1 Corinthians 3:4 For when one says, I am of Paul; and another says, I am of Apollos; are you not talking like natural men?

- 1 Corinthians 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passages:

1 Corinthians 1:12+ Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."

1 Corinthians 4:6+ Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.

### FORMING FACTIONS: ACTING LIKE UNSAVED MEN

**Factionalism** speaks of conflict within a group, an internal dissension, usually resulting in contention between groups, these perverted partisan practices and petty animosities reflecting the selfish (fleshly - characteristic of men without the Spirit) interests of the members of the various groups. Factionalism refers to arguments or disputes between two or more small groups from within a larger group (in this case the "larger group" being the Church, the local body of Christ at Corinth).

**For** ([gar](#)) - term of explanation. Paul reiterates his explanation of the evidence that they were still infants, still acting fleshly.

**When one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men?**- All the verbs in this sentence are present tense, speaking of continuing action. Paul is referring back to his opening description of the [pathogenesis](#) of the church divisions (1 Cor 1:10-12+) Paul says that their boasting in or favoring one preacher/teacher over another was evidence that they were acting like mere men, like natural men who were not saved and who were devoid of the Spirit. The effect of this statement would be to cause them to see the foolishness of favoring one man over another. In so doing, they were simply acting like unsaved men would act.

**Robertson** on **are you not mere men?** - It was a home-thrust. Paul would not even defend his own partisans.

**W E Vine** says **mere men** means "are you not on a purely human level," lacking spiritual discernment? He who sets his mind on "the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth" (Col. 3:2+), enjoys that fellowship with the Father and the Son which

enables him to understand “the things of the Spirit.” (Collected Writings)

**Wayne Barber** says that 'Since 1 Cor 1:10+ Paul has been dealing with the biggest symptom of a spiritual baby and that is **attaching yourselves to people** (1 Cor 1:12+), to preachers with the message, rather than **attaching yourself to Christ** and living in the depth of your relationship to Him. Babies have to cling to somebody they can see, don't they? They just have to have somebody around them to remind them that God really is alive. ([1 Corinthians 3:1-3](#) - Spiritual Babies)

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## Lead Them To Jesus

When one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not [carnal](#)? — 1 Corinthians 3:4

Today's Scripture : 1 Corinthians 3:4-8

Over the years of working with Sports Spectrum magazine, I've heard many stories about athletes and the help they receive from spiritual mentors. That relationship is usually helpful, but occasionally it seems that the athlete is not guided toward the true source of divine power.

I interview many athletes who illustrate this point. When I say, “Tell me about your faith,” they reply, “Our chaplain really helps us. We know that we can go to him with anything. He is always there for us. We really believe in the chaplain.”

I'm glad that the chaplain is there for them, but I'm sad that the name of Jesus is seldom mentioned. It seems that their focus is on the human helper and that their true source of power, Jesus, is being ignored.

We must remember not to let our devotion to a leader replace our devotion to Christ. Paul reminded us that “neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase” (1 Corinthians 3:7). Too often, we put our focus on the leader and not on the One the leader is following.

Are you a leader? Teach people to follow the Savior, not you the servant. Are you a follower? Follow only those who point toward Jesus-not themselves. By: Dave Branon (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

They truly lead who lead by love  
And humbly serve the Lord;  
Their lives will bear the Spirit's fruit  
And magnify His Word.  
-D. De Haan

Looking for a leader? Follow the Lord.

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## 1 Corinthians 3:5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one.

Amplified - What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Ministering servants [not heads of parties] through whom you believed, even as the Lord appointed to each his task:

Wuest - What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? We are ministering servants through whose intermediate agency you believed, servants in each case in the manner as the Lord gave to each of us. ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

NET 1 Corinthians 3:5 What is Apollos, really? Or what is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, and each of us in the ministry the Lord gave us.

NLT 1 Corinthians 3:5 After all, who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only God's servants through whom you believed the Good News. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us.

ESV 1 Corinthians 3:5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each.

NIV 1 Corinthians 3:5 What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe--as the Lord has assigned to each his task.

GNT 1 Corinthians 3:5 τ ο ν σπιν πολλοις; τ ο σπιν Πα λος; δι κοινοι δι ν πιστε σατε, κα κ στ ς κ ριος

δωκεν.

KJV 1 Corinthians 3:5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?

YLT 1 Corinthians 3:5 Who, then, is Paul, and who Apollos, but ministrants through whom ye did believe, and to each as the Lord gave?

ASV 1 Corinthians 3:5 What then is Apollos? and what is Paul? Ministers through whom ye believed; and each as the Lord gave to him.

CSB 1 Corinthians 3:5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? They are servants through whom you believed, and each has the role the Lord has given.

NKJ 1 Corinthians 3:5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?

NRS 1 Corinthians 3:5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each.

NAB 1 Corinthians 3:5 What is Apollos, after all, and what is Paul? Ministers through whom you became believers, just as the Lord assigned each one.

NJB 1 Corinthians 3:5 For what is Apollos and what is Paul? The servants through whom you came to believe, and each has only what the Lord has given him.

GWN 1 Corinthians 3:5 Who is Apollos? Who is Paul? They are servants who helped you come to faith. Each did what the Lord gave him to do.

BBE 1 Corinthians 3:5 What then is Apollos? and what is Paul? They are but servants who gave you the good news as God gave it to them.

- **ministers:** 1Co 3:7 4:1,2 Lu 1:2 Ro 10:14,15 2Co 3:6 2 Cor 4:5,7 2 Cor 6:1,4 2 Cor 11:23
- **even as the Lord gave opportunity:** 1Co 3:10 1 Cor 9:17 1 Cor 12:4-11,28 Mt 25:15 Joh 3:27 Ro 12:3-6 1Pe 4:10-11
- 1 Corinthians 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### **Related Passages:** (God's gift to men for ministry)

Romans 12:3-6+ For through **the grace given to me** I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. 4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Since **we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly:** if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith;

1 Peter 4:10-11+ As **each one has received a special gift**, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 Whoever **speaks**, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever **serves** is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies (HE GIVES THE SPIRITUAL GIFT, THEN HE GIVES THE SUPERNATURAL STRENGTH TO EXERCISE THE GIFT); so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

## **APOLLOS AND PAUL SERVANTS OF THE LORD**

**What then is Apollos? And what is Paul?** - The point of Paul's questions is to help the saints at Corinth to stop boasting in either he or Apollos. And he then goes on to explain why such boasting is not proper.

**Servants through whom you believed** ([pisteuo](#)) - They are **servants** not "leaders of parties or sects." (ATR) **Servants** is [diakonos](#) meaning a minister or attendant and as described below speaks of humble service for the sake of others. In this case the "humble service" was proclamation of the Gospel. Paul is saying in essence that the saints at Corinth should not boast in either himself or Apollos because they were only the Lord's **servants**. (called **servants of Christ** in 1 Cor 4:1) They were obeying His bidding. They were simply the "instruments" that God's Spirit had used to speak of Christ crucified by which the Corinthians were saved.

**THOUGHT** - Our ministry should be so Word centered, Spirit driven and God glorifying that we too could say we were "servants through whom you believed."

Earlier Paul had alluded to the saving effect of belief writing "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached (The Cross - 1 Cor 1:18+) to save those who believe ([pisteuo](#))." (1 Co. 1:21+)

**Servants** (ministers, deacons) ([1249](#)) ([diakonos](#) related to [diakoneo](#), [diakonia](#)) is of uncertain origin. Some say it is from **dia** (through) + **konis** (dust) which denotes one who hurries through the dust to carry out his service. (**Thayer** and others doubt this derivation for technical reasons). **Vine** thinks that **diakonos** is from **diako** which means to hasten after, to pursue and so to run on errands. **Hiebert** speaking of deacons sums it up writing that "the root idea is one who reaches out with diligence and persistence to render a service on behalf of others. This would imply that the deacon reaches out to render love-prompted service to others energetically and persistently....The basic concept underlying the word "deacon" is that of a voluntary, love-prompted service for the benefit of others. It is a service that desires the true welfare of those ministered to." This word group ([diakonos](#), [diakoneo](#), [diakonia](#)) focuses on the rendering or assistance or help by performing certain duties, often of a humble or menial nature, and including such mundane activities as waiting on tables or caring for household needs, activities that to many would seem to be without dignity (not true of course in God's eyes, Pr 15:3, Rev 22:12+). In summary, the basic idea of this word group is that of humble, submissive, personal service, with less emphasis on a specific office or a particular function. As Matthew Henry once said "Those whom God will employ are first struck with a sense of their unworthiness to be employed."

**Diakonos** - 29x in 27v - deacons(3), minister(7), servant(10), servants(9). Mt. 20:26; Mt. 22:13; Mt. 23:11; Mk. 9:35; Mk. 10:43; Jn. 2:5; Jn. 2:9; Jn. 12:26; Ro 13:4; Ro 15:8; Ro 16:1; 1 Co. 3:5; 2 Co. 3:6; 2 Co. 6:4; 2 Co. 11:15; 2 Co. 11:23; Gal. 2:17; Eph. 3:7; Eph. 6:21; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:7; Col. 1:23; Col. 1:25; Col. 4:7; 1 Ti 3:8; 1 Ti 3:12; 1 Ti 4:6

**Believed** ([4100](#)) ([pisteuo](#)) means to consider something to be true and therefore worthy of one's trust, in this case to place their trust in Christ crucified thereby opening the way of salvation. It is more than an intellectual belief (which it clearly includes), but is also a response of one's heart and will, placing full confidence in the Gospel which results in one's salvation. Uses in the letters to Corinth - 1 Co. 1:21; 1 Co. 3:5; 1 Co. 9:17; 1 Co. 11:18; 1 Co. 13:7; 1 Co. 14:22; 1 Co. 15:2; 1 Co. 15:11; 2 Co. 4:13

**Even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one** - **NLT** = "Each of us did the work the Lord gave us." **ESV** = as the Lord assigned to each. **NIV** = "as the Lord has assigned to each his task." The point is that what Paul and Apollos had done in Corinth was not a result of any intrinsic worth of either man but was in essence the result of a gift from the Lord Jesus Who gave them the privilege of proclaiming the Gospel. He says that he and Apollos were just doing the tasks God had assigned them. And so he is saying to the Corinthians "Don't boast it us, for what we did among you was not because of our goodness, but because of the goodness of the Lord."

**Carson** adds "If the Lord Jesus Himself "has assigned to each his task," it is idiotic to rank them according to their jobs. These servants have not gained their status by ambition and "natural gift" (as if in God's world there can be any gift that he himself has not given!), but by the specific assignment of the Lord." (Ibid)

**Matthew Henry** - Here the apostle instructs them how to cure this humour (sickness), and rectify what was amiss among them upon this head, (1) By reminding them that the ministers about whom they contended were but ministers (vv5-7) and (2) By representing to them the unanimity of Christ's ministers (v8)

### 1 Corinthians 3:6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.

Amplified - I planted, Apollos watered, but God [all the while] was making it grow and [He] gave the increase.

Wuest - As for myself, I planted, Apollos watered, but God has been causing that which was sown to grow. ([Erdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

NET 1 Corinthians 3:6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused it to grow.

NLT 1 Corinthians 3:6 I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it

grow.

ESV 1 Corinthians 3:6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

NIV 1 Corinthians 3:6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.

GNT 1 Corinthians 3:6 γ φ τευσα, πολλ ς πιπσεν, λλ θε ς η ξανεν·

KJV 1 Corinthians 3:6 I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.

YLT 1 Corinthians 3:6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was giving growth;

ASV 1 Corinthians 3:6 I planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.

CSB 1 Corinthians 3:6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

NKJ 1 Corinthians 3:6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.

NRS 1 Corinthians 3:6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

NAB 1 Corinthians 3:6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth.

NJB 1 Corinthians 3:6 I did the planting, Apollos did the watering, but God gave growth.

GWN 1 Corinthians 3:6 I planted, and Apollos watered, but God made it grow.

BBE 1 Corinthians 3:6 I did the planting, Apollos did the watering, but God gave the increase.

- **I:** 1Co 3:9,10 4:14,15 9:1,7-11 15:1-11 Ac 18:4-11 2Co 10:14,15
- **Apollos:** Pr 11:25 Ac 18:24,26,27 19:1
- **God:** 1Co 1:30 1 Cor 15:10 Ps 62:9,11 92:13-15 127:1 Isa 55:10,11 Isa 61:11
- 1 Corinthians 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passages (God causing the growth):

Acts 11:18+ When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then,**God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.**"

Acts 14:27+ When they had arrived and gathered the church together, **they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.**

Acts 16:14+ A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and **the Lord opened her heart to respond (GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY) o the things spoken by Paul (PAUL'S ROLE)..**

Acts 21:19+ After he had greeted them, **he began to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles (GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY) through his ministry (PAUL'S ROLE).**

Romans 15:18+ For I will not presume to speak of anything except what **Christ has accomplished through me**, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed,

2 Corinthians 3:5-6+ Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but **our adequacy is from God**,<sup>6</sup> Who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

1 Thessalonians 1:5+ for our **gospel** did not come to you **in word** only (PAUL'S ROLE). but also **in power and in the Holy Spirit** (GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY) and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.

## **SERVANTS SUBMITTED TO GOD'S SUPERNATURAL POWER**

Now Paul begins his agricultural metaphor to help them understand their role as the Lord's servants.

**I planted, Apollos watered** - Luke describes Paul's planting in Acts 18:1-18+ and Apollos' watering in Acts 18:24-19:1+. Paul sowed the Gospel seed in the "field" in Corinth, and the Spirit used this "seed" to birth new creations in Christ. After the church was established in Corinth, Paul left and was followed by the "[silver tongued](#)" speaker Apollos who proclaimed the pure Word of God which the Spirit used to build up the saints. But as we have seen, unfortunately they remained spiritually immature because of the

tendency to walk by the flesh and not the Spirit.

**but God was causing the growth - Causing the growth** is [auxano](#) in the imperfect tense (over and over, again and again). The faithful proclamation of the word by Paul and Apollos was supernaturally energized by God thus causing the spiritual growth. The implication is that at least some of them were growing spiritually to some degree, although as a whole the church was fleshly not spiritual.

[Robertson](#) on [auxano](#) in the imperfect tense - Imperfect tense here (active indicative) for the continuous blessing of God both on the work of Paul and Apollos, co-labourers with God in God's field. Reports of revivals sometimes give the glory to the evangelist or to both evangelist and pastor. Paul gives it all to God. He and Apollos cooperated as successive pastors.

Paul described God's part in **the growth** earlier writing "But by His doing (WHOSE? GOD'S DOING) you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption." (1 Cor 1:30).

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### 'Fertilizer Sure Helps!'

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. —1 Corinthians 3:6

A Sunday school teacher pointed to a large plant in the room and asked her young pupils, "Who made those beautiful flowers grow?" A boy quickly answered, "God did!" The teacher was pleased by the response, but before she had a chance to comment, another boy shouted, "But fertilizer sure helps!"

That youngster touched on a profound reality—the mingling of the human with the divine in God's plan for growth. For example, even though the Lord created this world with its growing things, He put man in the garden to tend and cultivate it.

We find a parallel to this truth in the spiritual realm. The apostle Paul said, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase" (1 Corinthians 3:6). His main intent in writing these words was to emphasize that God was the one responsible for "the increase." Even so, the Lord had worked through the faithful endeavors of men. Notice what the record states: Paul "planted," and Apollos "watered."

We recognize that God alone is the one who makes things grow—both in nature and in the church. But we also know that He chooses to work through people, and what we do "sure helps!" God is faithful in doing His part. Are we faithful in doing ours? (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

The Lord gives each of us a task  
He wants us to fulfill;  
To love and serve Him faithfully  
Accomplishes His will.  
—Sper

Pray for a good harvest, but keep on hoeing.

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### It's Up To God

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. —1 Corinthians 3:6

Tom Vreman of the Dorcas Society Mission was speaking to our church about the patience required to work on a mission field. He told about a friend and his family who had traveled to the Inner Mongolia region of China to proclaim the gospel.

For the first few years, all they did was get settled and learn the customs of the people. After almost 4 years, his friend reported with great excitement that he was discipling his first three converts. That's slow progress.

But after another 4 years, the missionary gave this amazing report: The entire village had turned in faith to Christ. The new Christians began praying for the people in a neighboring town. They sent witnesses, and soon that whole village received Christ. Now the entire region is hearing the gospel—all because one man and his family were willing to plant the seed and trust God for the results.

The apostle Paul gave his life to do God's work. But he knew who was responsible for the success of that work. "Neither he who plants is anything," he wrote, "nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase" (1 Cor. 3:7).

Evangelism calls for patience. We may plant the seed, as Paul did, or we may water, as did Apollos (v.6). The key is to do our part and leave the results to God.(Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

You've fished for men's souls for years,  
Yet little success you can claim;  
Keep casting the net where God leads you—  
Your faithfulness honors His Name.  
—DCE

Faithfulness is God's requirement; fruitfulness is His reward.

### **1 Corinthians 3:7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.**

Amplified - So neither he who plants is anything nor he who waters, but [only] God Who makes it grow and become greater.

Wuest - So that he who plants is not anything, nor he who waters, but God who causes things to grow. ([Erdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

NET 1 Corinthians 3:7 So neither the one who plants counts for anything, nor the one who waters, but God who causes the growth.

NLT 1 Corinthians 3:7 It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow.

ESV 1 Corinthians 3:7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

NIV 1 Corinthians 3:7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

GNT 1 Corinthians 3:7 στε ο τε φυτεων στυτιο τε ποτ ζων λα ξων θες.

KJV 1 Corinthians 3:7 So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.

YLT 1 Corinthians 3:7 so that neither is he who is planting anything, nor he who is watering, but He who is giving growth -- God;

ASV 1 Corinthians 3:7 So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.

CSB 1 Corinthians 3:7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

NKJ 1 Corinthians 3:7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

NRS 1 Corinthians 3:7 So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

NAB 1 Corinthians 3:7 Therefore, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who causes the growth.

NJB 1 Corinthians 3:7 In this, neither the planter nor the waterer counts for anything; only God, who gives growth.

GWN 1 Corinthians 3:7 So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is important because only God makes it grow.

BBE 1 Corinthians 3:7 So then the planter is nothing, and the waterer is nothing; but God who gives the increase.



- 1Co 13:2 Ps 115:1 Isa 40:17 41:29 Da 4:35 Joh 15:5 2Co 12:9 Ga 6:3
- 1 Corinthians 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### Related Passage:

Psalm 115:1 Not to us, O LORD, not to us, But to Your name give glory Because of Your lovingkindness, because of Your truth.

## TO GOD BE ALL THE GLORY

**So then** ([hoste](#)) - Term of conclusion similar to *therefore*. In 1 Cor 3:5 Paul had asked what Paul and Apollos were and now he gives the answer.

**ILLUSTRATION** - Jill Briscoe said, "I love what Corrie ten Boom once taught me". She said, "Jill, people thank me so much, and it used to worry me because I didn't want to get a big head. So I began to collect those compliments like flowers. 'Thank you,' I'd say. 'Thank you, thank you, thank you.' Then at the end of the day I'd kneel down and I'd say, 'Here You are Jesus, they're all Yours.'" (Brian Bell)

This is one of those great BUT GOD (see discussion of BUT GOD) phrases in the Bible. In the Greek, the word "**God**" occupies an emphatic position in the sentence: 'He that gives the growth, (namely) **God**'

**Neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God Who causes the growth**(see [related passages above](#)) - Paul's point is that it is God who supernaturally causes any spiritual growth, not the **one who plants** (Paul) or **who waters** (Apollos). Paul and Apollos were simply humble "branches" who were productive ONLY because they abided in the Vine, Christ Jesus (Jn 15:5). This truth should squash any ideas of competition or disharmony between Paul and Apollos, thus making favoritism by the Corinthians of one over the other superfluous, and countering the divisive effect of their "[party spirit](#)."

**Keith Krell** - Paul "planted" as he introduced the Corinthians to faith in Christ and taught basic discipleship truths to those who believed (4:15; Acts 18:1, 17).<sup>33</sup> Apollos "watered" as he followed up Paul in Corinth, and fortified, fed, and nurtured the work that Paul had begun (Acts 18:24-19:1). There is an operative word in these verses. It is the word "one." This word helps explain God's mathematics. One plus one equals one. Ten plus ten equals one. One hundred plus one hundred equals one. Regardless of how many people are serving, God is the One that makes things grow.<sup>34</sup> Paul states this twice in 3:6-7. He wants us to understand that "unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it" (Ps 127:1). We should dream and plan for ministry. We should want and expect our church and our ministries to grow. Nevertheless, growth is God's business, not ours. God is the One who causes the growth! Therefore, we must pray and trust Him for it. Are you praying for the growth and health of your church? If not, please begin doing so today. By using the illustration of a garden, Paul helps us to understand that he and Apollos are not gardeners, they are garden tools. They are shovels and rakes. Now no one fawns over a garden tool, right? Most people don't walk into a beautiful garden and say, "Look at that shovel!" "Look at that rake!" Instead, they focus on the garden and the gardener. Likewise, since we are mere garden tools we ought to direct people to the Gardener. He is the One whom has done all the work! The mark of a successful servant is: Does he or she point others to the Gardener (see John 3:30)? ([Team Work or Turf Wars? 1 Corinthians 3:1-9](#))

**Carson** adds "To heap unqualified and exclusive praise on the sower is to focus too narrowly; to praise those who handle the irrigation and forget those who sow the seed is to be myopic. In any case it is God alone who makes things grow. Should not he be praised?" (Ibid)

**Robertson** on **God Who causes the growth** - God is the whole and we are not anything.

Paul expressed a similar sentiment writing to the Galatians that

"if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself." (Gal 6:3+)

And again in Romans Paul wrote

"For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. 4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are **one body in Christ**, and individually members one of another. 5 so we, who are many, are **one body in Christ**, and individually members one of another." (Ro 12:3-5+).

Jesus alludes to the parity among those who participate in the growing of His Kingdom in John writing

"Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together." (Jn 4:36+).

See related commentary on Mark 4:27 (The Farmer) goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows—how, he himself does not know.

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### **The Pitfalls of Popularity 1 Corinthians 3:7 - J Oswald Sanders**

What leader or preacher does not desire to be liked by his people? Being disliked is no virtue, but popularity can have too high a price. "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!" Jesus warned in Luke 6:26KJV.

Personality cults have often developed around great spiritual leaders. Followers are awestruck at a leader's virtues and show such fawning deference that the leader seems no longer merely human. Worse yet, the leader sometimes begins to enjoy his or her pedestal.

Paul faced this problem at Corinth. Christians there were splintering into camps promoting their favorite: some liked Apollos, others liked Paul. The apostle saw the danger and immediately put a stop to it. Neither of them deserved such "hero worship," "but only God" (1 Corinthians 3:7). Any fervor, devotion, or loyalty the people in Corinth might have for spiritual leaders should be given solely to the person of Jesus.

Spiritual leaders may be esteemed highly for their work's quality, but that esteem cannot degenerate into a form of idol worship. Leaders must work to draw the people's affection to Jesus. There is no fault in finding encouragement when one's service is appreciated, but the leader must altogether refuse to be idolized.

Stephen Neill said in a lecture to theological students: "Popularity is the most dangerous spiritual state imaginable, since it leads on so easily to the spiritual pride which drowns men in perdition. It is a symptom to be watched with anxiety since so often it has been purchased at the too heavy price of compromise with the world."

George Whitefield was immensely popular, and in his early years he enjoyed the acclaim. He recalled that he felt it was death to be despised and worse than death to be laughed at. But as his service and career progressed, he grew tired of the attention. "I have seen enough of popularity to be sick of it," he declared. (ED: COMPARE John 3:30+)(SL)

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### **Vance Havner - ONLY GOD IS ANYTHING**

So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. 1 Corinthians 3:7.

God lays aside His co-workers as the carpenter his tools. Some are castaways, disapproved. Some are old and spent. A preacher who once swayed multitudes fades out in seclusion. We have our day and some finish early, dying in full bloom. All that matters is that the work goes on, the building goes up. We are not mere pawns on a chessboard, for God is our Father, but we serve our generation by the will of God and then fall asleep and are laid with our fathers. The planters and builders come and go and are nothing—only God is anything and everything.

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### **[Glory to the Grower](#)**

So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 1 Corinthians 3:7

Today's Scripture & Insight : Mark 4:26–29

One day, I noticed an unexpected splash of yellow to the right of our driveway. Six stalks of daffodils, sandwiched between two large stones, bloomed bright and tall. Because I hadn't planted, fertilized, or intentionally watered the bulbs, I couldn't figure out how or why the flowers had sprouted in our yard.

Jesus illustrated a mystery of spiritual growth in the parable of the growing seed. He compares the kingdom of God to a farmer scattering seed on the ground (Mark 4:26). The one who scattered the seed may have done what he could to care for the soil. But Jesus said the seed sprouted whether or not that man slept in, woke up, or even understood the growth process (vv. 27–28). The land owner benefited from the harvest (v. 29), though its development didn't depend on what he did or his understanding of the workings beneath the surface of the soil.

The maturing of the seeds in Jesus's parable, like the blooming of my daffodils, occurred in God's time and because of God's growing power. Whether we're considering personal spiritual growth or God's plan to expand the church until Jesus returns, the Lord's mysterious ways aren't dependent on our abilities or understanding of His works. Still, God invites us to know, serve, and

praise the Grower, reaping the benefits of the spiritual maturity He cultivates in and through us. By: Xochitl Dixon (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Lord, thank You for growing us spiritually and using us to serve Your people, as You grow Your kingdom.

God deserves the glory for the growth of His people and His kingdom.

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### **The Richness Of Humility**

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:1-10

Neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. —1 Corinthians 3:7

She lived out spiritual humility, yet she had much on a human level to be proud of. As an author of over 70 books and a translator of many others into Afrikaans, Annalou Marais had much cause to brag—but she was more concerned about honoring Christ than advancing herself. She worked behind the scenes of the Bible conference, doing a servant's tasks with a smiling face and a joyful heart. It would have been natural for her to desire, and even deserve, the spotlight. Instead, she quietly served, joyfully weeping as God worked in people's hearts. It was an impressive humility, because it was completely genuine.

I have heard it said, "It is amazing what can be accomplished when we don't care who gets the credit." This is certainly true of Christian service. Paul told the church at Corinth, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase" (1 Cor. 3:6-7). Paul had learned that great lesson of the servant's heart, as Annalou has learned—it's entirely about God. What we do is accomplished by His power and grace, and all the glory must go to Him.

It was a lesson in humility watching Annalou, and one that reminded me of the richness of serving God. (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

God often uses lowly things  
His purpose to fulfill,  
Because it takes a humble heart  
To carry out His will.  
—D. De Haan

Pride and grace cannot dwell in the same place.

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### **THE SELF-DISCIPLINE APPROACH**

Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. (1 Cor 3:7)

There's no doubt that disciplined people, both believers and unbelievers, can effect change in themselves. But in the self-discipline approach to holiness, a major temptation is to rely on a regimen of spiritual disciplines instead of on the Holy Spirit.

I believe in spiritual disciplines, and I seek to practice them. But those disciplines are not the source of our spiritual strength. The Lord Jesus Christ is, and the Spirit's ministry is to apply His strength in our lives. To paraphrase 1 Corinthians 3:7, we can plant and water, but we cannot make things grow. Only the Spirit can do that. We must plant and water if we're to make progress in holiness, but only the Spirit can change us more and more into the likeness of Jesus.

*Edwards was disciplined, but he was also dependent.*

[Jonathan Edwards compiled a series of seventy resolutions](#) to govern his own spiritual disciplines and conduct. Talk about spiritual discipline! His resolutions would make most of our present-day disciplines look like spiritual kindergarten. But at the beginning of his list he wrote these words: "Being sensible that I am unable to do any thing without God's help, I do humbly entreat him, by his grace, to enable me to keep these Resolutions, so far as they are agreeable to his will, for Christ's sake." Edwards was disciplined, but he was also dependent.

I'm sure those of us who tend toward the self-discipline school of holiness agree that we must depend on the enabling power of the Spirit. We give lip service to it, but do we practice it? Do we each day and throughout the day acknowledge our dependence on Him? Or do we in fact seek to pursue holiness in the strength of our own willpower? (BORROW Jerry Bridges [Holiness day by day : transformational thoughts for your spiritual journey page 94](#))

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**Rick Renner - 1 Corinthians 3:7 - [Your Most Valuable Partner](#) -** What has God called you to do that you never dreamed you

would be doing? I've learned that as we walk with God as our most important Partner in life, we often find ourselves doing what we would have never thought possible. ([For full devotional click here](#); See related devotional [Do You Know the Role You're Supposed to Play?](#))

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## Let God Do His Work

Read: 1 Corinthians 3:1-11

Neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. —1 Corinthians 3:7

In our zeal to serve the Lord, it's easy to think that it's our responsibility to produce results. This causes us to place too much faith in our ability and too little faith in God's.

Paul observed this same tendency in the Corinthian church. Certain believers extolled the seed-planting ministry of Paul, while others favored the seed-watering ministry of Apollos. In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul reminded them that it is God who brings the seed to fruition (vv.4-7). Yet Paul acknowledged that their faithful efforts were part of God's plan, "and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor" (v.8).

Imagine a farmer sitting on his front porch. You ask him what he's doing. He answers, "Farming." You ask him what he's growing. He replies, "Wheat." "But your fields look unplowed and unplanted," you say. "That's right," he answers, "I'm farming by faith. Believing God for a harvest." "But shouldn't you be doing something?" you protest. He replies, "I am. I'm praying and believing!"

This story reminds us that God won't do our work for us, and 1 Corinthians teaches us that the results are not up to us. The best way to serve is to faithfully plant and water the seed, then trust God for the results. (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

God does not expect us

To make the seed bear fruit;

Jesus said to plant it,

And pray that it will root.

—Pendergraft

We can plant the seed, but only God can give the harvest.

**1 Corinthians 3:8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.**

Amplified - He who plants and he who waters are equal (one in aim, of the same importance and esteem), yet each shall receive his own reward (wages), according to his own labor.

Wuest - Now, the one who plants and the one who waters are one. But each one of us will receive his specific pay appropriate to his specific work, ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

NET 1 Corinthians 3:8 The one who plants and the one who waters work as one, but each will receive his reward according to his work.

NLT 1 Corinthians 3:8 The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard work.

ESV 1 Corinthians 3:8 He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor.

NIV 1 Corinthians 3:8 The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor.

GNT 1 Corinthians 3:8 φυτεων δε και ποτιζων εν εσιν, καστος δε τον διον μισθον λαμβανει κατ τον διον κπον.

KJV 1 Corinthians 3:8 Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.

YLT 1 Corinthians 3:8 and he who is planting and he who is watering are one, and each his own reward shall

receive, according to his own labour,

ASV 1 Corinthians 3:8 Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: but each shall receive his own reward according to his own labor.

CSB 1 Corinthians 3:8 Now the one planting and the one watering are one in purpose, and each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

NKJ 1 Corinthians 3:8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

NRS 1 Corinthians 3:8 The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each.

NAB 1 Corinthians 3:8 The one who plants and the one who waters are equal, and each will receive wages in proportion to his labor.

NJB 1 Corinthians 3:8 It is all one who does the planting and who does the watering, and each will have the proper pay for the work that he has done.

GWN 1 Corinthians 3:8 The one who plants and the one who waters have the same goal, and each will receive a reward for his own work.

BBE 1 Corinthians 3:8 Now the planter and the waterer are working for the same end: but they will have their separate rewards in the measure of their work.

- **Now he who plants:** 1Co 3:9 4:6 Joh 4:36-38
- **and each:** 1Co 4:5 9:17,18 15:58 Ps 62:12 Da 12:3 Mt 5:11,12 10:41,42 16:27 Ro 2:6 Ga 6:7,8 Heb 6:10 1Pe 5:4 2Jn 1:8 Rev 2:23 22:12
- 1 Corinthians 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## A "LEVEL PLAYING FIELD"

[Level playing field](#) is an American idiom which describes a situation that is balanced and fair to all, where everyone has the same opportunity (cf "gave opportunity" in 1 Cor 3:5) and no person has an advantage over another person, thus giving all a fair and equal chance of succeeding.

**Now he who plants** (present tense = continually - ministry is NOT "[one and done!](#)") **and he who waters** (present tense = continually) **are one** - **He who plants** is Paul's self-description, for it was his proclamation (casting out) of the "seed" of the Word, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which the Holy Spirit used to birth the Corinthians into the Kingdom of God (cf Jn 3:3+) and in effect **plant** the Church in Corinth. There was an [interdependence](#) (mutual dependence) in the ministries of Paul and Apollos. Farmers plant and there is a drought the crops fail. Paul says there was no "water" shortage here. So both men were needed and neither deserved to be lauded over the other. He who waters alludes to Apollos who followed up Paul's ministry in Corinth with his eloquent teaching, viewed here as his dispensing the "water of the Word." (cf Eph 5:26+). The point of oneness is that there was harmony, not competition. Does that describe your ministry beloved? Or are you jealous of how big the other fellow's church is, etc? **One** is the Greek word [heis](#) which is the first cardinal numeral and signifies that which is united as one in contrast with being divided or consisting of separate parts. In other words, while Paul and Apollos had different functions (plants, waters), picturing separate and distinct ministries, they were still viewed as a unit and one which functioned [synergistically](#), working together in harmony. If the saints at Corinth would begin to grasp the significance of the oneness of the work/ministries of Paul and Apollos, party bickering would be minimized.

**But each will receive his own reward according to his own labor** ([kopos](#)) - Paul is saying that individual ministries are important and call for faithfulness and hard work. And the **reward** is proportionate to the labor for **each** individual. Notice own **reward...own labor** signifying that the reward will be as we might say today "[personalized](#)," or suited to each person's **labor**. Notice Paul does not use the Greek word [ergon](#) for **work**, but the word ([kopos](#)) which describes **labor** which is toilsome, wearying and even sorrowful at times (if you are a pastor, you are probably saying "amen" to that statement!). Spirit filled ministry (while being supernaturally energized) involves human responsibility which in turn is associated with trouble and toil (just as Paul is illustrating in the very letter we are reading)!

God rewards on the basis of labor, not success or results.

-- John MacArthur

**MacArthur on according to his own labor** - God rewards on the basis of **labor**, not success or results. A missionary may work faithfully for 40 years and see only a handful of converts. Another may work far fewer years and see far more converts. Jeremiah was one of God's most faithful and dedicated prophets, yet he saw little result of his ministry. He was ridiculed, persecuted, and generally rejected along with the message he preached. Jonah, on the other hand, was petty and unwilling, yet through him God won the entire city of Nineveh in one brief campaign. Our usefulness and effectiveness are purely by God's grace (cf. 1 Cor. 15:10). It is appropriate that God's faithful servants be appreciated and encouraged while they are on earth. But they are not to be glorified, set apart, or made the center of special groups or movements.

**Robertson** - God will bestow to each the reward that his labour deserves. That is the pay that the preacher is sure to receive. He may get too little or too much here from men. But the due reward from God is certain and it will be adequate however ungrateful men may be.

Paul expands on the theme of rewards in 1 Cor 4:5+ (which is good news for those whose rewards are burnt up) declaring "do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then **each man's praise** (NOTE - EACH AND EVERY MAN WILL RECEIVE PRAISE! AMAZING GRACE INDEED!) will come to him from God."

Near the end of this lengthy letter Paul uses [kopos](#) in an exhortation to the Corinthians saints - "Therefore, my beloved brethren, **be** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work (ergon) of the Lord, knowing that your toil ([kopos](#)) is not in vain in the Lord.(1 Co. 15:58+)

**Each** (each, every man, everyone)([1538](#)) see [hekastos](#)

**Will receive** (take, took) ([2983](#))([lambano](#)) in this context means to receive, regularly with acc. of the thing; used to embrace all areas of life from simple things to spiritual benefit.

**Reward** (wage) ([3408](#))([misthos](#)) literally refers to pay which is due for labor performed or dues paid for work. **Misthos** is used in two general senses in the NT, either to refer to wages or to reward, recognition or recompense. In this latter figurative usage, **misthos** refers to rewards which God bestows for the moral quality of an action, such rewards most often to be bestowed in eternity future. 28v in NT - Matt. 5:12; Matt. 5:46; Matt. 6:1; Matt. 6:2; Matt. 6:5; Matt. 6:16; Matt. 10:41; Matt. 10:42; Matt. 20:8; Mk. 9:41; Lk. 6:23; Lk. 6:35; Lk. 10:7; Jn. 4:36; Acts 1:18; Rom. 4:4; 1 Co. 3:8; 1 Co. 3:14; 1 Co. 9:17; 1 Co. 9:18; 1 Tim. 5:18; Jas. 5:4; 2 Pet. 2:13; 2 Pet. 2:15; 2 Jn. 1:8; Jude 1:11; Rev. 11:18; Rev. 22:12

**Labor** ([2873](#))([kopos](#) from [kopto](#) = chop, hew, cut down, strike; figuratively to lament which apparently came from the idea of striking one's breast) (See also study of related verb [kopiao](#)) is strictly a smiting as a sign of sorrow, then sorrow itself. **Kopos** thus describes a state of discomfort or distress, trouble, difficulty, transferring the sense of the primary meaning which is beating. **Kopos** referring to **labor** conveys the sense that the labor involves toil, fatigue, suffering, weariness and sorrow. It thus speaks of an intense effort which can be united with trouble. In short **kopos** conveys the idea of arduous toil involving sweat and fatigue and emphasizes the weariness which follows as a result of the straining of all of one's powers to the utmost. NT uses - Matt. 26:10; Mk. 14:6; Lk. 11:7; Lk. 18:5; Jn. 4:38; 1 Co. 3:8; 1 Co. 15:58; 2 Co. 6:5; 2 Co. 10:15; 2 Co. 11:23; 2 Co. 11:27; Gal. 6:17; 1 Th 1:3; 1 Th 2:9; 1 Th 3:5; 2 Th 3:8; Rev. 2:2; Rev. 14:13

## 1 Corinthians 3:9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

Amplified - For we are fellow workmen (joint promoters, laborers together) with and for God; you are God's garden and vineyard and field under cultivation, [you are] God's building.

Wuest - for we are God's fellow workers. You are God's land under cultivation, God's edifice. ([Erdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

NET 1 Corinthians 3:9 We are coworkers belonging to God. You are God's field, God's building.

NLT 1 Corinthians 3:9 For we are both God's workers. And you are God's field. You are God's building.

ESV 1 Corinthians 3:9 For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

NIV 1 Corinthians 3:9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

GNT 1 Corinthians 3:9 θεο γ ρ σμεν συνεργο , θεο γε ργιον, θεο ο κοδομ στε.

KJV 1 Corinthians 3:9 For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.

YLT 1 Corinthians 3:9 for of God we are fellow-workmen; God's tillage, God's building ye are.

ASV 1 Corinthians 3:9 For we are God's fellow-workers: ye are God's husbandry, God's building.

CSB 1 Corinthians 3:9 For we are God's coworkers. You are God's field, God's building.

NKJ 1 Corinthians 3:9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.

NRS 1 Corinthians 3:9 For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

NAB 1 Corinthians 3:9 For we are God's co-workers; you are God's field, God's building.

NJB 1 Corinthians 3:9 After all, we do share in God's work; you are God's farm, God's building.

GWN 1 Corinthians 3:9 We are God's coworkers. You are God's field. You are God's building.

BBE 1 Corinthians 3:9 For we are workers with God: you are God's planting, God's building.

- **we:** 1Co 3:6 Mt 9:37 Mk 16:20 2Co 6:1 3Jn 1:8
- **you are God's field:** Ps 65:9-13 72:16 80:8-11 Isa 5:1-7 27:2,3 28:24-29 32:20 Isa 61:3,5,11 Jer 2:21 Mt 13:3-9,18-30,36-42 20:1-14 21:23-44 Mk 4:26-29 Joh 4:35-38 15:1-8
- **God's building:** 1Co 3:16 6:19 Ps 118:22 Am 9:11,12 Zec 6:12,13 Mt 16:18 Ac 4:11 2Co 6:16 Eph 2:10,20-22 Col 2:7 1Ti 3:15 Heb 3:3,4,6 1Pe 2:5
- 1 Corinthians 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## PROPER PERSPECTIVE IT IS GOD'S WORK

Note the triple repetition **God's...God's...God's**. Three possessive proper nouns. God is the Possessor. Even this truth should help to defuse party factions, for it all belongs to God, not to any one faction! Paul and Apollos were not their own, but belonged to God! And the same is true for the saints at Corinth. And practically the same truth applies to every believer. (cf 1 Cor 6:19-20+). God as the Owner calls for the Corinthians to give their allegiance solely to Him and not favor one leader over another, which would in turn help dissipate their jealousy and strife.

**For we are God's fellow workers** - **Fellow workers** is the Greek word [sunergos](#) which gives us our English synergy. What is Paul's point in 1 Cor 3:5-9? He is addressing the problems of jealousy, strife and boasting in men (Paul or Apollos) in 1 Cor 3:3-4. Don't miss the significance of the little preposition [sun/syn](#) which speaks of intimacy in contrast to **meta** which speaks of nearness without the idea of intimacy. So but even more significantly speaks of intimacy between the parties, here God and His ministers (this is good news dear pastor and should encourage you that you have a Fellow Worker Who can handle ANY load!). They are almost "fused into one" like Siamese twins. Of course while they are co-workers with God, they are not co-equal. They are not workers on the same level as God. God is the Initiator and the Energizer of all work of any eternal value. Finite men have the incomparable privilege of joining God where He is working a truth Henry Blackaby referred to as "[Reality Three](#)" in his course on [Experiencing God](#). Note that in Second Corinthians Paul says that they (he and Timothy 2 Cor 1:1) "are **workers with** ([sunergos](#)) you for your joy." (2 Cor 1:24)

**THOUGHT** - As noted above [sunergos](#) is the root of [synergy](#) which describes the interaction of two (or more) agents/forces such that their combined effect is greater than the sum of their individual parts. When the omnipotent God is our **Fellow Worker** or Co-Laborer, the result is "far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the (HIS SUPERNATURAL) power ([dunamis](#)) that works within (present tense - [energeo](#) - continually energizes) us." (Eph 3:20+) This begs the question dear pastor, teacher, ministry worker of any genre - are you letting the Lord carry the load? (cf Mt 11:28-30+) Are you casting the burden He has cast on you back on Him? (Ps 55:22+). Are you abiding in the Vine (John 15:5)?

**Robertson** - God is the major partner in the enterprise of each life, but he lets us work with him. Witness the mother and God with the baby as the product. The farmer works with God in God's field. Without the sun, the rains, the seasons the farmer is helpless. God is the Great Architect. We work under him and carry out the plans of the Architect. It is building ([oikos], house, [demō], to build). Let us never forget that God sees and cares what we do in the part of the building where we work for him.

**D A Carson** adds that "what Paul finds inexcusable is the kind of fawning and defensive attachment to one particular leader that results in one-upmanship, quarreling, and jealousy. Implicitly, such allegiance is making too much of one person. It verges on assigning that person godlike status. In fact, a little sober reflection reminds us that many Christian leaders properly contribute to our

spiritual growth and fruitfulness, but in any case it is God alone who gives life and fruitfulness, however much he uses means. No Christian leader is to be venerated or listened to or adulated with the kind of allegiance and devotion properly reserved for God alone. That is folly; it betrays a deep ignorance of the nature of true Christian leadership and of the corporate and mutually supportive ways in which Christian leaders complement one another's work under God." (Ibid)

**Matthew Henry on God's fellow workers** - They are **laborers with God**, synergoi-co-workers, fellow-labourers (v. 9), not indeed in the same order and degree, but in subordination to Him, as instruments in His hand. They are engaged in His business. They are working together with God, in promoting the purposes of His glory, and the salvation of precious souls; and He who knows their work will take care they do not labour in vain. Men may neglect and vilify one minister while they cry up another, and have no reason for either: they may condemn when they should commend, and applaud what they should neglect and avoid; but the judgment of God is according to truth. He never rewards but upon just reason, and He ever rewards in proportion to the diligence and faithfulness of His servants. Note, Faithful ministers, when they are ill used by men, should encourage themselves in God. And it is to God, the chief Agent and Director of the great work of the Gospel, to Whom those that labour with Him should endeavour to approve themselves. They are always under His eye, employed in His husbandry and building; and therefore, to be sure, He will carefully look over them.

**Fellow workers** (4904)(**sunergos** from **sun** = together + **érgon** = work) means literally working together with and thus refers to a companion in work, a colleague, a co-laborer, a fellow laborer or fellow helper. **Sunergos** - 13x in 13v - Rom. 16:3; Rom. 16:9; Rom. 16:21; 1 Co. 3:9; 2 Co. 1:24; 2 Co. 8:23; Phil. 2:25; Phil. 4:3; Col. 4:11; 1 Thess. 3:2; Phlm. 1:1; Phlm. 1:24; 3 Jn. 1:8.

**You are God's field - Amplified** = "God's garden and vineyard and field under cultivation." **Field** is a vivid metaphor, for it pictures saints in need of watering and weeding in order to grow healthy "plants." First Corinthians is an example of Paul doing a little "weeding," so to speak, in God's garden in Corinth!

The metaphor of a **field** recalls some of Paul's last words to Timothy "The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops." (2 Ti 2:6+)

**God's building** - Paul presents a second metaphor of **abuilding** which serves as a segue to the next section of his letter in which he will present himself and Apollos as builders of God's church in Corinth (cf 1 Peter 2:5+).

**Carson on the building metaphor** - We will understand it better if we remember what a slow process building a great edifice was before the days of power equipment. Cathedrals in Europe often took four or five centuries to complete, sometimes longer. In Paul's day, a temple, a much more modest edifice than a medieval cathedral, sometimes took decades. So one builder might lay the foundation; others would complete various phases of the building project and then would move on, retire, or die, while still others would take their places. The lesson is clear: Paul laid the foundation, and others have built on his work. It is the project as a whole that is important, and, implicitly, it is foolish to focus all praise on just one of the builders who has contributed to the project. The builders themselves, after all, have shared a common vision, a common purpose. (Ibid)

**Mattoon on God's building** - As the song goes, "He's still working on me." Paul mentions this thought all throughout his epistles that we are God's construction project. As He builds our lives, He lives within us. We are a full-time job for Him. He never goes home at 5:00 p.m. because we are His home. He gets the glory because He is the architect and the builder.

**Field** (1091)(**georgion** cf **georgos** = a farmer) means a tilled field, a farm (Lxx - Pr 24:30; 31:16) and is used metaphorically of the saints at Corinth in aggregate or corporately. (1Co 3:9 = only NT use). Uses in Septuagint - Gen. 26:14; Prov. 6:7; Prov. 9:12; Prov. 24:5; Prov. 24:30; Prov. 31:16; Jer. 51:23

**Building** (edification, edifying) (3619)(**oikodome** from **oikos** = dwelling, house + **doma** = building or **demo** = to build) is **literally** the building of a house and came to refer to any building process. **Oikodome** can refer to the actual process of building or construction. Another literal meaning is as a reference to a building or edifice which is the result of a construction process (Mt 24:1, Mk 13:1, 2 are the only literal uses of **oikodome** in the NT). Most of the NT uses of **oikodome** are **metaphorical or figurative**, obviously an architectural metaphor. As used here in Eph 2:21, **oikodome** refers to the **church** as the building for God's indwelling (cp 1Co 3:9 - see discussion below). Figuratively the idea is the process of edification or building up spiritually or spiritual strengthening.

Other figurative meanings include our physical bodies (2Co 5:1), as a reference to the process of spiritual growth, edification or building up (some contexts speak primarily to the individual, some to the corporate body of Christ) (Ro 14:19, 15:2, 1Co 3:9, 14:3, 5, 12, 26, 2Co 10:8),

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**ILLUSTRATION - Rod Mattoon** - Rev. A. J. Gordon, one of the founders of Gordon Conwell Divinity School, told of being outside, walking and looking across a field at a house. There beside the house was what looked like a man pumping furiously on one of



those hand pumps. As Gordon watched, the man continued to pump at a tremendous rate. He seemed absolutely tireless, pumping on and on, up and down, without ever slowing in the slightest, much less stopping.

Truly it was a remarkable sight, so Gordon started to walk toward him. As he got closer, he could see it was not a man at the pump, but a wooden figure painted to look like a man. The arm that was pumping so rapidly was hinged at the elbow and the hand was wired to the pump handle. The water was pouring forth, but not because the figure was pumping it. You see, it was an artesian well, and the water was pumping the man!

Beloved, when you see a man who is at work for God and producing results, recognize that it is the Holy Spirit working through him, not the man's personality or schemes that are changing people's lives. Our responsibility as believers is to do our best for the Lord, keep our hand on the handle in laboring for Him, and let the Holy Spirit empower our lives and bless our work. If we fail to be responsible in serving Christ, we stop growing in the Lord and start behaving like a bunch of babies.

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## [Something Much Bigger](#)

We are co-workers in God's service. 1 Corinthians 3:9

Today's Scripture & Insight : 1 Corinthians 3:5–9

More than two hundred volunteers assisted October Books, a bookstore in Southampton, England, move its inventory to an address down the street. Helpers lined the sidewalk and passed books down a "human conveyor belt." Having witnessed the volunteers in action, a store employee said, "It was . . . a really moving experience to see people [helping]. . . . They wanted to be part of something bigger."

We can also be part of something much bigger than ourselves. God uses us to reach the world with the message of His love. Because someone shared the message with us, we can turn to another person and pass it on. Paul compared this—the building of God's kingdom—to growing a garden. Some of us plant seeds while some of us water the seeds. We are, as Paul said, "co-workers in God's service" (1 Corinthians 3:9).

Each job is important, yet all are done in the power of God's Spirit. By His Spirit, God enables people to thrive spiritually when they hear that He loves them and sent His Son to die in their place so that they can be free from their sin (John 3:16).

God does much of His work on earth through "volunteers" like you and me. Although we're part of a community that's much bigger than any contribution we may make, we can help it grow by working together to share His love with the world. By: Jennifer Benson Schuldt (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Do you see yourself as a part of God's plan or as someone who works alone in your service for Him? How does this affect the way in which you serve Him and others?

Dear God, thank You for including me in Your plan to tell everyone about Your love. Help me to represent You well with my words and actions.

- See related devotional - [We Have Work To Do](#)

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## [Our Work Matters](#)

We are God's fellow workers. —1 Corinthians 3:9

Today's Scripture : 1 Corinthians 3:7-15

One of the world's greatest architects, Sir Christopher Wren, undertook the task of helping to rebuild London after it had been nearly destroyed by fire in 1666. One day he visited the site where a large church building was under construction. He called out to a laborer perched high on a scaffold, "What are you doing up there?" With pride that man called back, "I'm helping Sir Christopher Wren build a cathedral!"

That was not an empty boast, for without the help of unnamed workers, Wren could not have constructed any of his impressive structures. The beautiful churches are as much a memorial to the workers as to Wren.

Do you ever feel that what you're doing in life is boringly humdrum and unimportant? Most of us probably feel as if we're on that sort of treadmill. And it's hard at times to keep in mind that as we serve Christ, "we are God's fellow workers" (1 Corinthians 3:9), assisting Him in the building of His church (vv.10-11; Matthew 16:18). But no matter what our job or task in life, as we are faithful to the Lord in the use of our time, talents, and gifts, we are helping Him to build.

Praise God for the privilege of working alongside of Him. For with the Lord, our work matters! — Vernon Grounds (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

We need each other as we serve the Lord,  
With all the workers equal to their tasks;  
No matter if the jobs are large or small—  
Our faithfulness is all the Savior asks.  
—Hess

In God's symphony of service, every part is important.

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### **Fellow Workers**

We are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. —1 Corinthians 3:9

Today's Scripture : Exodus 17:1-6

When it came time for Moses to strike the rock in the desert to get water for the thirsty Israelites, his part was very small—just strike the rock. Anyone in Israel could have done it. The main thing was what God was doing in the heart of the earth to provide a bountiful river of water.

But the two worked together: Moses before the people; God in the hidden depths of the earth. Moses and God were fellow workers.

There are always two agents in every fruitful work: willing workers and a faithful God. The human part is to do whatever God has asked us to do—strike the rock. God's work is to make the water flow.

Was Moses weighed down with anxiety that day as he approached the rock, thinking that he might fail? I doubt it. He had only to follow the Lord in obedience. God had promised to do the rest. And Moses had seen God work mighty miracles in the past.

Are you anxious about the task God has given you to do today? Do you believe that everything depends on you? Just strike the rock. God is working in secret to pour out rivers of water for every man, woman, and child. And when living waters begin to flow, praise Him.

Just do your part and He'll do His. By: David H. Roper (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

As a fellow worker with the Lord,  
Do the work He's given you today;  
You will find His blessings all outpoured—  
He will do His part if you obey.  
—Hess

"Apart from Me, you can do nothing." —Jesus

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### **Working with God**

We are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building. 1 Corinthians 3:9

Today's Scripture & Insight : 1 Corinthians 3:1–9

During his 1962 visit to Mexico, Bill Ashe helped fix windmill hand pumps at an orphanage. Fifteen years later, inspired by a deep desire to serve God by helping provide clean water to villages in need, Bill founded a nonprofit organization. He said, "God awoke me to 'make the most of the time' by finding others with a desire to bring safe drinking water to the rural poor." Later, having learned about the global need for safe water through the requests of thousands of pastors and evangelists from more than 100 countries, Bill invited others to join the ministry's efforts.

God welcomes us to team up to serve with Him and others in various ways. When the people of Corinth argued over which teachers they preferred, the apostle Paul affirmed his role as a servant of Jesus and a teammate of Apollos, fully dependent on God for spiritual growth (1 Corinthians 3:1–7). He reminds us that all work has God-given value (v. 8). Acknowledging the privilege of working with others while serving Him, Paul encourages us to build each other up as He transforms us in love (v. 9).

Though our mighty Father doesn't need our help to accomplish His great works, He equips us and invites us to partner with Him. By: Xochitl Dixon (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their

permission.)

Sign in to track your progress!

How does leaving the results to God give you the courage to risk doing what seems impossible? What hard thing has He invited you to do with His help?

Father, thank You for providing all I need as You continue to accomplish great things in me.

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## **God Alone**

We are God's fellow workers. — 1 Corinthians 3:9

Today's Scripture : 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

On May 29, 1953, New Zealander Edmund Hillary and his Sherpa guide, Tenzing Norgay, became the first people to reach the peak of Mount Everest, the highest mountain in the world. Since Tenzing did not know how to use the camera, Edmund took a photo of Tenzing as evidence that they did reach the top.

Later, journalists repeatedly asked who had reached the summit first. The expedition leader, John Hunt, replied, "They reached it together, as a team." They were united by a common goal, and neither was concerned who should get the greater credit.

It is counterproductive to try to determine who deserves the most credit when something is done well. The church at Corinth was split into two factions—those who followed Paul, and those who followed Apollos. The apostle Paul told them, "I planted, Apollos watered . . . . Neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters" (1 Cor. 3:7). He reminded them that they were "God's fellow workers" (v.9), and it is God who gives the increase in ministry (v.7).

Our concern about who deserves the credit serves only to take away the honor and glory that belong to the Lord Jesus alone. By: C. P. Hia (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Let others have the honors,  
The glory, and the fame;  
I seek to follow Jesus  
And glory in His name.  
—Horton

Jesus must increase; I must decrease.  
John 3:30+

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## **Bicycle Riders**

We are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. —1 Corinthians 3:9

Today's Scripture : 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

I remember the first time I tried to ride a bicycle. I thought I would never learn!

I pulled the bike alongside the porch and then jumped on and began pedaling, only to end up bumping smack into a maple tree. I had been so intent on pedaling that I forgot to steer. So I tried a second time and concentrated on steering but forgot to pedal, and of course I fell over. I had to learn to use my feet to pump the pedals and my hands to steer at the same time. It was a lesson on what it means to work together.

A bicycle built for two or more people is a different sort of challenge. The trick to riding one of these is for the people in back to concentrate on pedaling while the person in front does the steering. All can ride, all must help in pedaling, but only one can steer.

So it is in the church. There are some things all must do, while there are other things that only certain ones are entrusted to do. How sad that so many want to steer and so few want to pedal!

Have you found a place of service in your church? Don't try to do a task that belongs to someone else. Ask God to help you find the job He's gifted you to do (1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 1 Peter 4:10), then do it faithfully. —M. R. De Haan, M.D. (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Use now what God has given you,

Count not its worth as small;  
God does not ask of you great things,  
Just faithfulness—that's all!  
—Bosch

It is better to be faithful than to be out in front.

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### **We are God's fellow workers. —1 Corinthians 3:9**

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Our concern about who deserves the credit serves only to take away the honor and glory that belong to the Lord Jesus alone. (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Let others have the honors,  
The glory, and the fame;  
I seek to follow Jesus  
And glory in His name.  
—Horton

Jesus must increase; I must decrease.

**1 Corinthians 3:10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man **must be careful** how he builds on it.**

Amplified - According to the grace (the special endowment for my task) of God bestowed on me, like a skillful architect and master builder I laid [the] foundation, and now another [man] is building upon it. But let each [man] be careful how he builds upon it,

Wuest - According to the grace of God which was given to me, I as a skillful master builder laid a foundation, but another builds upon it. But let each one be taking heed how he builds upon it ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

NET 1 Corinthians 3:10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master-builder I laid a foundation, but someone else builds on it. And each one must be careful how he builds.

NLT 1 Corinthians 3:10 Because of God's grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful.

ESV 1 Corinthians 3:10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.

NIV 1 Corinthians 3:10 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds.

GNT 1 Corinthians 3:10 Κατ τ ν χ ρ ι ν τ ο θ ε ο τ ν δ ο θ ε σ ν μ ο ι ς σ ο φ ς ρ χ ι τ κ τ ω ν θ ε μ λ ι ο ν θ η κ α , λ λ ο ς δ π ο ι κ ο δ ο μ ε . κ α σ τ ο ς δ β λ ε π τ ω π ς π ο ι κ ο δ ο μ ε .

KJV 1 Corinthians 3:10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.

YLT 1 Corinthians 3:10 According to the grace of God that was given to me, as a wise master-builder, a

foundation I have laid, and another doth build on it,

ASV 1 Corinthians 3:10 According to the grace of God which was given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder I laid a foundation; and another buildeth thereon. But let each man take heed how he buildeth thereon.

CSB 1 Corinthians 3:10 According to God's grace that was given to me, I have laid a foundation as a skilled master builder, and another builds on it. But each one must be careful how he builds on it.

NKJ 1 Corinthians 3:10 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.

NRS 1 Corinthians 3:10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it.

NAB 1 Corinthians 3:10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But each one must be careful how he builds upon it,

NJB 1 Corinthians 3:10 By the grace of God which was given to me, I laid the foundations like a trained master-builder, and someone else is building on them. Now each one must be careful how he does the building.

GWN 1 Corinthians 3:10 As a skilled and experienced builder, I used the gift that God gave me to lay the foundation for that building. However, someone else is building on it. Each person must be careful how he builds on it.

BBE 1 Corinthians 3:10 In the measure of the grace given to me, I, as a wise master-builder, have put the base in position, and another goes on building on it. But let every man take care what he puts on it.

- **According to the grace of God:** 1Co 3:5 15:10 Ro 1:5 12:3 15:15 Eph 3:2-8 Col 1:29 1Ti 1:11-14 1Pe 4:11
- **like a wise master builder:** 1Ki 3:9-11 2Ch 2:12 Da 12:3 Mt 7:24 24:45 2Ti 2:15
- **I have:** 1Co 3:6,11 9:2 Zec 4:9 Ro 15:20 Eph 2:20 Rev 21:14,19
- **and another:** 1Co 15:11,12 Ac 18:27 2Co 10:15 11:13-15
- **each man must be careful how he builds on it** Ec 12:9 Lu 11:35 21:8 Col 4:17 1Ti 4:16 Jas 3:1 \*Gr: 1Pe 4:11 2Pe 2:1-3
- 1 Corinthians 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passage:

1 Peter 2:5+ You (BELIEVERS) also, as **living stones**, are **being built up as a spiritual house** for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:20+ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,

## BUILDING ON THE FOUNDATION BY GRACE

**According to the grace of God which was given to me**- What was accomplished through Paul was not because of the greatness of Paul, but the goodness of God Who bestowed on him empowering grace by which he would be supernaturally enabled to evangelize the Corinthians. Note that the **grace** is not **out of** but **in proportion to** God's grace. You say "So what? Why is that worth noting?" How much **grace** does God possess? He has infinite grace and He dispensed not a portion of His grace, but in proportion to His infinite grace. It would be like billionaire giving you ten dollars **out of** his wealth, versus another man generously giving you 1000's and 1000's of dollars which would be more in **proportion to** his wealth. Earlier in 1 Cor 1:3-4+ Paul had reminded the saints that they too were recipients of God's amazing, life transforming, empowering **grace**.

**MacArthur** - As an apostle, Paul's specialty was foundations. Over the years since his conversion, Paul had been used by the Lord to establish and instruct many churches across Asia Minor and in Macedonia and Greece. But lest some think he was bragging, he began by making it clear that his calling and his effectiveness were only by the grace of God that was given to him.

**THOUGHT** - How are we ENABLED by His Grace? One is never enabled or empowered by God's grace UNTIL we have SURRENDERED our WILLS to Him. Ro1:17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." So RIGHTEOUS DEEDS come from SURRENDER to Christ. Paul was enabled by the grace of God to lay a foundation and

anyone who followed Paul must also be surrendered to God so that he too could be enabled by God's grace. Then what he does will stand the test one day bc it will be CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS that came out of him. RIGHTEOUSNESS is that which comes from a SURRENDERED relationship to Christ. If you want to be righteous then bow down to Him and surrender to His Word. Admit the weakness of your flesh. Confess your sin. Repent of that sin. And then let Jesus be Jesus in your life. Righteousness is the outflow of that surrendered will. In [Isa64:6] he describes man's righteousness as filthy rags. No man in his flesh can produce what God commands and demands from righteousness. But enabled by His grace, this righteousness can come as we walk by faith, for without faith it is impossible to please Him. So Paul is saying to those teachers and preachers who follow him, you had better bow down. Men have their own idea and standard of what is righteous ("I read my Bible 10x this week!") but true righteousness is the character and the lifestyle that result from surrender to Christ. We all struggle with our flesh. If you're pointing fingers then look out. The one's who are truly living this life understand how wretched our flesh really is and how quickly we can snap back to the old ways. God has prepared these good works beforehand (Ep2:10). We must be in touch with Him that He might then work His righteous works through us and we should walk in them.

**Grace** (favor) (5485)(**charis** from **chairo** = to rejoice. Eng = charity. Beggars need "*charity*" just as sinners need *grace*, for we are all spiritual paupers outside of Christ, but "*God gives where He finds empty hands*"- Augustine [cp Mt 5:3+]) defies a simple definition but at its core conveys the sense of favor. **Grace** in simple terms is God's unmerited favor and supernatural enablement and empowerment for initial salvation and thereafter for daily sanctification. Grace is everything for nothing (although it cost the Father the sacrifice of His Son!) to those who don't deserve anything. Grace is what every man needs, what none can earn and what God Alone can and does freely give (see Ro 8:32+ where "freely give" is **charizomai** from **charis** = a grace gift!). **Grace** addresses man's sin, while mercy addresses man's misery.

The **grace of God** is described as **Glorious** (Ep 1:6+), **Abundant** (Acts 4:33+), **Rich** (Ep 1:7+), **Manifold** (many-sided, multi-colored, variegated) (1Pe 4:10+), **Sufficient** (sufficing, enough, adequate - there is never a shortage) (2Cor 12:9+).

[Noah Webster's original definition of grace](#) is unmerited love and favor of God which is the spring and source of all benefits men receive from Him, including especially His assistance given man for his regeneration or sanctification. (Grace is) a virtue from God influencing man, renewing his heart and restraining him from sin.

**John Newton** - "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound / That saved a wretch like me. / I once was lost, but now am found / was blind, but now I see." The words of this famous hymn were penned by John Newton. In the mid-1700s, Newton worked on a slave vessel and was described as the most profane man the captain had ever met. During a storm, Newton advised his fellow sailors to tie themselves to the ship to avoid being washed overboard. He begged God for mercy. God found him in his wretched state and redeemed him. Newton experienced the gift of God's grace.

**Grace** in the letters to **Corinth** - 1 Co. 1:3; 1 Co. 1:4; 1 Co. 3:10; 1 Co. 10:30; 1 Co. 15:10; 1 Co. 15:57; 1 Co. 16:3; 1 Co. 16:23; 2 Co. 1:2; 2 Co. 1:12; 2 Co. 1:15; 2 Co. 2:14; 2 Co. 4:15; 2 Co. 6:1; 2 Co. 8:1; 2 Co. 8:4; 2 Co. 8:6; 2 Co. 8:7; 2 Co. 8:9; 2 Co. 8:16; 2 Co. 8:19; 2 Co. 9:8; 2 Co. 9:14; 2 Co. 9:15; 2 Co. 12:9; 2 Co. 13:14;

**Like a wise master builder** - **Like** is a simile prompting the question what is the comparison teaching? [Wuest](#) has "skillful master builder." A **master builder** was one who functioned like a designer and a general contractor. He was wise because he preached Christ and Him crucified.

[Robertson](#) - Paul does not shirk his share in the work at Corinth with all the sad outcome there. He absolves Apollos from responsibility for the divisions. He denies that he himself is to blame.

Note that 1 Cor 3:10,17 deal primarily with warning to the preacher/teacher of God's Word and emphasize that one must teach those things that will endure (gold, silver, precious stones) which means that one must teach the pure unadulterated milk of the Word (1 Pe 2:2+), not shrinking from declaring the whole counsel (Acts 20:27+) not apologizing for the difficult statements Jesus made in the Gospels, but boldly proclaiming the Word, being ready in season and out of season (2 Ti 4:2-4+). If we do so we will not shrink back from Him in shame at His coming (1 Jn 2:28+).

**Wise** (4680) see [sophos](#)

**Master builder** (753) (**architekton** from **archi**—, denoting rank or degree + **tékton** = a workman, builder) means chief constructor, architect. master builder. This word gives us our word architect, but contained the idea of a builder as well as designer. Like a "structural engineer." A head or master workman or builder, an architect

(1 Cor. 3:10; Isa. 3:3).

**I laid a foundation** - **Laid** is [aorist tense](#), in context referring to Paul's initial evangelistic efforts in Corinth 4-5 years prior. With what did Paul lay the **foundation**? Obviously it was by the proclamation of Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor 2:2+, cf 1 Co 1:17,23+), but he will specifically explain the **foundation** in the next verse.

**Foundation** (2310) ([themelios](#) from **théma** = that which is laid down in turn from **tithemi** = to place [cf [themelioo](#)]) means something laid or put down, that on which a structure is built or a stone used in the construction of a foundation. It was used literally of buildings foundation. Lk. 6:48; Lk. 6:49; Lk. 14:29; Acts 16:26; Ro 15:20; 1 Co. 3:10; 1 Co. 3:11; 1 Co. 3:12; Eph. 2:20; 1 Ti 6:19; 2 Ti 2:19; Heb. 6:1; Heb. 11:10; Rev. 21:14; Rev. 21:19

**And another is building on it** - **Another** is [allos](#) meaning another of the same kind (like "**another** [allos] Helper", the Spirit of Christ, in Jn 14:16), in this context **another** Spirit filled, Word centered teacher. In context this would refer to Apollos who followed Paul's ministry in Corinth (cf at Ephesus it was Timothy following Paul - 1 Ti 1:3). And while not as directly stated as it was earlier, Paul links himself with Apollos as a fellow builder of the church at Corinth, which should serve as additional motivation to minimize the saints choosing one man over the other. They were both important for the integrity of the building and the work of both was important. It is also notable that Paul expresses no jealousy against Apollos following him.

**Building upon** (2026) see [epoikodomeo](#)

**But each man must be careful how he builds on** (present tense) **it** - **Each** is a Greek word ([hekastos](#)) which essentially means "no exceptions" regarding attention and adherence to the truth that follows. So here we see Paul broadening the scope of his argument to apply to anyone who would **build on** God's building (1 Cor 3:9), the Body of Christ, the Church. **Must be careful** is a command in the [present imperative](#) (see [need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)), this command calling for **each man** to continually pay close attention, weighing carefully how **he builds**. Paul will explain in the next verse why obedience to this command is so important. Who is each man? It is anyone who **builds on** the building, the church. More specifically, while the most natural interpretation (from the context) is that **each man** would refer primarily to pastors and teachers (including elders, Sunday School teachers, etc), it would seem reasonable to apply the principle to all members of the church, for in various ways, each member of a local body in utilizing their spiritual gift(s) contributes to the integrity of the "building."

**MacArthur on each man** - **Each man** primarily refers to evangelists, pastors, and teachers, who have continued to build on the foundation laid by the apostles. These are given special and the most direct responsibility for teaching Christian doctrine. Paul later instructs Timothy that men who build should be faithful and capable (2 Tim. 2:2). **But the context makes it clear that a broader and more inclusive application is also in mind.** The numerous references to "**each man**" and "**any man**" (vv. 10–18) indicate that **the principle applies to every believer. All of us, by what we say and do, to some extent teach the gospel. No Christian has the right to be careless in representing the Lord and His Word. Every believer is to be a careful builder. We all have the same responsibility.** (MNTC-1 Cor) (Bold added)

**Jack Arnold** - Even though a minister is only a servant, he has a grave responsibility to build upon the foundation a strong superstructure. There is a right way and a wrong way to build the church of Christ. In this context **each man** is referring to ministers, men called and gifted by God to build the church in a special way. However, saints who do the work of the ministry are also ministers in the broadest sense, so this does apply to all Christians. Eph 4:11-12 says "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the purpose of equipping the saints that the saints might do the work of the ministry and that the saints might build up the body of Christ ([1 Corinthians 3:10-17 The Ministry](#))

**Brian Bell** - Importance of the genuineness of one's building materials for the work of the kingdom. Adequacy or integrity of any building material depends upon the test it will have to meet. That test for the Christians building is fire on the day of judgment. Showing it for what it is. ([Sermon](#))

**Mattoon on must be careful** - This caution can have a two-fold application. First of all, those involved in ministries with others, whether it is in the church or in the family, they need to make sure that Christ is the foundation of that ministry. The focus of the ministry should be on the Lord and the truths of God's Word need to be emphasized and clearly presented through teaching and preaching. Ministry that is based on carnality, worldliness, and false teaching creates confusion, and develops carnal, immature believers. Secondly, we are to take heed how we are building our own lives in Christ. How we live, what we do, where we go, how we behave, what we put into our minds and into our bodies, all affect our fellowship with the Lord. All these factors influence our spiritual growth or the lack of it.

**Robertson on must be careful** - The carpenters have need of caution how they carry out the plans of the original architect. Successive architects of great cathedrals carry on through centuries the original design. The result becomes the wonder of succeeding generations. There is no room for individual caprice in the superstructure.

**Each** (each, every man, everyone)(1538) see [hekastos](#)

**Be careful** (beware, take care, take heed) (991)([blepo](#) basically means to have sight, to see, to look at, then to observe, to discern, to perceive with the eye, and frequently implies special contemplation (e.g., often in the sense of “keep your eyes open,” or “beware” **Vine** adds that **blepo** means “to look,” see, usually implying more especially an intent, earnest contemplation. Uses in Corinthians - 1 Co. 1:26 = “**consider** your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;”; 1 Co. 3:10; 1 Co. 8:9; 1 Co. 10:12; 1 Co. 10:18; 1 Co. 13:12; 1 Co. 16:10; 2 Co. 4:18; 2 Co. 7:8; 2 Co. 10:7; 2 Co. 12:6;

**Builds upon** (2026) see [epoikodomeo](#)

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### **Building A Life That Matters** (See also [God's Tool Kit](#))

I have laid the foundation . . . But let each one take heed how he builds on it. —1 Corinthians 3:10

Today's Scripture : 1 Corinthians 3:9-17

My grandkids love to play with Legos. These small colorful building blocks capture their imagination for building forts, planes, houses, or whatever the instructions may call for.

Emptying the contents of the box onto the floor, my grandchildren begin to put the pieces together. But soon they think they don't need to consult the directions. This eventually leads to a point when they realize that building according to their own instincts has resulted in a bad outcome. So, they break it apart and start over again—but this time they have a keen sense of how important the directions are.

Do you need the pieces of your life broken apart and put back together according to God's directions? If you have Jesus Christ as your foundation, begin to follow His blueprint for living. Paul wrote, “Let each one take heed how he builds” on the foundation (1 Cor. 3:10-11). What is the blueprint? Value others above yourself by humbly serving them (Phil. 2:3-4), give generously of your resources to those in need (James 2:14-17), respond with love to those who have wronged you (Rom. 12:14-21). These are just a few of the pieces that God wants you to put together to build a life that is worthy of being His temple (1 Cor. 3:16). By: Joe Stowell (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Because of the grace and forgiveness that You have shown me, Lord, I want to live a life that's worthy of knowing You. Help me to follow Your plans that You've laid out in the Scriptures. Amen.

The Bible is the Christian's blueprint for life.

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### **1 Corinthians 3:11 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.**

Amplified - For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is [already] laid, which is Jesus Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One).

Wuest - for an alternative foundation no one is able to lay alongside of the one which is being laid, which foundation is a person, Jesus Christ. ([Eermans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

NET 1 Corinthians 3:11 For no one can lay any foundation other than what is being laid, which is Jesus Christ.

NLT 1 Corinthians 3:11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have-- Jesus Christ.

ESV 1 Corinthians 3:11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

NIV 1 Corinthians 3:11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

GNT 1 Corinthians 3:11 θεμλιον γρλλον ο δε ς δ ναται θε ναι παρ τ ν κε μενον, ς σπιν ησο ς Χριστ ς.

KJV 1 Corinthians 3:11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

YLT 1 Corinthians 3:11 for other foundation no one is able to lay except that which is laid, which is Jesus the Christ;

ASV 1 Corinthians 3:11 For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

CSB 1 Corinthians 3:11 For no one can lay any other foundation than what has been laid down. That



foundation is Jesus Christ.

NKJ 1 Corinthians 3:11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

NRS 1 Corinthians 3:11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.

NAB 1 Corinthians 3:11 for no one can lay a foundation other than the one that is there, namely, Jesus Christ.

NJB 1 Corinthians 3:11 For nobody can lay down any other foundation than the one which is there already, namely Jesus Christ.

GWN 1 Corinthians 3:11 After all, no one can lay any other foundation than the one that is already laid, and that foundation is Jesus Christ.

BBE 1 Corinthians 3:11 For there is no other base for the building but that which has been put down, which is Jesus Christ.

- Isa 28:16 Mt 16:18 Ac 4:11,12 2Co 11:2-4 Ga 1:7-9 Eph 2:20 2Ti 2:19 1Pe 2:6-8
- 1 Corinthians 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## THE CRUX OF THE CHRISTIAN'S LIFE

Title from Rod Mattoon.

**For** ([gar](#)) - term of explanation. Always begs question "What is being explained?" Paul is elaborating on the **foundation** he just described in v10 to explain what kind of foundation he laid when he first came to Corinth and shared the Gospel.

**No man can lay a foundation - Lay a foundation** is literally to **lay** beside ([para](#)) **a foundation**. Paul mentions **faulty** "foundations" such as a "different gospel" in Gal 1:6+ and "another Jesus" in 2 Cor 11:4.

**Brian Bell** on **foundation** - no other redemption; no other salvation; no other Savior; no other Christ

**Spurgeon** said, "None but Jesus, the divine Savior, could sustain the weight of a single soul with all its sins, much less of all the souls which are built up into the Temple of God."

**Robertson**: "Paul scouts (make a search for something in various places) the suggestion that one even in the interest of so-called "**New Thought**" will dare to **lay beside** Jesus another foundation for religion (**ED**: SEE ANOTHER FALSE FOUNDATION = [What is the Jesus Seminar?](#)). And yet I have seen an article by a professor in a theological seminary in which he advocates regarding Jesus as a landmark, not as a goal, not as a foundation. Clearly Paul means that on this one true foundation, Jesus Christ, one must build only what is in full harmony with the Foundation which is Jesus Christ. Paul is merely repeating the claim of Jesus Himself on this very subject when He quoted Ps 118:22f. to the members of the Sanhedrin who challenged his authority Mk 11:10f; Mt 21:42-45; Lu 20:17f. Apostles and prophets go into this temple of God, but Christ Jesus is the chief cornerstone ([akrogoniaios](#), Ep 2:20+) All believers are living stones in this temple 1Pe 2:5 But there is only one foundation possible."

**MacArthur** - Some builders have tried to make the foundation of Christianity to be church tradition, others the moral teachings of the human Jesus, others ethical humanism, and still others some form of pseudo-scientism or simply sentimental love and good works. But the only foundation of the church and of Christian living is Jesus Christ. Without that foundation no spiritual building will be of God or will stand.

**Henry Morris** on **foundation**. No part of a structure should be built without a strong foundation if it is expected to stand. Similarly, creation is the foundation of the life of the cosmos, and Jesus Christ was the Creator before He became the Savior. The record of His creation in Genesis is the foundation of all revelation. Jesus Christ, first as Creator, then as Redeemer, is the foundation of any true and lasting Christian life.

**Foundation** ([2310](#)) ([themelios](#) from **théma** = that which is laid down in turn from **tithemi** = to place [see study of related word [themelios](#)]) means something laid or put down, that on which a structure is built or a stone used in the construction of a foundation. It was used literally of buildings foundation (foundation stone Rev 21:14). **NT** uses - Lk. 6:48; Lk. 6:49; Lk. 14:29; Acts 16:26; Ro 15:20; 1 Co. 3:10; 1 Co. 3:11; 1 Co. 3:12; Eph. 2:20; 1 Ti 6:19; 2 Ti 2:19; Heb 6:1; Heb 11:10; Rev 21:14; Rev 21:19

**Other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ**- NLT - the one we already have. **The one which is laid** refers to the foundation Paul had **laid** initially in proclaiming Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor 2:2+).

**Jack Arnold** - If the **foundation** of a building is solid, then the building will stand and not crumble, but a bad foundation always means a bad building. Paul made it very clear that the foundation of the spiritual temple, the Church, is Jesus Christ. His person, His deity, His life, His death, His salvation, His doctrines, His resurrection, His ascension, His Holy Spirit who lives in all Christians, and His return and all that surrounds it make up the foundation. All this truth about Christ is revealed to us in the Bible. Jesus Christ is the foundation for every Christian, for every local church and for the universal Church. Any church which begins to move away from the person and work of Christ begins to slide spiritually and soon will collapse and totally crumble. The Christ spoken of here is not the Christ of one's imagination or whims but the Christ of scripture. This is why it is so important to know the Bible so we can have a solid foundation for our Christian lives and our local church. Apparently the Greek philosophers were trying to invade the church at Corinth, and they wanted to lay a different foundation of philosophy, speculation and theories. There were also the Hebrew Judaizers who wanted to lay down the different foundation of good works, saying if a person wanted to be saved, he had to keep the works of the Mosaic law. Yet, Paul dogmatically declared there is only one foundation, Jesus Christ, and every builder is to build upon that foundation so as to produce a strong local church. This is why every minister must keep Jesus Christ at the center of his ministry. ([1 Corinthians 3:10-17 The Ministry](#))

**Matthew Henry** - Here the apostle informs us what foundation he had laid at the bottom of all his labours among them-even Jesus Christ, the chief corner-stone, Eph. 2:20. Upon this foundation all the faithful ministers of Christ build. Upon this rock all the Christians found their hopes. Those that build their hopes of heaven on any other foundation build upon the sand. Other foundation can no man lay besides what is laid-even Jesus Christ. Note, The doctrine of our Saviour and his mediation is the principal doctrine of Christianity. It lies at the bottom, and is the foundation, of all the rest. Leave out this, and you lay waste all our comforts, and leave no foundation for our hopes as sinners. It is in Christ only that God is reconciling a sinful world to himself, 2 Co. 5:19.

**Carson** - Paul is still thinking of the exclusive power, wisdom, and authority bound up with the gospel. If anyone tries to lay down some other foundation, then it must be for some other building. It is certainly not the church that will rise on any competing foundation.

**THOUGHT** - One practical application of this truth is that if some persuasive speaker comes to the church and begins teaching "doctrines" that did not focus on Jesus Christ and the Cross, the Corinthians should be very [leery](#) of such a teacher and if necessary expel them from the assembly. In his parting words to the Ephesian elders Paul describes some that might not build on Jesus warning "**Be on guard** ([prosecho](#) in [present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) for yourselves (PAUL IS ADDRESSING THE EPHESIAN ELDERS) and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 (THE SOBER WARNING) "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in **among you**, not sparing the flock; 30 (NOTE IT WILL BE AN "[INSIDE JOB](#)") and **from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.** 31 "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. 32" And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (Acts 20:28-32+)

Eph 2:19-20+ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 **having been built on** the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,

Col 2:6-7+ Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 having been firmly rooted and now **being built up in Him** and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.

**Has been laid** ([2749](#))([keimai](#)) means literally to be in a recumbent position, to lie down, to be laid down. The root meaning refers to lying down or reclining and came to be used of an official appointment and sometimes of destiny. In the military **keimai** was used of a special assignment, such as guard duty or defense of a strategic position - the soldier was placed (set) on duty. NT uses - Matt. 3:10; Matt. 5:14; Matt. 28:6; Lk. 2:12; Lk. 2:16; Lk. 2:34; Lk. 3:9; Lk. 12:19; Lk. 23:53; Jn. 2:6; Jn. 19:29; Jn. 20:5; Jn. 20:6; Jn. 20:7; Jn. 20:12; Jn. 21:9; 1 Co. 3:11; 2 Co. 3:15; Phil. 1:16; 1 Thess. 3:3; 1 Tim. 1:9; 1 Jn. 5:19; Rev. 4:2; Rev. 21:16

**SPURGEON** - 3:11 "No one can lay any other foundation than what has been laid down. That foundation is Jesus Christ." A building's superstructure is important, but the first question must always concern the foundation. However quickly, however cleverly a person may build, if the foundation is unsound, that person is a foolish builder. This is emphatically true in spiritual things, for there the foundation is of the utmost importance. Four important truths stand out about the foundation in this verse. To begin with, a foundation is the first portion of a building, and so is the Lord Jesus first and foremost with his church. God in his purpose has chosen a people, but he has no such people apart from Christ. Next, a foundation is the support of all, and there is no church except

that which derives all its support from Christ Jesus. If any company of people calling themselves a church depend for salvation and eternal life on anything besides or beyond the merit of Christ's atoning sacrifice, they are not a church. Furthermore, the shape of a building is determined by its foundation. If any portion of a church is not based on Christ, it is a mere deforming addition to the plan of the great architect. Finally, a foundation is indispensable to a building, and so Christ is indispensable to a true church. In a house we might close in a door, and we might remove parts of the roof, and still it might be a house. But we cannot have a house at all if we take away the foundation. We cannot have a church of Christ if Jesus Christ is not there as the foundation.

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## [A Place To Stand](#)

No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. —1 Corinthians 3:11

Today's Scripture : 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

While taking a break during a ministry trip, we were snorkeling in the Caribbean Sea. The boat that had taken us to the deep water for better sites had gone back to shore, and I began to feel panicky about being in the open water. Finding it hard to control my breathing, I asked my son-in-law Todd and a friend, Dave Velzen, for help. They held my arms while I searched for an outcropping of coral close enough to the surface for me to stand on. Once I had a place to stand, even though surrounded by deep waters, I was okay.

Are you feeling a bit panicky about events in your life? Maybe it seems as if you are surrounded by the open waters of relationship problems, or money woes, or simply an inability to put your life in order. Perhaps you feel as if you are drowning in a sea of trials and trouble.

May I suggest two things? First, find a fellow Christian or two who can come beside you and hold you up (see Eccl. 4:10), pray for you, talk with you, and remind you that you are not alone. Then rest your feet on the only solid foundation in life: Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11).

Life's troubles are too tough to take on alone. Get some help and find in Jesus a place to stand. By: Dave Branon (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

God often meets our deepest need  
With help we gain from others,  
From caring members of His church—  
Our sisters and our brothers.  
—Brown

Build your life on the solid foundation—Jesus Christ.

## **1 Corinthians 3:12 Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,**

Amplified - But if anyone builds upon the Foundation, whether it be with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,

Wuest - Now, assuming that anyone builds upon the aforementioned foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

NET 1 Corinthians 3:12 If anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw,

NLT 1 Corinthians 3:12 Anyone who builds on that foundation may use a variety of materials-- gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw.

ESV 1 Corinthians 3:12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw--

NIV 1 Corinthians 3:12 If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw,

GNT 1 Corinthians 3:12 ε δ τις ποικοδομε π τ ν θεμ λιον χρυσ ν, ργυρον, λ θους τιμ ους, ξ λα, χ ρτον, καλ μην,

KJV 1 Corinthians 3:12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay,

stubble;

YLT 1 Corinthians 3:12 and if any one doth build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw --

ASV 1 Corinthians 3:12 But if any man buildeth on the foundation gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, stubble;

CSB 1 Corinthians 3:12 If anyone builds on that foundation with gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw,

NKJ 1 Corinthians 3:12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,

NRS 1 Corinthians 3:12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw--

NAB 1 Corinthians 3:12 If anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw,

NJB 1 Corinthians 3:12 On this foundation, different people may build in gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay or straw

GWN 1 Corinthians 3:12 People may build on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw.

BBE 1 Corinthians 3:12 But on the base a man may put gold, silver, stones of great price, wood, dry grass, cut stems;

- **gold:** Ps 19:10 119:72 Pr 8:10 16:16 Isa 60:17 1Ti 4:6 2Ti 2:20 1Pe 1:7 Rev 3:18
- **precious:** Isa 54:11-13 Rev 21:18
- **wood:** Pr 30:6 Jer 23:28 Mt 15:6-9 Ac 20:30 Ro 16:17 2Co 2:17 4:2 Col 2:8,18-23 1Ti 4:1-3,7 6:3 2Ti 2:16-18 3:7,13 4:3 Tit 1:9-11 3:9-11 Heb 13:9 Rev 2:14
- 1 Corinthians 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

"Precious Stones" in Columns of Temple of Aphrodite

## CONTRASTING QUALITY OF BUILDING MATERIALS

Paul as a wise master builder knows that the foundation (Jesus Christ and Him crucified) is the one absolute essential upon which all subsequent building must take place. But he knows that a good foundation does not necessarily guarantee a sturdy, reliable building. And so now he describes two classes of building materials.

**Now if any man builds on ([epoikodomeo](#)) the foundation** - First note that the **IF** here is a **first class condition** which introduces a statement that is presumed to be true from the author's perspective and could be translated "since" or "because." (compare similar first class conditional "IF's" - 1 Cor 3:12, 14, 15, 17, 18). **Builds upon** is [epoikodomeo](#) in the present tense (continually builds upon). So keeping in mind the context that **each man must be careful how he builds on** (present tense) **it** how would any man build on the **foundation** of Christ? I can think of no better answer than Paul's closing exhortation to Timothy

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 **preach** ([aorist imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) the word; **be ready** ([aorist imperative](#)) in season and out of season; **reprove** ([aorist imperative](#)), **rebuke** ([aorist imperative](#)), **exhort** ([aorist imperative](#)), with great patience and instruction. 3 FOR (PAUL EXPLAINS WHY SO CRITICAL) the time will come when they will not endure **sound doctrine**; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. (2 Ti 4:1-4+).

In short, from Paul's exhortation we are to build on **the foundation** of Christ by preaching and teaching the pure word about Christ, the pure word being the only source of **sound doctrine**, (COMPARE "WISDOM...NOT OF THIS AGE" - 1 Cor 2:6-8+, 1 Cor 3:18-20+) "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power," (1 Cor 2:4+), "the power of God," (1 Cor 2:5+), not words that "tickle" the hearer's ears (IN CONTEXT IN CORINTH ESPECIALLY THE WISDOM OF MEN - READ 1 Cor 1:18-25+, 1 Cor 2:1, 4, 5+). Not only will "tickling" words be burned up, they will likely be destructive to the hearers (cf 1 Cor 3:17+), ultimately tearing down the church of

Jesus Christ rather than building her up. So it bears repeating, that **each man must be careful how he builds on** (present tense) **it!** And lest you think you have a pass since you are not a preacher or formal teacher, if you are a believer, you are part of the **each man/any man**, for all believer's are teaching others in one form or another -- parents their children, employers their employees, husbands their wives, wives their husbands, etc. And it will be the quality of our building materials which will be assayed and assessed! As Paul said "**Do not be deceived** ([present imperative with a negative](#) = stop being deceived like you are now being deceived!), God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap." (Gal 6:7+) **This begs the question are you sowing with precious or worthless building materials?** In the second letter Paul teaches that "we must (NOT "MIGHT")all appear before the judgment seat ([bema](#)) of Christ, so that (PURPOSE OF OUR PERSONAL APPEARANCE) **each one** ([hekastos](#)) (COMPARE **EACH MAN...ANY MAN** IN THIS CHAPTER) may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good ([agathos](#) = profitable, benefiting others) or bad ([phaulos](#))" (2 Cor 5:10+). The Greek word [phaulos](#) is a good word to describe building materials of **wood, hay and straw**, for the word [phaulos](#) means worthless, low-grade, substandard quality, base quality, inferior quality. The **Bema Seat** is for assessing the **QUALITY** and not for examination of our sins in this life, for those were paid for in full (Jn 19:30+ - aka "[tetelestai](#)" = "IT IS FINISHED." "IT IS PAID IN FULL") by the fully atoning, precious blood sacrifice of our great Redeemer and Lord, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29+). In fact we see that even if one builds with worthless materials in this life, he or she (1) will still be saved (1 Cor 3:15+) and (2) will still receive praise (1 Cor 4:5+).

Take a moment and praise our blessed One Foundation, Jesus Christ our Lord ...

### [The Church's One Foundation](#)

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.

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.

Tho' with a scornful wonder,  
men see her sore oppressed,  
by schisms rent asunder,  
by heresies distressed,  
yet saints their watch are keeping,  
their cry goes up, "How long?"  
And soon the night of weeping  
shall be the morn of song.

The church shall never perish!  
Her dear Lord, to defend,  
to guide, sustain, and cherish,  
is with her to the end;  
tho' there be those that hate her  
and false sons in her pale,  
against the foe or traitor  
she ever shall prevail.

'Mid toil and tribulation,  
and tumult of her war,  
she waits the consummation

of peace for evermore;  
till with the vision glorious  
her longing eyes are blest,  
and the great church victorious  
shall be the church at rest.

Yet she on earth hath union  
with God the Three in One,  
and mystic sweet communion  
with those whose rest is won.  
O happy ones and holy!  
Lord, give us grace that we,  
like them, the meek and lowly,  
on high may dwell with Thee.

**AMEN**

**Jack Arnold on any man** - Again in this context, this refers to ministers who are called a separated unto the gospel ministry by God, but it could apply to **any** Christian who ministers in the home, the church or the community. (**ED**: AND BELOVED WE ALL MINISTER TO OTHER BELIEVERS IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER!)

**With gold, silver, precious stones**- It is notable that in Paul's day these three elements commonly adorned temples (and of course the Corinthians would have been very familiar with such sights in a city filled with pagan temples and granite/marble columns! See columns at [Temple of Aphrodite](#)), which is interesting for Jesus referred to His body as a temple (Jn 2:19-22+). If precious items were used by fallen men to adorn temporal human temples, how much more should we seek to use precious items to "adorn" the eternal foundation of Christ, the blessed Cornerstone (Ps 118:22+, 1 Peter 2:7+). The **foundation** is Christ, Who is precious, and so it behooves all builders (the Corinthians and us) to select precious materials, lest we **sully** the pristine foundation God has given to each of us on which to build spiritually. This triad of materials each is costly and as such represents the best materials to use in building on the holy foundation of Christ Jesus.

"Ministry that costs nothing, accomplishes nothing."

-- John Henry Jowett

**Robertson** - **Gold** was freely used by the ancients in their palaces. Their marble and granite pillars are still the wonder and despair of modern men. The wooden huts had hay (chortos, grass, as in Mark 6:39) and stubble (kalamē, old word for stubble after the grain is cut, here alone in the NT, though in LXX as Ex. 5:12) which were employed to hold the wood pieces together and to thatch the roof.

**David Guzik** - **Precious stones** doesn't mean jewels, but fine stone materials like marble and granite (ED: THINK OF THE LARGE FOUNDATION STONES OF GRANITE AND MARBLE AT THE UNITED STATES CAPITOL, ETC - THAT'S THE IDEA). Mixing the wisdom of men with the wisdom of God in the work of building the church is like using alternate layers of straw and marble in building. Straw may be fine, it may have a place (in the barn), but it is an inadequate building material. In the same way, human wisdom and fleshly attractions may have a place in life, but not in the building of the church. There is only one foundation for the church. If it isn't founded on Jesus Christ, it isn't a church at all. So one can't build on any other foundation; but one can build **unworthily** on the one foundation. ([1 Corinthians 3 Commentary](#))

**Wood, hay, straw** - These three metaphors present a clear contrast with the first triad of metaphors. In the ancient world most homes were framed with wood, with the walls of hay and mud and with roofs thatched with straw, these three items together suggesting the metaphor of a building or a house. The most obvious distinction is that all three items are flammable, while the former three (**gold, silver, precious stones**) are generally considered inflammable. These are not costly, but the former are very costly. A building built with these materials is no more than a facade, a fake building at best, but a frail, flammable building for sure! In sum, we must build with materials that are valuable and permanent, not worthless and temporary! How would you classify the materials you are building with in your church, your ministry (formal or informal)? Now is the time to do a careful examination, for later may be too late and your experience in eternity will be far less than in could be (depending on what the nature of eternal rewards prove to be which is largely a mystery now)!

**Jack Arnold** - People are eternal. Everything else will go up in smoke. The things which will be burned are the Christian fads and the non-people priorities which the minister spent so much time supporting in his so-called ministry. "*We need to ask this question, 'Is what I am doing building people or just building my own little empire? Isn't it possible to be so concerned about things, ideas, and projects, that we fail to see whether or not all of that enhances the building up of people'*" (Knofel Staton, [1 Corinthians](#))? Many pastors on judgment day will come to realize they wasted their lives on frivolous, non-eternal projects. They will discover they

invested time, interests, priorities, monies and talents in things which were worthless as far as God's eternal evaluation is concerned. (Ibid)

**John MacArthur** - The materials do not represent wealth, talents, or opportunity. Nor do they represent spiritual gifts, all of which are good and are given to each believer by the Lord as He sees fit (1 Cor. 12:11). The materials represent believers' responses to what they have—how well they serve the Lord with what He has given them. In other words, they represent our works. We cannot be saved by good works or stay saved by good works. But every Christian has been “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10) and is to bear “fruit in every good work” (Col. 1:10). Works are not the source of the Christian life, but they are the marks of it. Every Christian is a builder, and every Christian builds with some sort of materials. God wants us to build only with the best materials, because only the best materials are worthy of Him, are the most effective, and will last. It is important to note that these first three materials are equally valuable. There is no grading, since some precious stones (such as pearls) were, in the ancient world, considered to be more valuable than gold, and silver could be used for things that gold could not. Things with different functions can be equally precious (cf. Matt. 13:23). Only the Lord can determine which works are high quality and which are low. It is not the believer's role to grade Christians and the work they do. The point Paul is making is that our purpose should always be to serve the Lord with the best He has given us and with full dependence on Him. He alone determines the ultimate value of each man's work.

**Matthew Henry** - But of those that hold the foundation, and embrace the general doctrine of Christ's being the mediator between God and man, there are two sorts. (1) Some build upon this foundation **gold, silver, and precious stones**, namely, those who receive and propagate the pure truths of the gospel, who hold nothing but the truth as it is in Jesus, and preach nothing else. This is building well upon a good foundation, making all of apiece, when ministers not only depend upon Christ as the great prophet of the church, and take him for their guide and infallible teacher, but receive and spread the doctrines he taught, in their purity, without any corrupt mixtures, without adding or diminishing. (2) Others build **wood, hay, and stubble**, on this foundation; that is, though they adhere to the foundation, they depart from the mind of Christ in many particulars, substitute their own fancies and inventions in the room of his doctrines and institutions, and build upon the good foundation what will not abide the test when the day of trial shall come, and the fire must make it manifest, as wood, hay, and stubble, will not bear the trial by fire, but must be consumed in it.

**Brian Bell** - Some building materials are combustible (wood, hay, straw) & they will be burned up completely. Others will use noncombustible materials such as gold, silver, or costly stones (granite, marble) & they will find their labor will stand the test. And they will receive a reward. Examples of wood, hay, & straw works? 1. **Wood**: When I became a sound man as a new believer to be seen by others...POOF! 2. **Hay**: Sharing the gospel w/a friend w/me, being more interested in showing off my apologetic prowess than caring for the soul of the individual I was talking to...POOF! 3. **Straw**: Any time I have served the Lord with a wrong heart...POOF! Take heed how you build! - Wasn't that the story of the 3 little pigs? 1. That which was made of shoddy building materials (straw & wood) blew down, but that which was of sturdy material (brick) withstood the fierce winds. a) Instead of blowing, Jesus will simply look at it with “His eyes like a flame of fire” at the judgment seat of Christ. “Take heed how you build!”

**1 Corinthians 3:13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work**

Amplified - The work of each [one] will become [plainly, openly] known (shown for what it is); for the day [of Christ] will disclose and declare it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test and critically appraise the character and worth of the work each person has done.

Wuest - the work of each person will become apparent, for the day will make it known, because it [the day] will be made clear as to its identity by means of one of its attributes, namely, fire. And the fire itself will put each person's work to the test for the purpose of approving it should it meet the required specifications, the test being to determine what sort of work it is as to quality. ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

NET 1 Corinthians 3:13 each builder's work will be plainly seen, for the Day will make it clear, because it will be revealed by fire. And the fire will test what kind of work each has done.

NLT 1 Corinthians 3:13 But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value.

ESV 1 Corinthians 3:13 each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.

NIV 1 Corinthians 3:13 his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work.

GNT 1 Corinthians 3:13 κ του τ ργον φανερ ν γεν σεσαι, γ ρ μ ρα δηλ σει, τι ν πυρ ποκαλ πτεται· κα κ του τ ργον πο ν σπιν τ π ρ [α τ ] δοκιμ σει.

KJV 1 Corinthians 3:13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

YLT 1 Corinthians 3:13 of each the work shall become manifest, for the day shall declare it, because in fire it is revealed, and the work of each, what kind it is, the fire shall prove;

ASV 1 Corinthians 3:13 each man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire itself shall prove each man's work of what sort it is.

CSB 1 Corinthians 3:13 each one's work will become obvious, for the day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire; the fire will test the quality of each one's work.

NKJ 1 Corinthians 3:13 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.

NRS 1 Corinthians 3:13 the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done.

NAB 1 Corinthians 3:13 the work of each will come to light, for the Day will disclose it. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire (itself) will test the quality of each one's work.

NJB 1 Corinthians 3:13 but each person's handiwork will be shown for what it is. The Day which dawns in fire will make it clear and the fire itself will test the quality of each person's work.

GWN 1 Corinthians 3:13 The day will make what each one does clearly visible because fire will reveal it. That fire will determine what kind of work each person has done.

BBE 1 Corinthians 3:13 Every man's work will be made clear in that day, because it will be tested by fire; and the fire itself will make clear the quality of every man's work.

- **man's:** 1Co 3:14,15 4:5 2Ti 3:9
- **the day:** 1Co 1:8 Mal 3:17 Ro 2:5,16 2Th 1:7-10 2Ti 1:18 2Pe 3:10 Rev 20:12
- **be revealed:** Lu 2:35
- **and the fire:** Isa 8:20 28:17 Jer 23:29 Eze 13:10-16 Zec 13:9 1Pe 1:7 4:12
- 1 Corinthians 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## A DAY OF RECOMPENSE FOR OUR EARTHLY WORKS

**Bob Utley** makes an excellent observation noting that "This clear manifestation of believers' or leaders' ministry (motives, actions, purposes) is emphasized by a three-fold repetition of verbs in 1 Cor 3:13 -- (1) **become evident** ([phanerós](#)), (2) **show** ([deloo](#)) and (3) **be revealed** ([apokalupto](#)) This open display and judgment of believers must relate to the judgment seat of Christ in 2 Cor. 5:10. ([1 Corinthians 3 Commentary](#))

**Each man's work will become evident** - Paul personalizes this passage to address **each** (and every individual) man and woman in Corinth. And while he is addressing the saints at Corinth, the principle of the passage applies to **each** and every believer individually and personally. This sure word of "prophecy" should wake us from spiritual slumber, sober our spirit and stir our heart so that we "prepare (our) minds for action, keep sober in spirit, **fix** (our) **hope** ([elpizo](#) in [aorist imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ (GLORIFICATION BUT ALSO THE DAY WHEN WORK WILL BECOME EVIDENT). As obedient children, do not be conformed ([suschematizo](#) - STOP BEING POURED INTO THE MOLD OF) to the former lusts (STOP WALKING LIKE "MERE MEN" FLESHLY, LIKE MEN WHO DO NOT POSSESS THE HOLY SPIRIT) which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One Who called you, **be** holy ([aorist imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) yourselves also in all your behavior." (1 Peter 1:13-15+)

**Jack Arnold** - Sometimes to the human eye it is difficult to distinguish between "gold, silver and costly stones" (sound doctrine, well-equipped saints, godly wisdom) and "wood, hay and straw" (false doctrine, mushy saints and human wisdom). This is why there is coming a day of judgment upon every minister's works. God has determined in His plan for that moment to come at the Judgment Seat of Christ for the doctrine, lifestyle and training of men to be tested by God. There is a day coming when the minister's life will be turned inside out and God will judge not only his works but the motives behind his works. The minister's works will be revealed by fire which purges the cross and leaves the pure metal. The fire may be symbolic of God's holiness when His judgment determines



what is destructible and what is indestructible, what shall last for eternity and what shall be consumed before our eyes, what was done to glorify God and what was done to glorify self. What is said of ministers and God's judgment on their works is also true of all believers and their works. (2 Cor 5:10) There is a broad sense in which all Christians are ministers. At the Judgment Seat of Christ each person's works will be seen in their true character and the piercing, searching eye of Christ will see right through all our phony, false, self-centered motives. It is a tremendous motivation for both the minister and the ministering saint to live a godly, holy, consecrated life because he or she knows examination day is surely coming. So much of what appears to the Christian work is really the energy of the flesh, and on judgment day, God will get down to the truth of why we did what we did. So many churches and Christian ministries today are built on the flesh (sin nature) and not from the Bible. Pastors and Christian workers are driven by success, bigness, influence, power and money. Pastors must be builders, but they also must build biblically. ([1 Corinthians 3:10-17](#) [The Ministry](#))

**Matthew Henry** - There is a time coming when a discovery will be made of what men have built on this foundation: Every man's work shall be made manifest, shall be laid open to view, to his own view and that of others. Some may, in the simplicity of their hearts, build wood and stubble on the good foundation, and know not, all the while, what they have been doing; but in that day their own conduct shall appear to them in its proper light. Every man's work shall be made manifest to himself, and made manifest to others, both those that have been misled by him and those that have escaped his errors. Now we may be mistaken in ourselves and others; but there is a day coming that will cure all our mistakes, and show us ourselves, and show us our actions in the true light, without covering or disguise: For the day shall declare it (that is, every man's work), because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is, v. 13. The expression carries in it a plain allusion to the refiner's art, in which the fire separates and distinguishes the dross from the gold and silver; as it also will silver and gold and precious stones, that will endure the fire, from wood and hay and stubble, that will be consumed in it. There is a day coming that will as nicely distinguish one man from another, and one man's work from another's, as the fire distinguishes gold from dross, or metal that will bear the fire from other materials that will be consumed in it. In that day,

**Become evident** pictures each man's work shining forth. The root [phanerós](#) gives us [epiphaneia](#) which describes the **appearing (epiphaneia) of our Lord Jesus Christ** (1 Ti 6:14, 2 Ti 4:1, 2+ Ti 4:8+, Titus 2:13+). Jesus will come forth in brilliant light (Rev 1:7+ "every eye will see Him", Mt 24:30+ "with power and great glory", Mt 16:27+ = come...and will then recompense every man), He will SHINE FORTH and our works and even the motives of our heart will be revealed by the brilliance of His shining forth! Our work will be shown for what it is and anything done apart from Christ (Jn 15:5, Jn 12:24) will not stand the test.

Jesus "was saying to them (HIS DISCIPLES), "A lamp is not brought to be put under a basket, is it, or under a bed? Is it not brought to be put on the lampstand? For nothing is hidden, except to be revealed; nor has anything been secret, but that it would come to light. ([phanerós](#))" (Mk 4:21-22+)

**Each** (each, every man, everyone)([1538](#)) [hekastos](#) from **hekas** = separate) means each, every one, of any number separately. **Hekastos** is used as an adjective qualifying a noun = each, every (Lk 6:44, Mt 16:27 = repay every man, Mt 26:22 = each one; Jn 19:23 - every soldier; Lk 4:40 = each one; Lk 16:5, Acts 2:3 = rested on each one; Acts 20:31; 1 Cor 12:18; Eph 4:7, 16, Col. 4:6; 1 Th. 2:11; 2 Th. 1:3);

**Evident** ([5318](#)) ([phanerós](#) = manifest, visible, conspicuous from **phaino** = give light; to make to shine, to cause to become visible from **phos** = light; [phaneroo](#)) means made visible as an external manifestation to senses. **Phaneros** stresses what is visible to sight. Conspicuous, apparent, (openly) manifest, obvious, visible, evident, plain, clear, easily seen, open to sight. What is open and public (Mk 4:22). Uses in NT - Matt. 12:16; Mk. 3:12; Mk. 4:22; Mk. 6:14; Lk. 8:17; Acts 4:16; Acts 7:13; Ro 1:19; Ro 2:28; 1 Co. 3:13; 1 Co. 11:19; 1 Co. 14:25; Gal. 5:19; Phil. 1:13; 1 Ti 4:15; 1 Jn. 3:10

## **ONE "DATE" THAT IS ON EVERY BELIEVER'S DAY TIMER!**

**For the day will show it** - This time phrase **the day** begs the question what **day**? In context it is the day in which believer's are judged, the thought of which should motivate in these spiritual babies (AND IN ALL BELIEVERS) a desire for a Holy Spirit enabled holy walk in Christ. In context of this first section of Paul's letter dealing with strife, jealousy, divisions, this great prophetic truth should motivate the saints at Corinth to cease their fleshy quarrels and focus on Christ crucified. Paul amplifies this truth in chapter 4 writing...

Therefore **do not go on passing judgment** (THE CORINTHIANS WERE DOING THIS) **before the time** (WHAT TIME? HE IMMEDIATELY TELLS US "WHAT TIME" - SECOND COMING), but wait until the Lord comes Who will both (FIRST ACTION) bring to light the things hidden in the darkness (BUT REMEMBER OUR SIN AND ITS SHAME HAS BEEN JUDGED AT THE CROSS) and (SECOND ACTION) disclose the motives of

men's hearts; and (CONCLUSION) then each man's praise will come to him from God. (1Co 4:5+)

There is going to be information given on this Day of Christ that is not apparent here on earth...because it is spiritually discerned. The point is there are people down here who look like they are doing SO MUCH for God...the question is are they doing it according to the flesh or according to the Spirit. It is hard to discern this down here (FOR WE CANNOT SEE HEARTS OR MOTIVES AS GOD CAN - 1 Sa 16:7) so therefore we must be very careful and very hesitant to pass judgment on others! The light will make our works evident, and the fire will test them as to whether they will endure eternally! Jesus the Perfect Judge Whose "eyes were like a flame of fire" (Rev 1:14+) warns the churches in Revelation "**I know your deeds**" (Rev 2:2, 19+ Rev 3:1, 8+ Rev 3:15+). In Rev 2:23+ He declares "I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds." (Rev 20:12+, Rev 22:12+).

As an aside a few commentaries interpret this **day** as synonymous with the [Day of the Lord](#), but it is distinct and separate from the [Day of the Lord](#) which is a manifestation of God's righteous wrath on unbelief and unbelievers, not on believers.

**Show** (make clear) (1213)([deloo](#) from **delos** = manifest, evident) means to make plain by words and thus to declare. To make manifest to the mind. **Deloo** is used of indications which lead the mind to conclusions about the origin or character of things. It means to make some matter known that was unknown or not communicated previously. It means to show clearly, to signify, to make manifest, visible, clear, or plain and to make known. When spoken of things past it means to tell, relate or impart information (as in 1Cor 1:11 = "I have been informed"; Col 1:8 = "he also informed us"). Although **deloo** is used most often in reference to declarations through articulate language, it is also used often of any kind of indirect communication.

**Deloo** used 7v in NT - 1 Co. 1:11; 1 Co. 3:13; Col. 1:8; Heb. 9:8; Heb. 12:27; 1 Pet. 1:11; 2 Pet. 1:14

**Because** - Explains why the day will show it.

**It is to be revealed with fire** - It is the The veil will be removed exposing our "**building**" that was previously hidden to open view. Have you ever been at the unveiling of a statue commissioned to honor some great leader, etc? What do they do? The statue is concealed by a huge tarp or sheet so that no one can see. After the speeches and adulations, a man tugs the rope and the tarp falls revealing the beautiful work of art! One day the Lord will "tug the rope" (so to speak) and the tarp will fall away and the **good works** He has done through each of us and they will be revealed and rewarded in accordance with what we have done in Him (cf 1 Cor 15:58+). This will be the experience of each and every believer in Christ on that day when our works are judged. What will the "statue" look like for you on that great day of the Bema Seat judgment? Will you be glad or will there be a tear? I say "tear" because twice in the Revelation in the context of a scene involving believers in Heaven, John records the fact that God will "wipe away every tear from their eyes." (Rev 7:17+, Rev 21:4+)

**MacArthur** - Fire is the symbol of testing. Just as it purifies metal, so will the fire of God's discernment burn up the dross and leave what is pure and valuable (cf. Job 23:10; Zech. 13:9; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 3:18).

In the OT so often FIRE was used as a symbol of the revealed presence of God and one day we will stand in His holy presence and there will be a judgment by holy fire.

**THOUGHT** - The picture is that of a beautiful house that experiences a devastating fire which destroyed everything but the rock chimney. This is a faint metaphorical picture of you and me beloved before the Lord's fire someday. The question is will I build my house in faith, correcting the flaws in the structure with the tools of confession and repentance or will I have a beautiful house that men adore but which is built entirely of fleshly effort? Father forgive me for building castles of my own vain imagination and give me experientially the mind of Christ, a heart like David, a single mindedness like Paul, a repentance like Peter, an encouraging spirit like Barnabas, a Spirit energized determination and dedication to hold fast to the pure Word like Timothy and that glorious first love that the Ephesian church had left (Rev 2:4-5+). Oh Lord, we acknowledge that unless You build the house, all of our labor is in vain! (Ps 128:1+), so enable us to build Your house! In Jesus' Name and for His glory Alone. Amen

**Revealed** (601)([apokalupto](#) from **apó** = from + **kalúpto** = cover, conceal, English = apocalypse - see study of [apokalupsis](#) English = apocalypse) literally means to remove the cover from and so the idea is to remove that which conceals something. Almost all of the NT uses have a figurative use, especially to some aspect of spiritual truth that was heretofore hidden but now has the "lid removed" so that it can be seen (understood). Thus **apokalupto** means to "take the lid off", to remove the cover and thereby to expose to open view that which had heretofore not been visible, known or disclosed. The idea is to make manifest something previously secret or unknown. All uses - Matt. 10:26; Matt. 11:25; Matt. 11:27; Matt. 16:17; Lk. 2:35; Lk. 10:21; Lk. 10:22; Lk. 12:2; Lk. 17:30; Jn. 12:38; Rom. 1:17; Rom. 1:18; Rom. 8:18; 1 Co. 2:10; 1 Co. 3:13; 1 Co. 14:30; Gal. 1:16; Gal. 3:23; Eph. 3:5; Phil. 3:15; 2 Thess. 2:3; 2 Thess. 2:6; 2 Thess. 2:8; 1 Pet. 1:5; 1 Pet. 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:1

**Believer's Study Bible** - The judgment described in 3:11-17 is for Christians only and transpires immediately after the translation (rapture) of the church into heaven (ED: THE TIMING IS NOT CLEARLY STATED IN THE SCRIPTURES). In Rom. 14:10 and 2 Cor. 5:10, this judgment is labeled the **bema** (Gk.) or the "**judgment seat**" of Christ. Several important truths about that judgment are presented in this passage: (1) Only those who have the proper spiritual foundation upon which to construct a life will be able to appear at the bema. That foundation is Christ (v. 11). (2) Once the foundation has been laid, believers build a superstructure throughout the years that God allows. That superstructure may consist of the valuable and lasting -- gold, silver, precious stones; or the unworthy and fleeting -- wood, hay, straw (v. 12). (3) On the day of Christ's return, all works will be declared and "revealed by fire." This latter expression probably refers to the penetrating, purging, and discerning gaze of Jesus (cf. Rev. 1:14; 2:18). (4) Those Christian works which are of permanent value abide and become the basis for reward (v. 14). (5) Those works which are worthless in themselves or which are improperly motivated are destroyed in the fire of Christ's gaze. Consequently, reward may be limited, but the man himself is saved (v. 15). This judgment is not to determine salvation or eternal destiny but to determine rewards.

**And the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.** -[Wuest](#) "the fire itself will put each person's work to the test for the purpose of approving it should it meet the required specifications, the test being to determine what sort of work it is as to quality." So it is quality, not quantity, of works that is the basis of judgment.

**Jack Arnold** - Christian ministers will not be judged so much on the quantity of works (numbers, success, large congregations and buildings) but on the quality of work and the motives behind it. It is not how much the minister has done but how faithful he has been. It is possible for a person who has seemingly done little work to have a big reward because his motives were right. But it is also possible for a person to have outwardly done much work but whose motives were terrible to have little reward. The ideal is much work with right motives; this glorifies God the most. If we are doing things for Christ with positive motives, then we will never be ashamed at Christ's coming. "And now, dear children, continue in faith, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming" (1 Jn. 2:28+). ([1 Corinthians 3:10-17 The Ministry](#))

We (I) need to think about those times when we've taught and it was nothing more than the flesh. Frankly, I usually know when I have taught depending on my fleshly performance (I become extremely anxious and begin to sweat profusely!!!), but for certain Jesus piercing eye knows (Pr 15:3) and such efforts will be revealed for what they really are - filthy rags! It's amazing how many religious things one can do in the energy of the flesh. And we can get away with on earth because so many seem to not know the difference between spiritual works and fleshly works, especially in success oriented America. Don't ask "How's the church doing?" Ask how are YOU doing, because we are the church!!! We are preparing for our future life with Jesus right now for John writes of the Bride of Christ ""Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." It was given to her to **clothe herself** in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is **the righteous acts of the saints**. (THESE ARE WORKS WHICH PASS THROUGH GOD'S FIRE INTACT)." (Rev 19:7-8+)

**Will test** (1381) ([dokimazo](#) from **dokimos** = tested, proved or approved, tried as metals by fire and thus purified from [dechomai](#) = to accept, receive) means to assay, to test, to prove, to put to the test, to make a trial of, to verify, to discern to approve. **Dokimazo** involves not only testing but determining the genuineness or value of an event or object. That which has been tested is demonstrated to be genuine and trustworthy. 20v in NT - Lk. 12:56; Lk. 14:19; Rom. 1:28; Rom. 2:18; Rom. 12:2; Rom. 14:22; 1 Co. 3:13; 1 Co. 11:28; 1 Co. 16:3; 2 Co. 8:8; 2 Co. 8:22; 2 Co. 13:5; Gal. 6:4; Eph. 5:10; Phil. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:4; 1 Thess. 5:21; 1 Tim. 3:10; 1 Pet. 1:7; 1 Jn. 4:1

**ILLUSTRATION** - The Builder --An elderly carpenter was ready to retire. He told his employer-contractor of his plans to leave the house building business and live a more leisurely life with his wife enjoying his extended family. He would miss the paycheck, but he needed to retire. They could get by. The contractor was sorry to see his good worker go and asked if he could build just one more house as a personal favor. The carpenter said yes, but in time it was easy to see that his heart was not in his work. He resorted to shoddy workmanship and used inferior materials. It was an unfortunate way to end his career. When the carpenter finished his work and the builder came to inspect the house, the contractor handed the front-door key to the carpenter. "This is your house," he said, "my gift to you." What a shock! What a shame! If he had only known he was building his own house, he would have done it all so differently. Now he had to live in the home he had built none too well. So it is with us. We build our lives in a distracted way, reacting rather than acting, willing to put up less than the best

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### [Work That Won't Burn](#)

The fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. —1 Corinthians 3:13

Today's Scripture : 1 Corinthians 3:9-15

My father-in-law spent 30 years helping people in the public health field. When he went to heaven at the age of 76, he left a closet

full of files and a wall full of awards.

When it came time for us to clean out his “work” closet, the family pictures and a few mementos were kept, and all the rest had to go. I got the job of disposing of it. I hauled it up past the barn into an open field, doused it with diesel fuel, and set it on fire—old project files, slide presentations, plaques of appreciation, correspondence, everything—and I watched it burn.

It was a sobering experience as I thought that someday when I stand before God, all my “work” will meet the same test. Only what survives the fire has eternal value.

Watching letters and proposals turn to ashes gave me a new understanding of 1 Corinthians 3:13. Paul said, “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.”

Today the work. Tomorrow the fire.

That afternoon in the pasture made me more careful, more thoughtful, about my fleeting opportunities to do work that won’t burn.  
By: David C. McCasland (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

To know our works will all be judged  
Should give us deep concern:  
But if for Christ our works are done,  
Then they’ll endure—not burn.  
—Hess

Live today as if you will stand before God tomorrow.

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The Judgment Seat of Christ 1Cor. 3 2 Cor. 5

I. It's Proclamation 2 Cor. 5:10 "we must all stand..."

1. The Divine Involvement "we"
2. The Divine Imperative "must"
3. The Divine Inclusion "all"

II. It's Purpose 2 Cor. 5:10b 1 Cor 3:13

"...that everyone may receive the things done in the body...of what sort it is..."

- NOT a judgment of Salvation!
- NOT a judgment of Sin....but of Service!

III. It's Perfection 1 Cor. 3:13

1. It's Fairness
2. It's Fire (fire is the perfect purifier)

IV. It's Pleasure 1 Cor. 3:14

The Preserved Works -gold, silver, precious stones

V. It's Painfulness 1 Cor. 3:15

The Polluted Works -wood, hay, stubble

VI. It's Presentation Rev. 4

1. The Sovereign King
2. The Saved Subjects
3. The Sincere Worship (casting the crowns at His feet)

VII. It's Preparation Amos 4:12 Rom. 12:1-2

1. We Need Constant Communion
2. We Need Continual Confession 1 Jn 1:9
3. We Need Clear Consciences Acts 24:16

**1 Corinthians 3:14 If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.**

Amplified - If the work which any person has built on this Foundation [any product of his efforts whatever] survives [this test], he will get his reward.

Wuest - Assuming that the work of anyone which he has built upon it [the foundation, Christ] endures in that it has met these specifications, he shall receive a reward. ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

NET 1 Corinthians 3:14 If what someone has built survives, he will receive a reward.

NLT 1 Corinthians 3:14 If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward.

ESV 1 Corinthians 3:14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward.

NIV 1 Corinthians 3:14 If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward.

GNT 1 Corinthians 3:14 ε τινος τ ργον μενε ποικοδ μησεν, μισθ ν λ μψεται·

KJV 1 Corinthians 3:14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

YLT 1 Corinthians 3:14 if of any one the work doth remain that he built on it, a wage he shall receive;

ASV 1 Corinthians 3:14 If any man's work shall abide which he built thereon, he shall receive a reward.

CSB 1 Corinthians 3:14 If anyone's work that he has built survives, he will receive a reward.

NKJ 1 Corinthians 3:14 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.

NRS 1 Corinthians 3:14 If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward.

NAB 1 Corinthians 3:14 If the work stands that someone built upon the foundation, that person will receive a wage.

NJB 1 Corinthians 3:14 The one whose work stands up to it will be given his wages;

GWN 1 Corinthians 3:14 If what a person has built survives, he will receive a reward.

BBE 1 Corinthians 3:14 If any man's work comes through the test, he will have a reward.

- 1Co 3:8 4:5 Da 12:3 Mt 24:45-47 25:21-23 1Th 2:19 2Ti 4:7 1Pe 5:1,4 Rev 2:8-11
- 1 Corinthians 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### Related Passages:

Matthew 16:27+ "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS.

1 Cor. 9:17 For if I do this voluntarily, I have **reward**; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me

2 John 8 **Watch** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full **reward**.

Daniel 12:3+. Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Luke 6:23+ "**Be glad** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your **reward** is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.

Luke 6:35+ "But **love** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) your enemies, and **do good**, ([present imperative](#)) and **lend**, ([present imperative](#)) expecting nothing in return; and your **reward** will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.

Matthew 5:11-12+ Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. "**Rejoice** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) and **be glad** ([present imperative](#)) for your **reward** in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Mark 9:41+ "For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his **reward**.

Matthew 10:42+ "And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold

water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his **reward**."

Hebrews 11:26+ (MOSES) considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the **reward**.

## **GOD NOT ONLY SAVES US HE EVEN REWARDS US!**

**If - IF** is a **first class conditional statement** means what follows is accepted as true (and thus could be translated "since" or "because"). The future indicative, indicates that this in almost a "prophetic sense" will be fulfilled. The King will return to examine each man and woman's work (see Matthew passage above). I like to refer to this as "**Payday at the Parousia**," ([parousia](#) = coming) or as Pastor Robert Lee termed it "[Payday, Someday](#)."

**THOUGHT** - Remember the context is that the Corinthians were spiritual babies. Babies need motivation. What effect might this truth of future reward have on them? Might not this at least potentially serve to spark a desire to pursue holiness (2 Cor 7:1+, Heb 12:14NET+)? This is the "divine" **carrot and stick** approach (OF A REWARD AT THE END OF OUR SHORT RACE - cf 2 Ti 4:7-8+) before the Corinthians and indeed before all believers, encouraging them and us that "in reference to your former manner of life (WHEN YOU LIVED AS "MERE MEN," UNREGENERATE MEN) **lay aside** (FIRST WORD IN GREEK SENTENCE FOR EMPHASIS) the old self (THAT LIFE WE LIVED IN ADAM, WHEN WE WERE LOST, UNREGENERATE, MEN OF FLESH), which is being corrupted (present tense = continually - EVERY NON-BELIEVER'S LIFE IS CONTINUALLY "CORRUPTING" WHETHER THEY KNOW IT OR NOT! cf 2 Pe 1:4b+) in accordance with the lusts of deceit (NOTE - STRONG DESIRES PROMISE GRATIFICATION BUT LIE AND **DECEIVE!**) and that you be (present tense = continually) renewed in the spirit of your mind (EXPERIENTIALLY PARTAKING OF OR REALIZING IN OUR PRACTICE THE ENERGIZING EFFECT AND POWER OF OUR PRIVILEGED "POSITION" = THE MIND OF CHRIST - 1 Cor 2:16+), 24 and **put on the new self** (NEW NATURE, YOUR SPIRITUAL NATURE, DAILY BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY WORD AND THE HOLY SPIRIT, WALKING BY THE SPIRIT, BEARING FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT), which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." (Eph 4:22-24+).

Paul says it this way to the saints at Rome - "Do this (LOVE - see Ro 13:11+), knowing the **time**, that it is already **the hour** for you to awaken from sleep; for **now** salvation is **nearer to us** than **when** we believed (NOTE ALL TIME PHRASES IN **BOLD**). 12 The **night** is almost gone, and the **day** is near (MORE TIME PHRASES). Therefore let us **lay aside the deeds of darkness** and **put on the armor of light**. 13 (PAUL THEN EXPLAINS HOW WE ARE TO DO THIS PRACTICALLY) Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy (THE VERY PROBLEM THAT HAD INFECTED THE CORINTHIANS!). 14 But **put on** (NOT A SUGGESTION - [arist imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) the Lord Jesus Christ, and **make no provision** ([present imperative with a negative](#) = COMMAND TO STOP MAKING PROVISION IS THE IDEA! THIS BEGINS IN OUR MIND - AS WE BEGIN TO LISTEN TO THE LUSTS OF OUR FALLEN FLESH) for the flesh in regard to its lusts (STRONG DESIRES WILL STILL ASSAULT YOU, BUT IF WE PUT ON CHRIST WE WILL BE SHIELDED BY HIS WORD AND HIS SPIRIT, CHRIST WILL ENABLING US TO RESIST THE STRONG DESIRES).(Ro 13:11-14+)

**Any man's work which he has built on it remains** - This is a description of a wise builder, for his work will not be burned up by fire. When the fire has done its work, what is left? That is the fiery test that the work of each of us must meet. Suitable reward Mt 20:8 will come for the work that stands this test (gold, silver, precious stones)

**Arnold** - The first minister is a wise builder, a wise worker, who built sound doctrine, a strong God-centered world and life view, and equipped solid saints on the foundation which is Christ. This is "gold, silver and costly stones" and for these materials he will be paid or rewarded for his labors. These works will survive the fiery judgment of Christ. **Christian, are you involved in ministry?** Any Sunday school teaching, counseling, home Bible teaching, home schooling, teaching in a Christian school, or any work you do for Christ will be judged by Christ at the Judgment Seat. He will judge your motives and reward you accordingly.

**Matthew Henry** - In that day, Some men's works will abide the trial-will be found standard. It will appear that they not only held the foundation, but that they built regularly and well upon it-that they laid on proper materials, and in due form and order. The foundation and the superstructure were all of a piece. The foundation-truths, and those that had a manifest connection with them, were taught together. It may not be so easy to discern this connection now, nor know what works will abide the trial then; but that day will make a full discovery. And such a builder shall not, cannot fail of a **reward**. He will have praise and honour in that day, and eternal

recompense after it. Fidelity in the ministers of Christ will meet with a full and ample reward in a future life. Those who spread true and pure religion in all the branches of it, and whose work will abide in the great day, shall receive a reward. And, Lord, how great! how much exceeding their deserts!

**ILLUSTRATION** - Mr. Gilbert, a Plymouth Brethren, tells about a dream he had of the Judgment Seat of Christ. His works were piled up, and angels kept bringing them in and piling them up, up, up. He was so proud of his works. Then another angel came in and lit a fire to it. It was like a burning haystack -- it came down, down, down. Finally another angel came in with broom and dustpan and swept in a few precious stones. (AND ALL GOD'S PEOPLE SAY "WOE!")

**Build upon** (2026)(**epoikodomeo** from **epí** = upon, Vincent says it indicates the placing of one layer upon another + **oikodomeo** [from **oikos** = house + **domeo** = to build] = build a house) literally means to build upon something already built, "adding to the foundation of a building" (Friberg-Analytical Lexicon), "to build further" (TDNT), to erect a superstructure (an entity, concept, or complex based on a more fundamental one) which is the metaphorical use in 1Co 3:10, Ep 2:20). **Epoikodomeo** is used figuratively meaning to build up spiritually, to edify or to promote the growth of Christian character (Col 2:7, Jude 1:20).

**He will receive a reward** - Even as **the grace of God was given to Paul** to lay a **foundation**, that same grace is available to all who build on it with care (1 Cor 3:10+), and here the receipt of a reward is also all of grace. Grace from start to finish and for the age to come. Thank You Lord. The loss in view is that of rewards, not of salvation or one's soul. The nature of the **reward** itself is not specified, but considering that God is the Giver, it is guaranteed to be good and worth the work.

Jesus referred to the enduring effect of the fruit of our **work** in His address to His disciples declaring

"You did not choose Me but I chose you (JUST AS HE DID YOU AND I BELOVED - Ro 8:33; Eph 1:4ff.; Col 3:12; 1 Pet 2:4) and appointed you that (THEIR AND OUR PURPOSE IN THIS SHORT LIFE) you would go (present tense - continually) and bear fruit (present tense - continually) (THE WORK, cf our "APPOINTMENT" - Eph 2:10+; WHY BEAR FRUIT? Jn 15:8), and that your fruit would remain (present tense - continually), so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.(Jn 15:16). This can happen only as we stay in close relationship with Jesus (John 15:1-11). Only then will we have the fruit that remains, fruit that will pass God's "FIRE TEST!" Note the key is abiding in Jesus the Vine, filled with His energizing, enabling Spirit, for only then is our work supernatural and only then will it pass the fruit inspection test. No rotten fruit will be accepted by God, but all good fruit will receive a just recompense.

**Brian Bell** - There is a legend of a wealthy woman who, when she reached heaven, was shown a very plain mansion. She objected. "Well," she was told, "that is the house prepared for you." "Whose is that fine mansion across the way?" she asked. "It belongs to your gardener." "How is it that he has one so much better than mine?" The houses here are prepared from the materials that are sent up. We do not choose them, you do that by your earthly faithfulness. This may be a legend, but it bears a profound truth!

**Lenski** suggest the **wages** described "consist in higher degrees of glory and in the delightful eternal contemplation of the work these builders have wrought by the Lord's grace."

**WHAT IS THE REWARD?** Some examples: 1Th 2:19, 20; 2Ti4:7,8; Jas 1:12; 1Pe 5:4; Rev 22:12) Persecution is CERTAIN (2Ti 3:12) in the radical believer's lot on earth but we must wait until heaven for reward: Mt 5:11 Mk 9:41 Mt 10:42, Heb 11:26 Mt 5:46 Lu 6:35 In the NT God offers SALVATION to the lost and REWARDS for the faithful service of the saved. Salvation is invariably a free gift (Jn 4:10; Ro 6:23; Ep 2:8,9) whereas rewards are "earned" by good (agathos 2Ti 3:17, Heb 13:21) works (only those "works" from the Vine Jn 15:5, cp the motive 1Co 4:5) (Mt 10:42; Lu 19:17; 1Co 9:24,25; 2Ti 4:7 8; Rev 2:10; 22:12). A further distinction is that salvation is a present (and of course future) possession (Lu 7:50; Jn 3:36; 5:24; 6:47), whereas rewards are generally spoken of as a future attainment, probably awarded at the bema seat of Christ or possibly associated with the rapture -- the timing is not absolutely clear from Scripture as far as I can discern (2Co 5:10, 2Ti 4:8; Rev 22:12).

**Reward** (wage) (3408)(**misthos**) literally refers to pay which is due for labor performed or dues paid for work. **Misthos** is used in two general senses in the NT, either to refer to wages or to reward, recognition or recompense. In this latter figurative usage, **misthos** refers to rewards which God bestows for the moral quality of an action, such rewards most often to be bestowed in eternity future. 28v in NT - Matt. 5:12; Matt. 5:46; Matt. 6:1; Matt. 6:2; Matt. 6:5; Matt. 6:16; Matt. 10:41; Matt. 10:42; Matt. 20:8; Mk. 9:41; Lk. 6:23; Lk. 6:35; Lk. 10:7; Jn. 4:36; Acts 1:18; Rom. 4:4; 1 Co. 3:8; 1 Co. 3:14; 1 Co. 9:17; 1 Co. 9:18; 1 Tim. 5:18; Jas. 5:4; 2 Pet. 2:13; 2 Pet. 2:15; 2 Jn. 1:8; Jude 1:11; Rev. 11:18; Rev. 22:12

If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. — 1 Corinthians 3:14

Today's Scripture : 1 Corinthians 3:9-15

A co-worker told me about taking a walk near his home and noticing this imprint on a number of sidewalk slabs: "A. Anderson, 1903." That name and the date were indelibly inscribed in the concrete, indicating the year it had been poured and identifying the man who did the work.

If that contractor were still living, he could certainly be proud of his work. The concrete had not cracked in all those years. It had stood the test of time and had brought no shame to A. Anderson, the man whose reputation was attached to the workmanship.

As Christians, everything we do bears our name. Someday, depending on whether our works pass or fail the test, we will either receive praise and reward (1 Cor. 3:14) or experience regret and loss (v.15). How can we make certain that our service for Christ is the kind that endures? The way to be sure we are building for eternity is to build on the foundation of Christ (v.11) and to "do all things through Christ who strengthens [us]" (Phil. 4:13).

As you serve the Lord today, remember this important fact: The work that is worthy of reward is the work that endures. By: Richard DeHaan (Reprinted by permission from [Our Daily Bread Ministries](#). Please do not repost the full devotional without their permission.)

Press on in your service for Jesus,  
Spurred on by your love for the Lord;  
He promised that if you are faithful,  
One day you'll receive your reward.  
—Fasick

Salvation depends on what Christ did for us; rewards depend on what we do for Him.

**1 Corinthians 3:15 If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.**

Amplified - But if any person's work is burned up [under the test], he will suffer the loss [of it all, losing his reward], though he himself will be saved, but only as [one who has passed] through fire.

Wuest - Assuming that the work of anyone will be burned up, he will incur a loss, but he himself shall be saved, but being saved thus, it will be as escaping destruction in the midst of the fire which burns up his works. ([Erdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

NET 1 Corinthians 3:15 If someone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

NLT 1 Corinthians 3:15 But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames.

ESV 1 Corinthians 3:15 If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

NIV 1 Corinthians 3:15 If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

GNT 1 Corinthians 3:15 ε τινος τ ργον κατακα σεται, ζημιωθ σεται, α τ ς δ σωθ σεται, ο τω ς δ ς δι πυρ ς.

KJV 1 Corinthians 3:15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

YLT 1 Corinthians 3:15 if of any the work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; and himself shall be saved, but so as through fire.

ASV 1 Corinthians 3:15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as through fire.

CSB 1 Corinthians 3:15 If anyone's work is burned up, it will be lost, but he will be saved; yet it will be like an escape through fire.

NKJ 1 Corinthians 3:15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.



NRS 1 Corinthians 3:15 If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

NAB 1 Corinthians 3:15 But if someone's work is burned up, that one will suffer loss; the person will be saved, but only as through fire.

NJB 1 Corinthians 3:15 the one whose work is burnt down will suffer the loss of it, though he himself will be saved; he will be saved as someone might expect to be saved from a fire.

GWN 1 Corinthians 3:15 If his work is burned up, he will suffer the loss. However, he will be saved, though it will be like going through a fire.

BBE 1 Corinthians 3:15 If the fire puts an end to any man's work, it will be his loss: but he will get salvation himself, though as by fire.

- **If any man's work:** 1Co 3:12,13 Rev 3:18
- **he will:** Ac 27:21,44 2Jn 1:8
- **yet:** Am 4:11 Zec 3:2 1Pe 4:18 Jude 1:23
- 1 Corinthians 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Related Passages:

## FAILURE TO PASS THE DIVINE FIRE TEST

**If** - The **IF** here is a **first class condition** which introduces a statement that is presumed to be true from the author's perspective (compare similar first class "IF's" - 1 Cor 3:12, 14, 15, 17, 18).

**Any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss - Burned up** ([katakaio](#)) means burned up completely, totally consumed (like the magic books in Acts 19:19+), the antithesis of good (God) works which remain. The **loss** in view is that of rewards, not of salvation or one's soul (as the context shows). Don't read this too fast -- think of a lifetime of work in ministry and it all goes up in smoke because it did not pass God's fire test!

**Jack Arnold** - If it is burns up, he will **suffer loss**; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. This pictures the unwise minister who builds upon the foundation with poor material (wood, hay, straw). This is the saved minister who teaches twisted or weak doctrine, who gives a perverted Christian world and life view, who goes after every new Christian fad and who fails to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry. These works will not stand the test of judgment. The minister will suffer loss, not of salvation but of reward. Notice carefully it is the minister's works that are burned up not the man. This is not a Protestant [purgatory](#). This unwise minister will receive little reward, if any, for lousy workmanship in building the temple (the Church) upon the foundation of Christ. This man will be saved; yet he shall escape through fire as one fleeing from a burning building. He will escape only with his life and all else will be lost. What a stern thought for all who are in the ministry. All works will be examined and evaluated on that judgment day and the unfaithful minister will lose reward and yet be saved by the skin of his teeth. There are going to be many embarrassed preachers on judgment day, but the faithful will be heaped up with rewards and will be basking in the glory of Christ This is strong motivation for being a faithful minister and a faithful saint.

**Matthew Henry** - In that day, There are others whose works shall be burnt, whose corrupt opinions and doctrines, or vain inventions and usages in the worship of God, shall be discovered, disowned, and rejected, in that day-shall be first manifested to be corrupt, and then disapproved of God and rejected. **The great day will pluck off all disguises, and make things appear as they are:** He whose work shall be burnt will suffer loss. If he have built upon the right foundation wood and hay and stubble, he will suffer loss. His weakness and corruption will be the lessening of his glory (**ED: HENRY APPARENTLY SEES PART OF THE "REWARD" AS DEGREES OF GLORY WHICH IS POSSIBLE**), though he may in the general have been an honest and an upright Christian. This part of his work will be lost, turning no way to his advantage, though he himself may be saved. Those who hold the foundation of Christianity, though they build hay, wood, and stubble, upon it, may be saved...for nothing will damn men but wickedness. He shall be saved, yet so as by fire, saved out of the fire. He himself shall be snatched out of that flame which will consume his work.

**Burned up** ([2618](#)) ([katakaio](#) from **kata** = intensifies meaning of verb + **kaio** = to burn) means to burn up, to consume or destroy by fire. The word denotes a violent consuming heat. 11 NT uses - Matt. 3:12; Matt. 13:30; Matt. 13:40; Lk. 3:17; Acts 19:19; 1 Co. 3:15; Heb. 13:11; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 8:7; Rev. 17:16; Rev. 18:8

**Suffer loss** (forfeit) ([2210](#)) ([zemioo](#) from [zemia](#)) means to affect with damage or to do damage to, to suffer injury, to suffer loss, to sustain damage, to forfeit or to fine. It means to experience the loss of something, with

implication of undergoing hardship or suffering. **Zemioo** was a business term meaning to "punish by exacting a forfeit" (Vincent). 6x in NT - Matt. 16:26; Mk. 8:36; Lk. 9:25; 1 Co. 3:15; 2 Co. 7:9; Phil. 3:8

**But he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire** - Salvation is secure, but rewards are not guaranteed.

**MacArthur** writes that "It is easy to fool ourselves into thinking that anything we do in the Lord's name is in His service, just as long as we are sincere, hardworking, and well meaning. But what looks to us like gold may turn out to be straw, because we have not judged our materials by the standards of God's Word—pure motives, holy conduct, and selfless service."

**Brian Bell** - Picture a man escaping a burning building, he has his life...but no possessions.

**Guzik** - The fire does not purify the worker, it tests their workmanship. Roman Catholics use this passage to teach purgatory, the idea that when we die, we go to a place where we are purified by fire before we go to heaven. The idea of [purgatory](#) has nothing to do with this passage, and nothing to do with any other passage in the Bible. Purgatory is strictly a human invention, and denies the finished work of Jesus for the believer. This passage has first application to Christian leaders, because this is Paul's topic in context, but the application extends to all servants of God.

**Henry Morris** - All who have made Christ the foundation of their lives are saved, and they will be saved even though their works are burned up at the judgment seat. This judgment, therefore, is of believers only, and will determine only rewards or loss of rewards. Judgment will "begin at the house of God," when every man shall have "praise of God" (1 Peter 4:17 and 1 Corinthians 4:5).

**Saved** (4982)([sozo](#)) has the basic meaning of rescuing one from great peril. Additional nuances include to protect, keep alive, preserve life, deliver, heal, be made whole. Sozo in Corinthians 1 Co. 1:18; 1 Co. 1:21; 1 Co. 3:15; 1 Co. 5:5; 1 Co. 7:16; 1 Co. 9:22; 1 Co. 10:33; 1 Co. 15:2; 2 Co. 2:15

**Fire** (4442)([pur](#)) refers to literal fire (Mt 13:40; 17:15; Mk 9:22; Lk 17:29; Acts 2:3; Acts 7:30; Acts 28:5; 1 Cor 3:15; Jas 5:3; Heb 12:18; 2 Pet 3:7; Rev 1:14; 4:5; 8:7; 17:16; 19:20).

**Stedman** warns that "effort put out to impress people of what the church is like and its power and impressiveness in the eyes of the world is wasted effort -- wood, hay and stubble that comes to nothing in the measurements of God." ([1 Corinthians 3:16-23 How To Destroy A Church](#))

**ILLUSTRATION** - The story is told of a man who was a great lover of the arts, who travelled widely and brought back to his home masterpieces of all types. His beautiful mansion, overlooking a lovely lake, was filled with these art treasures. One night he awakened, coughing and choking with heavy smoke. He crawled out of bed and over to an open window. As he looked out, both wings of the house roared into flames. Just then a fireman looked up at him leaning out of the window and cried: "Jump for your life, man; the roof is about to cave in!" Scarcely had he jumped into the firemen's net below when that part of the house in which he had just been crashed down behind him. He looked back to see the efforts of a lifetime and the expenditure of a fortune go up in smoke, a total loss. He was saved, but so as through the flames. This is the picture that Paul gives us, and it is a sad warning that many a Christian will SUFFER loss.

**J Vernon McGee** - Friend, what are you building today? What kind of material are you using? If you are building with gold, it may not be very impressive now. If you are building an old haystack, it will really stand out on the horizon, but it will go up in smoke. I like to put it like this: there are going to be some people in heaven who will be there because their foundation is Christ but who will smell as if they had been bought at a fire sale! Everything they ever did will have gone up in smoke. They will not receive a reward for their works.

#### Related Resources:

- [1 Corinthians 3 Will Believers Be Judged When Christ Returns?](#) - Question/Answer from John MacArthur
- [1 Corinthians 3:10-4:5, 2 Cor 5:10, Ro 14:10-12 What is the Purpose of the Judgment Seat of Christ?](#) - Question/Answer from John MacArthur
- [1 Corinthians 3:14 Should Christians Be Motivated By Eternal Rewards?](#) - Question/Answer from John MacArthur

#### 1 Corinthians 3:16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

Amplified - Do you not discern and understand that you [the whole church at Corinth] are God's temple (His sanctuary), and that God's Spirit has His permanent dwelling in you [to be at home in you, collectively as a church and also individually]?

Wuest - Do you not all know that all of you are God's inner sanctuary and that the Spirit of God is making His home in you? ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

NET 1 Corinthians 3:16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

NLT 1 Corinthians 3:16 Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you?

ESV 1 Corinthians 3:16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?

NIV 1 Corinthians 3:16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

GNT 1 Corinthians 3:16 ο κ ο δατε τι να ρ θεο στε κα τ πνε μα το θεο ο κε ν μ ν;

KJV 1 Corinthians 3:16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

YLT 1 Corinthians 3:16 have ye not known that ye are a sanctuary of God, and the Spirit of God doth dwell in you?

ASV 1 Corinthians 3:16 Know ye not that ye are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

CSB 1 Corinthians 3:16 Don't you yourselves know that you are God's sanctuary and that the Spirit of God lives in you?

NKJ 1 Corinthians 3:16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

NRS 1 Corinthians 3:16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?

NAB 1 Corinthians 3:16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

NJB 1 Corinthians 3:16 Do you not realise that you are a temple of God with the Spirit of God living in you?

GWN 1 Corinthians 3:16 Don't you know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

BBE 1 Corinthians 3:16 Do you not see that you are God's holy house, and that the Spirit of God has his place in you?

- **Do you not know:** 1Co 5:6 6:2,3,9,16,19 9:13,24 Ro 6:3 Jas 4:4
- **you are a temple of God:** 2Co 6:16 Eph 2:21,22 Heb 3:6 1Pe 2:5
- **the Spirit of God dwells in you:** Eze 36:27 Joh 14:17 Ro 8:11 2Ti 1:14 1Jn 4:12,15,16
- 1 Corinthians 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passages:

Acts 7:48+; "However, the **Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands** as the prophet says:

Acts 17:24+ "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth,**does not dwell in temples made with hands;**

Ephesians 2:19-22+ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in Whom the whole building, being fitted together, is **growing into a holy temple in the Lord**, 22; in whom you also are being built together **into a dwelling of God in the Spirit**

1 Peter 2:5+ you also, as living stones, are **being built up as a spiritual house** for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

### UNDERSTAND WHO YOU ARE CORPORATELY

This passage flows from the building metaphor in the preceding passages, now referring to the building of the Temple of God.

**Matthew Henry** - Verses 16-17. From other parts of the epistle, it appears that the false teachers among the Corinthians taught

unholy doctrines. Such teaching tended to corrupt, to pollute, and destroy the building, which should be kept pure and holy for God. Those who spread loose principles, which render the church of God unholy, bring destruction upon themselves. Christ by his Spirit dwells in all true believers. Christians are holy by profession, and should be pure and clean, both in heart and conversation. He is deceived who deems himself the temple of the Holy Ghost, yet is unconcerned about personal holiness, or the peace and purity of the church.

**Do you not know that you** (plural not singular) **are** (verb is in plural) **a temple (naos) of God** - **Do you not know** or "Don't you realize" is Paul's way of directing his readers attention to what follows and is essentially a rebuke, because these were truths that they SHOULD have known! Paul as their spiritual father is "scolding" them for not knowing that when they became believers, the Spirit entered their bodies individually and was present corporately when they came together to worship. The Spirit does not indwell a building per se, but each believer so that when they come together the Spirit dwells in the place of the meeting. As noted the pronoun, **you** and verb **are** (este) are both in the plural and therefore do not refer to the individual believer's bodies (as in 1Co 6:19,20+), but here refer to the local church which is viewed as a temple of God inhabited by the Spirit Who is in the believers in that temple. **Are** is present tense signifying that the believers were continually a **temple of God**.

**Do you not know** will be a repetitive theme in the remainder of this book - 1 Cor. 3:16; 5:6; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19; 9:13, 24. As **Kistemaker** says Paul "expects the Corinthians to answer positively to his questions, for they had received instruction from the apostles and apostolic associates. Therefore, by asking questions Paul refreshes the memory of the Corinthians and builds on the foundation that was laid in earlier days...Now he chides the Corinthians for their negligence and slothfulness in not using the knowledge they possess (1 Cor 1:5+; 1 Cor 8:1). The verb to **know** in Greek (**eido**) signifies inherent knowledge the believers ought to possess. They **know** that they are the temple of God. Yet Paul does not reveal how they came to develop this knowledge. He takes for granted that they are able to marshal this information."([NTC-1Cor](#))

**Glenn Spencer** - We are the present earthly dwelling place for God. This is one of the most astounding truths in the Word of God. Just as the Holy of Holies was the dwelling place of God in the Old Testament Temple, the body of each individual believer is the temple of God in this present dispensation. (Expository Pulpit Series – 1 Corinthians). (ED: Think of yourself as a "portable holy of holies," for everywhere you go you transport the Spirit (and of course the Trinity, the Father, Son and Spirit in fact indwell us - see Col 1:27b+, Jn 14:23 = "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word [NOTE "LOVE" IS AN ACTION, NOT JUST SO MUCH AN EMOTION - WE ACTUALLY "SAY" {SHOW} WE LOVE HIM BY OBEYING HIM! HAVE YOU EVER SAID "I LOVE YOU LORD" AND WERE IN UNCONFESSED SIN?]; and **My Father** will love him, and **We** [Father and Son] will come to him and make Our abode [Gk = **monē** = dwelling place] with him.").

**NET Note on you are a temple** - You are God's temple refers here to the church, since the pronoun you is plural in the Greek text. In 1 Cor 6:19+ the same imagery is used in a different context to refer to the **individual believer**.

**Kistemaker on you are a temple** - The wording in this clause is unique for two reasons: first, the expression **temple** is in the singular (see 1 Cor 6:19) and, second, in the Greek this noun is **NOT** preceded by a definite article. The Greek word for temple is **naos**, which refers to the actual temple and not to the temple complex (known in Greek as **hieron**). In his epistles, Paul nearly always writes **naos**, the word for the actual temple, to indicate that God caused the divine name to dwell there (1 Kings 8:16–20). For Paul and the Corinthians, the temple of God is the church, that is, the body of believers. "The Spirit of God lives within you." The church is holy because God's Spirit dwells in the hearts and lives of the believers. In 6:19 Paul indicates that the Holy Spirit lives in the physical bodies of the believers. But now he tells the Corinthians that the presence of the Spirit is within them and they are the temple of God. The Corinthians should know that they have received the gift of God's Spirit. Paul had already called attention to the fact that they had not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit of God (2:12). He teaches that Christians are controlled not by sinful human nature but by the Spirit of God, who is dwelling within them (Rom. 8:9). The behavior—strife, jealousy, immorality, and permissiveness—of the Christians in Corinth was reprehensible. By their conduct the Corinthians were desecrating God's temple and, as Paul writes in another epistle, were grieving the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30; compare 1 Thess. 5:19). ([NTC-1Cor](#))

**Bell** - the temple does not refer to the structure in which believers meet to worship. Rather, Christians themselves are the temple. We are God's temple why? - Because the Spirit of God dwells in us! (1 Cor.6:19) w there are 2 words in Greek for Temple: (**naos** & **hieron**) a) One means the Temple building itself. **hieron** b) **Naos** means the Sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, where the glory of God dwells (that is the word used here). (1) We are God's sanctuary, the place of His holy awesome presence! (2) You are not simply the structure in which He lives. You are the dwelling place of the Shekinah glory of God! : The Spirit of God dwells in you - not an influence of the Spirit; but the 3rd person of the Trinity Himself! 1. Christian, no matter how weak, feeble, poor, helpless, or frustrated you feel; or how inadequate, incapable, incompetent, or ineffective you feel,...The Spirit of God dwells in you! 2. Why does He dwell in us? That we might develop character, the fruit of the Spirit, good works, & the reproduction of the character of Jesus Christ. a) Which begs the question, "Why is it that so little of His life is produced in us & so much of ourselves still remains?" (Alan Redpath) The O.T. tabernacle had an outer court (where the public walked), the inner court (which was the place of service), & the Holy of Holies (the sanctuary of the presence of God). 4 a) We are not to live in the outer court (the world); we are not to live

"only" in the inner court (of the busy rush of Christian service); but in the Holiest of all (walking as holy men & women w/dignity, reverence, & worship!)

**Ray Stedman on you are a temple** - Now that is a great truth and one which the apostle will really underscore throughout this letter. This truth lies at the base of all that Christians do. Their bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, and when Christians, with the Spirit indwelling them, gather (as we are doing here this morning), the whole congregation becomes a great temple of the Holy Spirit, the center of the presence of God. The center of divine activity in this whole community is right here this morning because God the Spirit is present when his people are gathered together. ([1 Corinthians 3:16-23 How To Destroy A Church](#))

In John's Gospel Jesus uses the same word for **temple** ([naos](#)) declaring "Destroy this **temple** ([naos](#)), and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this **temple** ([naos](#)), and will You raise it up in three days?" 21 But He was speaking of the **temple** ([naos](#)) of His body." (Jn 2:19-21+) So Paul's thought would parallel with Jesus' description of Himself for even as His earthly body was a temple, so too His redeemed people are a temple indwelt by the Spirit and collectively are **a temple of God**.

**Jack Arnold** - The Bible speaks of three spiritual temples 1) the body of the individual Christian (1 Cor. 6:19-20); 2) the universal Church (Eph. 2:20-22) and 3) the local church collectively (1 Cor. 3:16). A temple is where the presence of God resides. These three temples are to be constantly built up spiritually by faithful ministers of God. Lest we miss the point, this verse is stating the local church houses the presence of God, not as a physical building but in the people collectively.

**Staton** - "We have done something terrible when we have talked about the church building as being the "house" of God or the "temple" of God. That would mean then that the building is more sacred than the people. But it is the people who are the "house" of God and are the "temple" of God. For it is not just what goes on inside a building, but what goes on inside a people, that is important" ([1 Corinthians](#)).

**Robertson on a temple of God** - Literally, a sanctuary ([naos](#), not [hieron](#), the sacred enclosure, but [the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place](#)) of God. The same picture of building as in 1 Cor 3:9+ ([oikodome](#)), only here the sanctuary itself. The outward temple is merely the symbol of God's presence, the Shechinah (the Glory). God makes His home in the hearts of His people or the church in any given place like Corinth. It is a terrible thing to tear down ruthlessly a church or temple of God like an earthquake that shatters a building in ruins.

**Cornerstone Bible Commentary** - Nearly all gods in the ancient world were enshrined in elaborate buildings, including the God of the Jews, who dwelt in the Most Holy Place. Paul's statement was a radically new paradigm that would not be easy for the Corinthians or any other ancient people to get their mind around.

**Believer's Study Bible** - Two different Greek words are translated "temple." Hieron refers to the entire temple complex. The naos is the Most Holy Place in which God uniquely dwelt in the O.T. tabernacle and temple. This verse speaks of the local church as the naos, the unique dwelling place of the Spirit of God. In 1 Cor. 6:19 Paul speaks of each individual believer as a **temple** of the Holy Spirit of God. Verse 17 urges caution in the use one makes of this temple. Dividing the local church (cf. v. 4) is the same as defilement of the sanctuary and calls forth the most serious response of judgment by God. As Paul is addressing a visible local congregation, the destruction threatened by God may be applied both to the discipline of genuine believers and to the eternal destruction of those in the church whose profession is insincere.

**Temple** (sanctuary) ([3485](#)) see [naos](#)

**And that the Spirit of God dwells** (present tense = continually dwells) **in you?** - The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ (Ro 8:9+ note that the clear implication is that believers are indwelt by the Trinity - cf Jn 14:23) and as such indwells each and every believer at the moment of their conversion (at [regeneration](#), when they are [born again](#)), not at the time of some supposed "[second blessing](#)." In this passage the pronoun **you** is plural which signifies that Paul is referring to the corporate body of believers, each of whom is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In other words **dwells in you** could be paraphrased **dwells in** your church, not the building per se, but in your assembled body of believers (this is a bit mysterious to me, but I think this is what God's Word teaches). **Dwells** means the Spirit of God makes His home in believers (corporately and individually).

**Henry Morris** - In light of the certainty of our eventual meeting with Christ at the judgment seat, it is vital to live in daily obedience to the guidance of the indwelling Holy Spirit. We must be especially respectful of our bodies and what we do with them, for He has made them individual temples to house His glory (1 Corinthians 6:19,20).

**Dwells** ([3611](#))([oikeo](#) from [oikos](#) = home) means to live, inhabit or dwell in a certain place as one's home. To inhabit a house. **Oikeo** is speaks of dwelling often with a figurative sense - sin (Ro 7:17), Spirit (1Cor 3:16), marriage partners (1Cor 7:12).

**ILLUSTRATION** of Body as Temple of Spirit (applied more to each individual believer than the corporate body, but still apropos) - A

few weeks ago I was in Chattanooga, Tennessee, at the Fellowship of Christian Airline Personnel Conference and a number of the pilots and flight attendants were sharing with us some of their experiences as Christian personnel in the airlines. One very beautiful stewardess told that one day she was serving coffee on a plane that had just taken off. As she came down the aisle, she stopped beside a man who looked up at her and got her attention. He then opened his hand and showed her an explicitly sexual object and she immediately got the implication. It shook her, and she did not know what to do for a moment. She turned, and went to the back of the plane to recover herself, and she prayed and asked God to show her what to do because she had to go up to that man again. She went back and knelt beside his seat and she looked him right in the eye and said, "Sir, I saw what you showed me and I understand what you mean, but there is something you need to know. I am a Christian, and my body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and God says he is going to destroy anyone who damages his temple." The man began to stammer out an apology, and she said, "I understand. Don't say any more. I just want you to know that." Later she gave grateful thanks that the Lord had laid that verse on her heart because it served to deliver her from both the embarrassment and the threat of that situation. (Ray Stedman - [1 Corinthians 3:16-23 How To Destroy A Church](#))

#### Related Resources:

- [What is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit? | GotQuestions.org](#) - nice summary at bottom of article concerning 10 results of the indwelling of the Spirit
- [What does it mean that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit? | GotQuestions.org](#)- **Excerpt:**  
But by choosing the word "**temple**" to describe the Spirit's dwelling, He conveys the idea that our bodies are the shrine, or the sacred place, in which the Spirit not only lives, but is worshiped, revered, and honored. Therefore, how we behave, think and speak, and what we let into the temple through our eyes and ears becomes critically important as well, for every thought, word and deed is in His view. Even though He will never leave us, it is entirely possible to grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4: 30). I
- [What does it mean that Christ is in us? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [How should we live our lives in light of our identity in Christ?](#)
- [What was the role of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament? | GotQuestions.org](#)

**1 Corinthians 3:17 If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.**

Amplified If anyone does hurt to God's temple or corrupts it with false doctrines **EDITORIAL COMMENT** - I LIKE THE AMPLIFIED AND IT CAN GIVE GOOD INSIGHTS BUT **BEWARE** OF IT AND ANY VERSION WHEN THEY BECOME INTERPRETIVE - WHILE **FALSE DOCTRINE** CLEARLY **CORRUPTS**, THAT PROBLEM IS NOT SPECIFICALLY MENTIONED BY PAUL IN THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT - SEE [NOTE BELOW](#)] or destroys it, God will do hurt to him and bring him to the corruption of death and destroy him. For the temple of God is holy (sacred to Him) and that [temple] you the believing church and its individual believers] are.

Wuest - If, as is the case, anyone morally corrupts the inner sanctuary of God, this person God will bring to the place of ruin, for the inner sanctuary of God is holy, of which holy character you are. ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

NET 1 Corinthians 3:17 If someone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, which is what you are.

NLT 1 Corinthians 3:17 God will destroy anyone who destroys this temple. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

ESV 1 Corinthians 3:17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

NIV 1 Corinthians 3:17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

GNT 1 Corinthians 3:17 ε τις τ ν να ν το θεο φθερει, φθερε το τον θεος· γ ρ νας το θεο γις στιν, ο τις στε μες.

KJV 1 Corinthians 3:17 If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

YLT 1 Corinthians 3:17 if any one the sanctuary of God doth waste, him shall God waste; for the sanctuary of

God is holy, the which ye are.

ASV 1 Corinthians 3:17 If any man destroyeth the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, and such are ye.

CSB 1 Corinthians 3:17 If anyone destroys God's sanctuary, God will destroy him; for God's sanctuary is holy, and that is what you are.

NKJ 1 Corinthians 3:17 If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.

NRS 1 Corinthians 3:17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

NAB 1 Corinthians 3:17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for the temple of God, which you are, is holy.

NJB 1 Corinthians 3:17 If anybody should destroy the temple of God, God will destroy that person, because God's temple is holy; and you are that temple.

GWN 1 Corinthians 3:17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him because God's temple is holy. You are that holy temple!

BBE 1 Corinthians 3:17 If anyone makes the house of God unclean, God will put an end to him; for the house of God is holy, and you are his house.

- **If any man destroys the temple of God:** 1Co 6:18-20 Lev 15:31 20:3 Nu 19:20 Ps 74:3 79:1 Eze 5:11 7:22 Eze 23:38,39 Zep 3:4
- **God will destroy him,** Ge 28:17 Ex 3:5 1Ch 29:3 Ps 93:5 99:9 Isa 64:11 Eze 43:12
- 1 Corinthians 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passage:

2Co 6:14-18 Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? 16 Or what agreement has **the temple of God with idols?** For **we are the temple of the living God** just as God said, **"I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.** 17 "Therefore, **COME OUT** ([aorist imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) FROM THEIR MIDST AND **BE SEPARATE** ([aorist imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#))," says the Lord. **"AND DO NOT TOUCH** ([present imperative with a negative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#) = STOP TOUCHING WHAT IS UNCLEAN LIKE YOU ARE DOING!) WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you. 18 "And **I will be a father to you,** And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty.

Exodus 3:5+ Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

1 Corinthians 11:27+ Therefore **whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner,** shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. 28 But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 **For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep** (DIE).

## HOW TO DESTROY A CHURCH

**IF** is a first class conditional statement which means that what follows is accepted as true (and thus for IF one could substitute "since" or "because"). The future indicative, indicates that this in a sense almost a "prophecy," for it will be fulfilled. Destruction of the destroyer is certain!

**Uteley** add that this "assumes the reality of unspiritual believers (leaders or the factions) damaging the work of the church. Here the emphasis is on the actions of the individual believer. This does not affect their salvation (v. 15) but their longevity and reward. The supreme tragedy of believers living selfish, fruitless lives is the potential of the resources at their disposal. They know the gospel,

they have the Spirit, yet they and the church are damaged by their actions. This is where Luke 12:48 speaks loudest! Is it speaking to you?"

**Jack Arnold** - there are some so-called ministers who seek to destroy God's temple, the church. Apparently there were some who were trying to do this at Corinth. Those ministers who wanted to follow Greek philosophy were trying to destroy that local church. There were also some Judaizers in that assembly who were intent on destroying that body of believers through the false doctrine of salvation by good works. Paul taught that belief in Jesus Christ alone is sufficient for salvation and any other formula is another gospel, and salvation by works is building rotten material on the solid foundation of Christ. The modern day counterpart to these false builders would be the liberal ministers in our churches who deny the deity of Christ, reject an inspired Bible, see Christ's death as that of a martyr or merely an example of love, accept no literal hell and a hundred other heretical teachings. Another modern counterpart would be the so-called evangelicals who have watered down the gospel to make it acceptable to people so as to gain numbers, success, power and money; the result is no real gospel.

**If any man destroys ([phtheiro](#) in present tense) the temple ([naos](#)) of God, (now he gives a "prophetic promise" so to speak) **God will destroy ([phtheiro](#)) him** - Many commentaries suggest things like false doctrine, false teachers, Jewish legalism, "moral corruption (see Wuest's paraphrase above)," (and we know there was some of that defilement but that comes later in the letter in chapters 5-6), etc, and of course each of those things can destroy a church. However what has Paul mentioned specifically as that which would be destructive to the church in Corinth? Here is a prime example of the rule that **context is king** in interpretation and the corollary axiom - Read the text in context before you read the comments in the commentaries! In context, Paul is speaking of the church and the deadly effect of internal strife and division on the Body (1 Cor 1:11+, 1 Cor 3:3+) (See [Ralph Earle](#) below). Division between saints can easily progress to division of ([split of](#)) a Church (and if you have been a Christian a few decades, you have likely witnessed this tragic scenario of an established church [splitting](#)). To be sure fleshly saints (1 Cor 3:1-2, [3+](#)) are the primary instruments by which a church is divided, the ultimate author of that division is Satan, whose very name **devil** is the Greek word [diabolos](#), which in turn is from **dia** (through or between) and **ballo** (throw). This etymology of [diabolos](#) gives us a perfect word picture of Satan's cunning as he wages ceaseless attacks seeking to devour and divide God's spiritual entities, be they a Christian church, a Christian marriage, a Christian ministry, etc.**

**THOUGHT** - Let's be brutally honest. We all have had times when we have strongly disagreed with something in the politics of a church we were attending. Now do not misunderstand, I am not referring to teaching which is questionable or even false, because we are called to disagree with such teaching. I am speaking of opinions (color of the rug in the sanctuary, who should do the most preaching, etc, etc). So Paul's solemn warning applies to every man or woman who would dare to incite division in the church, whether by gossip, innuendo, accusations, etc. Paul's strong warning to be a cause to pause for all of us! If it becomes intolerable and you cannot hold your tongue, you should seek godly counsel with the elders or pastor and if you are still unresolved in your heart, it may be time to move on to another church. As sad as that would be, it would be better to move on than to destroy the church and in turn be destroyed!

**Deffinbaugh:** Don't Tamper with the Temple --A person can "defile the temple of God" by doing the things for which Paul rebukes the Corinthians. One can defile the temple by dividing it up into little groups and factions. One can defile the temple by forsaking the simplicity of the gospel and seeking wisdom elsewhere. He can defile the temple of God by sexual immorality (chapter 5) or by taking a brother to the law court (chapter 6). God's temple can be defiled by divorce (chapter 7) or by causing a weaker brother to sin through the insensitive use of your rights as a Christian (chapters 8-10). One can defile the temple of God by misconduct at the Lord's Supper and the meeting of the church (chapters 11-14). One can also defile the temple by false teaching (chapter 15).

**Ralph Earle** has a reminder which helps understand the contextual meaning of this passage - It must be remembered that this passage is a part of Paul's discussion of the problem of division in the church at Corinth. He devotes the first four chapters of the Epistle to this subject. What he means here, then, is that those who are dividing the church are destroying it. This is because the church of Jesus Christ is a living organism, not just an organization. You can divide a pie into 6 pieces without destroying it; you are just preparing to serve it. This is because a pie is an organization. But if you divide a dog in two, you have destroyed him, because he is an organism. The Corinthian church was being divided into four cliques or parties (1 Cor 1:12+). Thus it was in danger of being destroyed. (Word Meanings in the New Testament)

**THOUGHT** (Similar to above thought but worth repeating) - **This passage sounds a solemn warning against those who would do anything to bring about a church quarrel, leading to a church split. In God's sight they have murdered a living organism.** The time to take care of problems is in the earliest stage, when they are small. At first in a personal quarrel only two people are involved, and that is all the pastor has to deal with. But if he ignores the problem and lets the quarrel continue, others get involved, and a church fuss is in the making. The problem is much more difficult to handle, because relatives and close friends have formed strong feelings about the situation. The pastor will have to straighten out two groups of people. We



could illustrate it this way. When a lion is a little cub, a man might play around with it freely. But when the lion is a year or two old, it isn't as safe to handle! Problems are like that; they get out of hand. And the pastor who tries to handle a church split is likely to get hurt in the process. (Earle)

**D A Carson** is similar to **Ralph Earle** writing that "1 Corinthians 3, is part of one sustained argument that runs from 1 Cor 1:10 to 1 Cor 4:21 (cf esp 1 Cor 4:6+). Primarily, Paul addresses the deep divisiveness, the wretched factionalism, that plagues the church at Corinth." ([The Cross and Christian Ministry - Lessons in Leadership from 1 Corinthians](#)).

**Jack Arnold** - One cannot set out to destroy the church of God without serious repercussions. To destroy God's holy temple, the Church, is to invite God's eternal destruction. At the judgment day, the false teachers will fall under the eternal judgment of almighty God and face His wrath for all eternity. God's judgment will show the false builder what he really is, a Christ-rejecting, God-hating apostate and heretic who is lost forever and will be damned forever. An unwise builder may have a little reward because he is a true Christian, but a false builder will not have any reward because he is not saved. He will face only the judgment of a holy, wrathful God. Now, Christian, can you see how serious one should take the ministry? To be a minister of God is a high and holy calling and an awesome responsibility. If you really desire to be in the fulltime ministry, then sit down and count the cost, for with this high calling comes great responsibility and accountability.

Regarding the phrase **God will destroy him**, **Henry Morris** (Defender's Study Bible) feels "This destruction must be physical death, not spiritual, for the apostle has just assured us that all in whom the Spirit dwells are eternally saved (1 Corinthians 3:15; 5:5)."

**Stedman** on **God will destroy him** sees this "destruction" as related to 1 Cor 3:15+ writing "I tried to point out then that what happens is: We come to an awareness that all the effort we have been putting out to impress people with our godliness, our piety, our abilities, etc., come to nothing. They are a waste of time."

**Lenski**: Paul does not say how he conceives this destroying. We shall not go far wrong when we say that, if the Corinthians themselves are God's sanctuary because of the indwelling of the Spirit, he destroys this sanctuary, be he teacher or layman, who by lies and deceptions drives the Spirit out of the hearts of the Corinthians and fills them with the spirit of the world.

Commentators like **MacArthur** think that these are not believers but unbelievers - The third group of workmen obviously is made up of unbelievers, because God will never destroy those He has redeemed and given eternal life. It is composed of evil, unsaved people who attack God's people and God's work.

**Zodhiates** agrees with **MacArthur** - Let us take the first statement: "If anyone constantly corrupts the temple, God will destroy him—such a one." This person has to be an unbeliever. No believer can constantly seek to tear down Christ or His church, both being the temple of God, or even a believer in whose heart God dwells. Constantly to erode that which is holy—since [naos](#), "temple," is practically synonymous with holiness, is to sin; and he who constantly sins cannot be of God....Anyone, therefore, who constantly seeks to destroy God's temple, Christ, His church universal or local, His believers, even anyone of them, will be destroyed by God. The verb phthereí, "shall destroy," is in the future tense. The unregenerate sinner mistakes God's longsuffering for a non-punitive attitude toward him, but He will mete out a fitting punishment in the end. The same word phtheírō, "destroy," used in the first declaration about the unbeliever's attack on the temple of God, is also used of God's retribution or punishment visited on the unbeliever. This is to show that the justice of God demands retribution or punishment commensurate with the sin committed. The unbeliever sought to destroy in his unbelief; therefore God will destroy him. Observe that God's punishment is not spoken of as testing this man's work, as in verses 13-16 where Paul speaks about the believer's work of faith as a superstructure that is tested by fire, but as being visited on the person himself. The believers work will be tested, tried, and what is of no permanent value will be burned, but the believer himself will be saved. In verse 17 it is a different story: "Him [this one, *toúton* in Gr.] God will destroy." Just what this destruction (*phthorâ*) is, we are not specifically told in this context.

**Gene Getz** on **God will destroy him** - Later in this same letter, Paul stated that God had judged some of the Corinthians because they had deliberately violated God's will in terms of taking the Lord's Supper: This is why many are sick and ill among you, and many have fallen asleep. (1Co 11:30) These are indeed exceptions. However, it does reveal that God still disciplines His children when they sin persistently, deliberately, openly, and unabashedly (from Life Essential).... (IN "MEN OF CHARACTER" GETZ WRITES) I know of times when God has severely judged Christians who have flagrantly and deliberately destroyed unity in the church because of their own selfish and carnal motives. Though this may not involve death, it has been serious and painful judgment. In these cases, the sin has been so obvious that no one can misinterpret what has happened. In conclusion, we must remind ourselves that even the Bible records very few times when God breaks through with this kind of judgment. But when He does, it falls on people who have willfully disobeyed God in the full light of His revealed will and power....What was Paul saying? There can be no other meaning. He warned that any Christian leader who deliberately destroys, divides, and dismantles God's unique workmanship—His body of believers—is in danger of being destroyed by God Himself. This is what happened to the sons of Eli. God is warning us through Paul that it can happen to any spiritual leader who takes advantage of God's people. The Lord is particularly grieved when we destroy love and unity, the very things Jesus prayed for as He went toward the cross to die for the sins of the world in order to

give birth to His most prized possession—the church of Jesus Christ.

**John Piper on God will destroy him** - This is a dreadful thing, and it is not hypothetical. It happens all the time in one place or another. For example it happened repeatedly in New England 150 years ago. Churches that were once evangelical with Christ as the foundation got a Unitarian pastor. At first he did not declare himself openly, but began to build a structure which little by little changed the edifice. And within a matter of years you could look down and realize that the structure was now so out of line with Christ that it no longer rested on the foundation. You see, there are two ways to remove a foundation and destroy a church. One is to attack the foundation directly and break it up. The other is to slowly and subtly reshape the edifice so that its contours don't rest on the foundation anymore. Paul says, If a teacher does that to a church, he will pay with his eternal life: "If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him." (Compare Acts 20:26–27, "I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.") ([Let Christ Be all in this Building](#))

**Ryrie** is not quite so blunt commenting that "If any man contributes to the collapse of a local church (whether a believer or a professing believer) he will be severely disciplined by God.

**Adrian Dieleman** - Think, for a moment, of the Old Testament tabernacle. The tabernacle and its furnishings were pronounced holy by God, set apart. They were not to be touched by mere humans. And the priests could touch them only after they were cleansed, washed, and dressed in white. Remember the death of Uzzah? King David was bringing the Ark to Jerusalem on a new cart pulled by oxen. Uzzah took hold of the Ark to steady it when the oxen stumbled. Scripture says, (2Sam 6:7) The Lord's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the ark of God. Uzzah touched a holy thing, something set apart by God, something he had no right to touch....The church is holy. She belongs to God. She is His dwelling place, indwelt by the Spirit, the body of Christ. So God does not tolerate her destruction. Instead, by God's grace and power, we are to build her up. How do we do that? We can encourage instead of criticize. We can live at peace instead of fights and quarrels. We can walk and live by the Spirit instead of falling from one sin into another. We can keep faith with each other instead of breaking our promises. We can study the Word instead of following error and heresy. God does not tolerate the destruction of His holy temple. He wants her built up. ([1 Corinthians 3:16-17 "Wounding the Body"](#))

**Robertson on God will destroy him** - The condition is the first class and is assumed to be true. Then the punishment is certain and equally effective. The church-wrecker God will wreck. What does Paul mean by "will destroy"?...There is warning enough here to make every pastor pause before he tears a church to pieces in order to vindicate himself.

**Destroys** (5351) ([phtheiro](#) from **phthio** or **phthino** = waste, decay, wither, pine away) means to cause harm to in a physical manner or in outward circumstances. To shrivel, to wither, to spoil. Think of something rotting in your vegetable bin in the refrigerator because you forgot it was there. Or a potato in the back of a cupboard, which begins to give off such an offensive odor that you begin to hunt desperately for the source (That has happened to me twice in past few years and the smell is very off-putting!) It means to ruin or destroy something with the implication of causing something to be corrupt and cease to exist. To destroy by corrupting. To pine or waste away. To corrupt in the sense of degeneration. Classic Greek used **phtheiro** to describe buildings which crumbled with age. 8x in NT - 1 Co. 3:17; 1 Co. 15:33; 2 Co. 7:2; 2 Co. 11:3; Eph. 4:22; 2 Pet. 2:12; Jude 1:10; Rev. 19:2

**Utley** - The term **phtheiro** (destroy) has several uses in the NT. (1) spoil or corrupt physically (rotting fruit or decaying meat, even metaphorically of spoiling financially) (2) spoil or corrupt morally (breaking the rules of an athletic contest or seducing someone sexually) (3) destroy - physically spiritually eternally. Only the immediate context can determine its meaning. This term in context is referring to saved, but immature, believers who are causing a factious spirit to develop in the church at Corinth. It is hard to define what "destroy" means in this context (cf. Matt. 18:6; Luke 17:1–2; Rom. 14:15; 1 Cor. 5:5; 8:11; 1 Tim. 1:20). While I am on this subject, I personally do not believe this term (and related terms) can legitimately be used to prove the physical annihilation of lost persons but rather their conscious, eternal separation from God (hell). It is even possible that what Paul is referring to here relates to 1 Cor. 5:5 and 1 Tim. 1:20, where the church disciplines one out of their fellowship (but always with the hope and prayer of restoration following repentance).

**Temple** (sanctuary) (3485) ([naos](#)) in the Greek culture denoted the "abode of the gods" and was used to refer to a literal structure or building associated with, dedicated to and set apart to be a dwelling place for a deity, either pagan gods (Acts 17:24) or the true God (Mt 23:16). **Naos** describes the place where a deity was worshipped (cp Zacharias ministering to God in Lk 1:9). Figuratively a believer's body = 1Co 3:16, 17 6:19 2Co 6:16 Ep 2:21. Naos in Corinthians - 1 Co. 3:16; 1 Co. 3:17; 1 Co. 6:19; 2 Co. 6:16

**Naos** referred to the temple proper, including the inner sanctuary, composed of the outer room, the **Holy of Holies** and the innermost **Holy Place**. When our Lord taught in the temple, He taught in the **hieron**, in one of

the temple porches. He expelled the money-changers from the **hieron**, the court of the Gentiles. When the veil of the temple was rent at the time of the death of our Lord (Mt 27:52), it was the veil of the **naos**, the curtain separating the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. When Zacharias entered the temple to burn incense (Lk 1:9), he entered the **naos**, the Holy Place where the altar of incense stood while the multitude were in prayer outside he people were "without," in the **hieron** (Lk 1:10).

Jesus used **naos** in a figurative to refer to His body as a temple (Jn 2:19, 20, 21). Paul extends this meaning to the individual believer's body as the dwelling place or inner sanctuary of the Holy Spirit (1Co 6:19), the inner sanctuary of the Holy Spirit.

**Hieron** (2413) means holy, hallowed, consecrated and is derived from **hieros** [2413] which is an adjective meaning sacred, consecrated or belonging to or connected with the gods. The word Hieros or Hieron is distinct from Naos because the former words refer to the complex which is set apart and dedicated to the worship and service of Yahweh. In other words **hieron** designates the entire sacred enclosure, with its porticos, courts, and other subordinate buildings. Note that **Hieron** is closely related to **hieros** (2413) which is the word the NAS translates "Temple."

**For** ([gar](#)) - term of explanation. Always begs question "What is being explained?"

**The temple (naos) of God is holy (hagios), and that is what you are** (present tense = continually are) - Paul had used [hagios](#) earlier in 1 Cor 1:2+ describing the Corinthians as **saints by calling** (set apart from the world, the profane and unto God). So here Paul explains his warning in the previous clause by emphasizing one would not want to destroy that which is **holy**, set apart and to be revered. A **holy** Temple deserves **holy** behavior, not destructive, divisive behavior. This [Bride, the church](#), is jealously (in a fiercely protective, possessive way) watched over by the [Bridegroom, Christ Jesus](#) (cf 2 Cor 11:2 = Paul say "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy"). Recall that in the OT, if a priest entered the Holy of holies in an "*unholy*" manner, God would strike him down (cf Ex 28:33-35+). Compare [Nadab and Abihu](#) who offered [strange fire](#) (Lev 10:1-2+)

**Kistemaker (NTC-1Cor)** writes that "Despite their sins, these believers have been sanctified in Christ and have been called to be holy (1:2). The church is holy because God is holy. A seventeenth-century confession of faith declares:

This church has existed  
from the beginning of the world  
and will last until the end.  
That appears from the fact  
that Christ is the eternal King,  
from which it follows  
that he cannot be without subjects.  
And this holy church is preserved by God  
against the rage of the whole world.  
It shall never be destroyed  
even though for a while  
it may appear very small  
and may even seem to be snuffed out.

**Cornerstone Bible Commentary** - this Corinthian building (was) "**holy**," a sacred shrine, and desecrating it in any way (was) a [sacrilege](#).

**Expositor's Bible Commentary** - God in His justice and holiness cannot allow part of His holy work to be damaged without bringing [retribution](#). Here is a fitting warning to every Christian minister and worker!

**Holy** (40) ([hagios](#) or [here](#) from **hagos** = an "awful thing" in the sense of religious awe or possibly from hazo = to venerate) is literally set apart and thus distinct, holy, different (NOT WEIRD but DIFFERENT!). **Hagios** is the very word used to describe the Eternal God (1 Pe 1:16+). It means separated from sin and unto the sacred! Uses in Corinthians - 1 Co. 1:2; 1 Co. 3:17; 1 Co. 6:1; 1 Co. 6:2; 1 Co. 6:19; 1 Co. 7:14; 1 Co. 7:34; 1 Co. 12:3; 1 Co. 14:33; 1 Co. 16:1; 1 Co. 16:15; 1 Co. 16:20; 2 Co. 1:1; 2 Co. 6:6; 2 Co. 8:4; 2 Co. 9:1; 2 Co. 9:12; 2 Co. 13:12; 2 Co. 13:13; 2 Co. 13:14;

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## Mark Copeland: I. HOW MIGHT ONE DESTROY THE TEMPLE OF GOD?

### A. THROUGH RELIGIOUS STRIFE...

1. This was the problem that existed at Corinth - 1 Co 1:10-13
2. It prevented many members from receiving spiritual meat - 1 Co 3:1-2

3. It left such members in a state of carnality - 1 Co 3:3-4
4. Paul warned the churches of Galatia of the dangers of strife - Ga 5:15  
-- Where religious strife exists, the temple of God is being destroyed!

#### B. THROUGH DESTRUCTIVE DOCTRINES...

1. Peter warned of the destructive influence of false teachers - 2 Pe 2:1
2. Causing many to follow their destructive ways - 2 Pe 2:2-3
3. Paul also warned of those who lead many astray - Ac 20:29-30
4. The Spirit also expressly warned of such an apostasy - 1 Ti 4:1-3  
-- Where false teaching occurs, the temple of God is being destroyed!

#### C. THROUGH SLOTHFUL SERVICE...

1. The slothful person is a brother to one who is a great destroyer - Pro 18:9
2. The devastating effect of sloth can be vividly illustrated
  - a. By Solomon, in the book of Proverbs - Pro 24:30-34
  - b. By the illustrating the church as a wagon, where some help by pulling or pushing, while others simply go along for the ride, making travel difficult through their dead weight
3. Thus the need for diligent, fervent service to the Lord - Ro 12:11
4. Instead of sluggishness, we ought to serve with faith and patience - He 6:12  
-- Where slothful service is found, the temple of God is being destroyed!

**Stedman** on **HOW TO DESTROY A CHURCH** says **destroy** is not best translated as **destroy** (see [phtheiro](#) below) for "The word is really not **"destroy."** We usually think that word means "to eliminate or break apart." But the word is everywhere else translated in the Scriptures "corrupt." It means to damage, to injure, to harm the temple of God.) Nothing can destroy that temple. Jesus said, "On this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," (Matthew 16:18KJV). No matter what force is brought against the church, how powerful may be its adversaries, nothing can destroy the temple of God in that sense. But it can be damaged, it can be injured, and that is what Paul is talking about here. He says it is a dangerous thing to destroy or corrupt the temple (the church of God), and God takes a very dim view of anyone who does so, and he will do something about it. (**ILLUSTRATION**) - We have a very dramatic example of that in the fifth chapter of Acts, where Ananias and Sapphira indulged in a little personal hypocrisy. They pretended to a level of dedication and commitment which they really did not fulfill, and when they came before Peter by the insight of the Spirit he pronounced them guilty, and instantly they both fell dead at Peter's feet (Acts 5:1-10+). **That was not intended to be a model of what the Spirit is going to do every time there is hypocrisy in the church because he has never done it since. But it is intended to be a message from God as to what happens spiritually in a church when hypocrisy is allowed to pervade the thinking of the congregation. Something dies; something is damaged; some injury occurs, and God takes it very seriously. Well, how do you damage the church? How do you corrupt the congregation? I think the answer is clear from the context -- we have been looking at this all along. Corruption takes place when someone introduces the wisdom of the world into the life style and the practice of a congregation (ED: WHILE I COULD NOT ARGUE WITH THAT, IT STILL SEEMS THAT THE MAIN ISSUE IN THIS CONTEXT IS DIVISION OF THE MEMBERS).** If someone individually chooses to begin to live according to the wisdom and the practice of the world, he begins to corrupt and damage the church. He is building with shoddy material, with wood, hay and stubble which will not stand the test of the fire and therefore he is marring the building of the church. When someone seeks to make the church impressive and powerful by the methods and the standards of the world, he is fulfilling this very thing -- corrupting and damaging the church. So whoever suggests a compromise with the spirit of the age is fulfilling this dangerous thing, especially when he does so at the expense of the teachings of our Lord himself

This happens when a church insists on having a hierarchy in the government of a congregation -- someone at the top, someone in authority over everyone else. This is wrong, as our Lord said. "Among the Gentiles they are in authority over one another, but it shall not be so among you," he said {cf, Matt 20:25-26}. Yet how widely that has been ignored and how many churches still today have brought in the hierarchical structure of the world's government into the church. As a result the church is severely damaged by it.

This happens when a church permits the lax moral standards of the world to go unjudged within the congregation. (Paul is going to deal more with this as he comes into the next chapters.) It is happening all around us today. Sexual practices widely tolerated in the world are admitted into the church and Christians allow themselves to practice these kinds of things. This damages the church and tears it apart; it destroys and mars what God is doing.

This happens when you substitute secular insights and secular authority for guidance in the matter of counseling and discipline problems in a church. This is happening widely in our day. Much of secular counseling is designed to build up the flesh, to make people self-confident. This whole business of Transactional Analysis and Transcendental Meditation is based on the secular view of life, and the church forgets that the secular viewpoint is narrow and limited. It does not take in the whole factor of human life and

make-up as God has made man to be. Apart from that understanding, operating only on that very narrow, limited viewpoint, severe damage is done to people in counseling. Although there may be momentary or temporary help, they are locked into a plateau from which they cannot emerge, and this is a way of damaging the church.

I think one widespread way of damaging the church today is to allow a congregation to drift into a "mechanical" worship. Perhaps nothing is more deadly than to permit people a kind of outward compliance with the matters of worship and service without any inward, heartfelt commitment to it. That will destroy a church.

When Paul wrote to the church at Colossae he saw them severely threatened by three things that were coming into the Church in their worship together:

1. One was formalism. They were going through ceremonies and rituals in a set way as though that was what God was after and not the change of heart that these things represented. That formalistic pattern of worship is a destructive thing to the life of the church that God is seeking to build.

2. The second thing was emotionalism. Many of the Colossians were caught up in a kind of a mystical experience. They were talking about these things and they had forsaken, therefore, clinging to the Head of the body, which is Jesus himself. That was destroying the church, as it does in many places today.

3. And the third thing was an asceticism, a legalistic spirit that was taking pride in its dedicated heart and its willingness to give up so many things, to go in for fasting and beating the body, and not touching certain things. They were glorying in that fact. The apostle saw the church being threatened, choked and sabotaged by these kinds of practices. ([1 Corinthians 3:16-23 How To Destroy A Church](#))

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**Doug Goins - How do we damage or corrupt the church?** Looking back at the context to this point, the Corinthians had introduced the wisdom of the world into their decision-making and their teaching. It was hard to tell what was Biblical and what was the secular philosophy of Corinth in that church. They had allowed fleshly competition to defile their fellowship. And they ended up treating each other no differently than any nonbelievers in pagan institutions would. We're going to see in the chapters ahead that there were ugly legal battles between members of the church. There were power struggles in leadership, with teachers and prophets battling for preeminence, position, and influence in the church. The church had permitted lax moral standards to go unjudged within the community; they were living with serious immorality and nobody was saying a word. Their corporate worship life was out of control. Personal experience had become the most important thing in worship, and self-indulgence was the rule.

But the good news, the logic of the appeal that Paul is making, is that they don't have to continue living out these destructive attitudes and behaviors. Paul's motive in writing this is to remind the Corinthian Christians of who they are. They don't have to live in contradiction to their true identity as God's holy ones.

I believe that one of our desperate needs in the church is to recapture this vision of what God intends us to be. Most of us tend to take our life together too lightly. Seldom do we sense that our church can be an experience of community that is so powerfully indwelt by the Spirit that it is a genuine alternative to the pagan world that surrounds us.

In closing, let me ask you three important questions, going back through this passage. The first one has to do with the issue of foundation. Jesus Christ is the foundation. Are you committed to Jesus Christ alone and to his apostolic word as the only foundation for our church? Or do we need Christ crucified plus other foundational issues on which to build our church?

Let me ask you about this issue of the process of building the superstructure. What kind of workmanship and materials are you building into your brothers and sisters in this church? Have you become invested in building materials that won't stand the test? I remembered last week as I was studying this, the wasted effort that I put into several human systems based on worldly wisdom, especially in my earlier years in ministry. These were philosophical, managerial, and psychological systems that became far more important to me than the gospel itself. They were relational wood, hay and stubble. The ironic thing is that I've seen all that modern wisdom swept away by newer combustible materials.

The last question concerns this issue of the nature of the church, our identity. Do you take the church and your identity as a saint, a holy, set-apart one in this holy temple of God, as seriously as he does? The good news is that we don't have to go on living with the Corinthian casualness Paul has exposed here. We must examine our hearts and see what is Corinthian and what is Christian, what is from below and what is from above.

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**ILLUSTRATIONS** - We had a wedding yesterday. What a mess. The families were seated. The groom and his attendants were in their places. I was waiting at the front, Bible in hand. The bridesmaids and flower girl had come down the aisle. Ruth began to play the organ, and everyone stood. We could not believe our eyes. The bride came limping down the aisle. Her gown was ripped and

covered with mud. One eye was purple and swollen. Her hair was a mess. She had been fighting with her sisters and brothers again. We all thought to ourselves, "Doesn't the groom deserve better than this?" This didn't really happen, of course. It is but a parable of what happens when Christ's bride, the church, has fights and quarrels and divisions. A church so divided brings shame upon the Lord. A church so divided, wounds and destroys the body.

Did you know that when a group of thorough-bred horses face attack, they stand in a circle facing each other and, with their back legs, kick out at the enemy. Donkeys do just the opposite; they face the enemy and kick each other! How often the church does just that – acting like donkeys by attacking fellow believers.

Nikita Khrushchev once boasted that he would exhibit the last Soviet Christian on television by 1965. Khrushchev has since gone to give account of himself to the Judge of all mankind, and his deadline for the extinction of Christianity in Russia has also passed. Throughout history, so-called big men and little men have strutted across the stages of life defying God and attacking the church. But as with Khrushchev they too have failed and have been called to appear before the Judge of the living and the dead. - [Adrian Dieleman](#)

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**ILLUSTRATION OF GOD WILL DESTROY HIM** - Steven Cole writes - When I was seeking a place of ministry after seminary, I talked to the pulpit committee of a church in the Southern California mountains. They did not call me, but I ended up accepting the pastorate of another church in the neighboring community. A year or two later, the first church asked me to arbitrate a conflict that had developed. The chairman of the deacon board had sent a letter to the congregation criticizing their new pastor on three counts: he wasn't feeding the flock; he was quoting liberals in the pulpit; and, he wasn't visiting the flock. He urged the church to withhold their giving and force the pastor out.

At the meeting, I asked whether the deacon had first gone privately to the pastor to discuss these matters. He had not done so. Then I asked for clarification. I asked the pastor if he worked each week to study the Word to prepare biblical sermons. He did. I asked who the liberals were. It was C. S. Lewis! I asked if his job description had any requirement of how many hours a week he was expected to visit the congregation. It said nothing about this.

After I heard what was going on, I confronted the deacon with violating Scripture in a self-centered attempt to grab power for himself. I warned him of the verse that says that if anyone destroys God's temple, the church, God will destroy him (1 Cor. 3:17). In front of all, I called on him to repent of his sinful behavior. When we closed in prayer, he piously prayed, "Lord, I forgive my brother for all of the wrong things he has said about me." But, thankfully, the church disciplined the man by removing him from office, and the pastor was able to serve there for a few more years.

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#### Related Resources:

- [What is the cause of church splits? How can healing occur after a church split? | GotQuestions.org](#)
- [How can I overcome being hurt by the church?](#)
- [How can the church achieve a true, biblical unity?](#)

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**1 Corinthians 3:18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise.**

Amplified - Let no person deceive himself. If anyone among you supposes that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool [let him discard his worldly discernment and recognize himself as dull, stupid, and foolish, without true learning and scholarship], that he may become [really] wise.

Wuest - Let no one continue to be deceiving himself. If, as is the case, anyone among you thinks himself to be wise in the sphere of the things of this age, let him become a fool [in the estimation of this age] in order that he may become wise, ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

NET 1 Corinthians 3:18 Guard against self-deception, each of you. If someone among you thinks he is wise in this age, let him become foolish so that he can become wise.

NLT 1 Corinthians 3:18 Stop deceiving yourselves. If you think you are wise by this world's standards, you need to become a fool to be truly wise.

ESV 1 Corinthians 3:18 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.

NIV 1 Corinthians 3:18 Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a "fool" so that he may become wise.

GNT 1 Corinthians 3:18 Μηδε ς αυτ ν ξαπαττω· ε τις δοκε σοφ ς ε ναι ν μ ν ν τ α νι το τ, μωρ ς γεν σθω, να γ νηται σοφ ς.

KJV 1 Corinthians 3:18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.

YLT 1 Corinthians 3:18 Let no one deceive himself; if any one doth seem to be wise among you in this age -- let him become a fool, that he may become wise,

ASV 1 Corinthians 3:18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man thinketh that he is wise among you in this world, let him become a fool, that he may become wise.

CSB 1 Corinthians 3:18 No one should deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks he is wise in this age, he must become foolish so that he can become wise.

NKJ 1 Corinthians 3:18 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.

NRS 1 Corinthians 3:18 Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise.

NAB 1 Corinthians 3:18 Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you considers himself wise in this age, let him become a fool so as to become wise.

NJB 1 Corinthians 3:18 There is no room for self-delusion. Any one of you who thinks he is wise by worldly standards must learn to be a fool in order to be really wise.

GWN 1 Corinthians 3:18 Don't deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise in the ways of this world, you should give up that wisdom in order to become really wise.

BBE 1 Corinthians 3:18 Let no man have a false idea. If any man seems to himself to be wise among you, let him become foolish, so that he may be wise.

- **deceive:** 1Co 6:9 15:33 Pr 5:7 Isa 44:20 Jer 37:9 Lu 21:8 Ga 6:3,7 Eph 5:6 2Ti 3:13 Tit 3:3 Jas 1:22,26 1Jn 1:8
- **If :** 1Co 1:18-21 4:10 8:1,2 Pr 3:5,7 26:12 Isa 5:21 Jer 8:8 Ro 11:25 Ro 12:16
- **let:** Mt 18:4 Mk 10:15 Lu 18:17
- 1 Corinthians 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passages:

1 Corinthians 1:18-21+ For the word of the cross is **foolishness** to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written, "I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE **WISE**, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE." 20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through **the foolishness of the message preached** to save those who believe.

James 3:15-18+ This **wisdom** is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. 17 But **the wisdom from above** is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. 18 And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

## THE DIVINE PARADOX BECOME FOOLISH TO BECOME WISE

**John MacArthur** entitles 1 Cor 3:18-23 "**How to Eliminate Division.**"

**Kistemaker** introduces 1 Cor 3:18-23 with these thoughts - Paul has come to the conclusion of his discourse on the tension in the Corinthian church. He has reminded the believers of the spiritual riches they possess, especially those in Christ and in the Holy Spirit. Now he issues them a stern warning not to become wise in their own eyes, for that is foolishness to God. Rather, they should become fully aware of their possessions, for all things are theirs in Christ. ([NTC-1Cor](#))

**Jack Arnold** - In 1 Cor 3:18-4:5, the Apostle Paul is going to deal with how Christians are to respond to ministers, how they ought to view a minister of the gospel, and what their attitude should be towards a person who is called and gifted for the ministry and appointed to be their teacher by God. Paul is going to show the Corinthians the lowly place the minister, whom they had set up so high, really occupies in the plan of God for the church.

**Knofel** - In order for God's people to decide to build upon the foundation in such a way that every stone is saved and every seed matures toward Christlikeness, it will take some special attitudes. It is going to take humility: What prevents the church from really reaching out and really helping one another more than anything else is the attitude of arrogance and pride and thinking that "I am a superior person to others." Jesus, who was in the form of God, emptied himself and became a servant, and calls us to follow Him (Philippians 2:5–11).

**Let no man deceive himself** - This is a command in [present imperative with a negative](#) which means **stop deceiving yourself** (as they were already doing). In context the saints had fallen into the dangerous deception of thinking they were wise but it was not in God's wisdom. They were priding themselves on their worldly wisdom. And one way they thought themselves wise was by attaching themselves to a certain teacher or leader. Self-deception is ever a problem for fallen flesh so that the root of this delusion is pride and the antidote is humility ("he must become a fool"). Unity begins with a proper view of self and a willingness to think less highly of self and more highly of God's wisdom. As **MacArthur** says "Much division in the church would be eliminated if individuals were not so impressed with their own wisdom. A person who **thinks** that he is **wise in this age**—that is, wise in contemporary human wisdom—does nothing but **deceive himself**."

**Utley** - Many of the leaders of the factions at Corinth thought they were mature and wise, but they were self-deceived.

**Robertson** - "Excited partisans can easily excite themselves to a pious phrenzy, hypnotize themselves with their own supposed devotion to truth"

**Deceive** (1818) ([exapatao](#) from [ek](#) = intensifies meaning of root + [apatáo](#) = seduce, deceive - see study of related word [apate](#)) means to beguile thoroughly, deceive completely or seduce (persuade to disobedience, lead astray by persuasion or false promises) wholly. The result is to lead astray. To cause a subject to believe or accept false ideas about something with the implication of that one is led out of the right way into error and especially to sin (see 1 Cor 11:3, 1Ti 2:14). **Apatao** and its derivatives indicate ethical enticement... Deception sometimes comes from within, as our desires impel us to deceive. But more often in the NT, deceit is error urged by external evil powers or by those locked into the world's way of thinking. Used 6x in NT - Ro 7:11; Ro 16:18; 1 Co. 3:18; 2 Co. 11:3; 2 Th 2:3; 1 Ti 2:14

**Hodge** - 'Let no one doubt the truth of what I have said about the worthlessness of human wisdom, and of the danger of substituting it for God's wisdom. If he does, he will find himself mistaken.'

**Kistemaker** - Self-deception occurs when a person tries to justify his thoughts, words, and actions and refuses to admit that he is wrong. What, then, is this self-deception? Paul explains in the next sentence. "**If any of you thinks that he is wise in this age.**" First, Paul addresses everyone in the Corinthian church, teachers and learners, leaders and laity, members and adherents. Notice that he once again resorts to using the phrase **if any man** (cf **if any man** - 1 Cor 3:12, 17) in his address to the readers. Next, instead of referring to the imagery borrowed from agriculture and the building trade, Paul reverts to an earlier discussion on wisdom (1:20–25; 2:6; see also 4:10). Although he seems to perplex the readers by going back to earlier remarks, he makes these comments on wisdom fundamental to everything else. The Corinthians were deceiving themselves because they were enthralled by worldly wisdom. Third, Paul specifies that the wisdom that seduces the believers has its origin in this age. The wisdom of the world manifests itself in people who want to be independent, govern their own lives, and manage their own affairs rather than submit to the lordship of Christ.

**If any man among you thinks** (present tense - continually) **that he is wise in this age** - **IF** is a first class conditional statement means what follows is accepted as true (and thus could be translated "since" or "because"). This indicates that some (? most) of the saints in Corinth were thinking of themselves as **wise**, but worldly **wise**, not godly **wise** (as was Paul in 1 Cor 3:10 = "a **WISE** master builder"! "Many in the Corinthian church prided themselves on their supposed spirituality or spiritual giftedness or knowledge." (Utley) In our fleshly moments, all believers fall into the trap of thinking too highly of ourselves and our wisdom. The fallen flesh will continually fight against harmony, thinking it's way is the wisest way, but the result is disharmony.

**Guzik** has an interesting comment - Paul is being a little sarcastic here. Of course the Corinthians considered themselves wise in this age! That was one of their problems, their love of worldly wisdom.

The person who elevates his own wisdom will always have a low view of Scripture.

-- John MacArthur



**Thinks** (supposes)(1380)(**dokeo** "primarily, to be of opinion, think, imagine, [suppose](#). To hold an opinion based upon appearances which may be significantly different from reality which is absolutely true in this passage. Uses in Corinthians - 1 Co. 3:18; 1 Co. 4:9; 1 Co. 7:40; 1 Co. 8:2; 1 Co. 10:12; 1 Co. 11:16; 1 Co. 12:22; 1 Co. 12:23; 1 Co. 14:37; 2 Co. 10:9; 2 Co. 11:16; 2 Co. 12:19;

**Wise** (4680) see [sophos](#)

**Age** (165)(**aion**) generally means an extended period of time and has various meanings depending on the context. Age, referring to an age or time in contrast to *kósmos*, referring to people or space. The term generally expresses an extended span of time, but it additionally assumes a specific meaning according to its various contexts. Uses in Corinthians 1 Co. 1:20; 1 Co. 2:6; 1 Co. 2:7; 1 Co. 2:8; 1 Co. 3:18; 1 Co. 10:11; 2 Co. 4:4; 2 Co. 9:9; 2 Co. 11:31;

**He must become foolish, so that** (purpose clause - states purpose of becoming foolish) **he may become wise** ([sophos](#)) - Paul is calling for the Corinthians to renounce all worldly wisdom, to make an "about face," a 180 degree turn back to the truth, to turn away from the wisdom of the world and to the wisdom of God. In short be willing to be called a fool (**pride** will fight against obeying this command for it does not want to be called a fool!) Becoming a fool for Jesus is better than following deceptive worldly wisdom! Note that Paul is not playing games, for the verb **Must become** is not a suggestion to the Corinthians but an "order" as from a commanding general, the [aorist imperative](#) command in essence calling for them to **"Do this now!" "Do not delay!" "The need is urgent!"**

The idea of believers becoming **foolish** is that as the lost world looks at **the wisdom from above** (see contrasting description in James 3:15-18+) which is guiding the believer, they think he or she is utterly **foolish**! (Have you ever experienced that reaction from a lost person who considered you a fool?) In sum, Paul gives the solution for those believers then (and now) who think they are worldly **wise**. Obey his command -- **Become foolish** so you can **become wise**! Or using a play on the Greek word for foolish, **moros**, **become** a **moron**! The point is that fallen man's best wisdom is **"moronic"** in comparison to God's perfect wisdom which is marvelous! And since the two wisdoms are [antithetical](#), like oil and water, they do not mix and are not to be thought of as [synergistic](#) (acting together to produce a greater effect). One must "cast off" the old (fleshly) way of thinking and put on the new, allowing God's Spirit and His Word to carry out a supernatural "mind renewal." (cf Eph 4:23-24+, Ro 12:2+).

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus' issues a command to His followers that sounds like utter foolishness to the natural men (1 Cor 2:14+) and their worldly wisdom "get even"...

I say to you, **love** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) your enemies and **pray** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) for those who persecute you, (Mt 5:44+, cf Luke 6:27+)

In chapter 4 Paul writes

1 Corinthians 4:10+ **We are fools for Christ's sake**, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor.

**Vance Havner - Fools for Christ** - This world has always been moved, not by cold, calculating brass hats but by fools with their facts on fire; fools to their own generation, who perhaps did not know as much as some others but who were consumed by what they knew. And God is looking for "fools for Christ's sake" who are sure of a few great facts and with those facts on fire.

**James Smith** - If a Christian is not in the eyes of the world an anomaly he is nothing. The Spirit of God always makes a tremendous distinction between men. "Ye are a peculiar people." The energy of the natural man, and that of the Holy Spirit in the believer, are as different as darkness is from light; as far apart in character as Judas was from John....When God makes His choice of weapons they are always weak and base in the sight of the wisdom of this world (1 Cor. 1:27, 28). Fools for Christ. (Read his full discussion of [Gideon's Victory](#) where the numbers of warriors and weapons are "foolish" to the natural, logical man -[scroll down to middle of the page](#)).

In another comment on fools for Christ, **Smith** writes "Those who are fools for Christ have a business, and pleasures, and prospects, that Christless eyes have never seen. Fools, because they hold lightly the material, and grasp with firm hand the eternal. The things of the Spirit of God are foolishness to the natural man (1 Cor. 2:14). To die to live, is wiser than to die to be lost. (from [For Christ's Sake](#))

We are not much use in the Lord's service until we are willing to become **fools for Christ**.

It is ours to obey and to trust. Opinions formed apart from the light of God's Word will sooner or later bring the blush of confusion to your face.

--- James Smith

As **MacArthur** says "unity can never come without Christians becoming **foolish** in the world's eyes by conforming to God's wisdom....Where human wisdom becomes **foolish** and useless is in matters concerning God, salvation, and spiritual truth. Human wisdom has no way of discovering and understanding divine things. Even Christians, therefore, do not have a right to their own opinions about the things God has revealed. **When Christians start expressing and following their own ideas about the gospel, the church, and Christian living, the saints cannot help becoming divided. Christians are no wiser in their flesh than are unbelievers.** The first step in a Christian's becoming truly wise is to recognize that **this own human wisdom is foolishness**, a reflection of the wisdom of this world, which is foolishness before God. It is the product of intellectual **pride** and is the enemy of God's revelation. The church must create an atmosphere in which the Word of God is honored and submitted to, in which human opinion is never used to judge or qualify revelation. As far as the things of God are concerned, Christians must be totally under the teaching of Scripture and the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Only then can we be open to God's wisdom and truly become wise. **Common commitment to the Word of God is the basic unifier. Where the Word of God is not set up as the supreme authority, division is inevitable.** Such happens even in evangelical churches, when pastors and other leaders begin substituting their own ideas for the truths of Scripture. The substitution is seldom intentional, but it will always happen when the Bible is neglected. A Bible that is not studied carefully cannot be followed carefully. **And where it is not followed there will be division, because there will be no common ground for beliefs and practices.** When the truth of Scripture is not the sole authority, men's varied opinions become the authority." ([MNTC-1 Cor](#)) (Bolding added)

**Rod Mattoon** - We gain wisdom by being foolish enough to trust God and His Word. The world may think we are nuts, but in reality we are wise.

**Ray Stedman** - There are two things Paul says to do if you catch yourself in this sort of a thing (THAT IS FIND YOU ARE DECEIVING YOURSELF) -- and we all do from time to time. We all think we are making an impression for God, doing great things for God, and down at the heart, hidden to others around us, is an ambition, a desire for prominence, for recognition, for fame perhaps. Paul says, "Stop kidding yourself. Don't let anyone deceive himself in this. You may be greatly impressing men, but God is totally unimpressed. You may think you are a great success but God is sadly shaking his head over what he sees. God cannot be fooled. He knows the heart. Others may give you tremendous applause and recognition, but if it is not coming from that sense of dependence on the wisdom and the power and the working of the Spirit of God, it all is wasted effort, coming to nothing." And then, secondly, Paul says, "Deliberately choose what the world says is foolish. If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, thinks he's got it made, thinks he understands the methods to move people and motivate them, let him become a fool that he may become wise, "for the wisdom of the world is foolishness to God." ([1 Corinthians 3:16-23 How To Destroy A Church](#))

**ILLUSTRATION** from Ray Stedman - I was in the state of Washington a few weeks ago, and I met a pastor there who had been down here with us at PBC and he had set up some of the Body Life practices in his church. He told me that another pastor in town asked him once, "What are you doing over there in the church?" So he told him, "We're trying to share one another's problems. We pray for one another and we're trying to meet each other's needs. We have a service where we try to talk openly and honestly about where we are messing up in our homes and marriages." The other pastor said, "There's no other church in town that will act like that. Why do you do that?" And the first pastor said, "Because the New Testament tells us so." The other man said, "You won't get anywhere with that approach." But the first pastor said, "I determined that I was going to keep right on whether I got anywhere or not, because that is what God said to do." Now that is becoming a fool in order that you might become wise. That is choosing what the world and the worldly church says is wrong, but because the Lord says it is right, being willing to act upon it.

**Jack Arnold** - It is quite possible for a Christian to be deceived because he is operating on worldly wisdom rather than God's wisdom which is found in the Bible. This is true of ministers as well as the saints. To give oneself to worldly wisdom is to operate in this world as though there is no God. To view life strictly from a secular perspective is worldly wisdom. A nominal Christian can speak of God with his lips but live like an atheist because he has capitulated to a secular, worldly, humanistic view of life which is all around him and which constantly hounds him to throw over faith in God and go the way of the world. **This verse clearly says the way to become spiritually wise is to become a fool in the sight of the non-Christian world.** The world says wisdom comes through power, fame, money, pleasure, manipulation of people to gain selfish ends, and thousands of other ways. For a Christian to become **wise**, he must renounce all human reasoning and worldly thinking and cling only to Christ by faith as He and His plan is revealed in the written Word of God. ([1 Corinthians 3:18-4:5 Stewards Of The Gospel](#))

**J Vernon McGee** - Unfortunately, most of our seminaries today are trying to train "intellectual" preachers. I have listened to some of them, and very few of them are really intellectual. May I say again that the important thing is to know and preach the Word of God. Oh, if only I could get that across to some of these smart-aleck young fellows in seminary! I have the privilege of speaking in many seminaries today, and I have met so many boys in the seminaries who want to be "intellectual." (Thru the Bible)

**Foolish** ([3474](#))([moros](#) conveys the root meaning of one who is mentally dull, sluggish in understanding,

foolish, morally worthless, useless, silly or stupid (English = "moron"). Absurd (ridiculously unreasonable, unsound, or incongruous). All 12 NT uses - Matt. 5:22; Matt. 7:26; Matt. 23:17; Matt. 25:2; Matt. 25:3; Matt. 25:8; 1 Co. 1:25; 1 Co. 1:27; 1 Co. 3:18; 1 Co. 4:10; 2 Ti 2:23; Titus 3:9. Jesus used **moros** giving us a good description of foolish when he declared "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish (**moros**) man who built his house on the sand." (Mt 7:26+) That is foolish!

**Wise** (4680) see **sophos**

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**Fools for Christ** - An article appeared in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution (April 10, 1996, A12) titled "Stand Up for Faith, Scalia Says." The article reported the recent speech delivered by Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia to an event sponsored by the Christian Legal Society at the Mississippi College School of Law. He said that Christians must proclaim their belief in miracles and ignore the scorn of the "worldly wise." He went on to say that the modern world dismisses Christians as fools for holding to their traditional beliefs, "We are fools for Christ," he said "We must pray for the courage to endure the scorn of the sophisticated world."

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### The Story of a Fool for Christ **Karl F.A. Gutzlaff** (1803-1851) Disgraced idealist

One historian described him as, variously, "a saint, a crank, a visionary, a true pioneer, and a deluded fanatic." **Karl Gutzlaff** provides a poignant example of how Christ is preached even through those with many shortcomings.

Gutzlaff, young and zealous, skirted the coast of China in his boat, delivering Chinese tracts. The free-lance missionary had recently lost his wife and daughter after several years of mission work in Indonesia and Thailand.

By the late 1840s, the reports from Gutzlaff's work in China were glowing: the 300 Chinese Gutzlaff had trained to evangelize China in one generation had distributed thousands of New Testaments and counted no fewer than 2,871 baptized converts. Supporters back home were enthusiastic—until the hoax was discovered in 1850.

Gutzlaff was in Europe promoting his mission work at the time, but evidence suggests he already knew he had been deceived by his Chinese workers. They had concocted the conversion numbers and had secretly sold back to the printer New Testaments Gutzlaff had paid to have printed in the first place. The printer would sell them again to an unsuspecting Gutzlaff.

More serious still: for fear of losing financial support, Gutzlaff chose to gloss over the growing discrepancies. When this all came to light, he was disgraced. A disheartened Gutzlaff returned to China to try and pick up the pieces. One year later he died.

If history judges Gutzlaff as a "deluded fanatic," it must add that he was a fool and a fanatic for Christ. In Indonesia and in Thailand (where he and his wife translated the complete Bible into Siamese) and in China, he was foolish enough to dress, eat, and live like those he sought to evangelize—a radical step in his day. He deftly blended evangelism with social concern, as when he helped to negotiate the end to the First Opium War, in 1842.

And though the mission organization he founded, Chinese Union, died with him, out of its soil grew the Chinese Evangelization Society, which sent Hudson Taylor to China in 1853, only two years after Gutzlaff's death. Taylor himself remembered and honored Gutzlaff by calling him "the grandfather of the China Inland Mission." —"Hudson Taylor and Missions to China," Christian History, no. 52

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**ILLUSTRATION** - Gary Hamlin: Fool for Christ - Gary Hamlin: A physician and self-proclaimed "fool for Christ"

Nine years ago [1984] on April Fool's Day, Dr. Gary Hamlin, a Joplin, Missouri, osteopath, became a "fool for Christ." Soon, he began doing seemingly foolish things.

"I lived the first 40 years of life for Gary Hamlin's personal gain," he says. "But as I became obedient to God, he opened my eyes to other people who needed my help."

First, Hamlin co-founded a Teen Challenge center offering free counseling and medical care for young people in trouble. He and his family hosted some of these teenagers in their home. Then, when no other physician volunteered, Hamlin became the first medical director of the AIDS Project of the Ozarks. Lafayette House, a Joplin facility for battered women and children, also engaged Hamlin's services, which he provided free of charge.

But God had more plans. On April 1, 1988, Hamlin opened a highly unconventional medical practice—the Benevolent Friday Clinic. Any patient who needs medical care receives it. No one is turned over to a collection agency for non-payment. Medicare and Medicaid assignments are welcomed.

Build a clinic like that, and people will come—35 to 45 patients a day. However, operating that way, Hamlin has to moonlight every other weekend in a local hospital to help with the overhead. Not everyone in the medical community is as enthusiastic about

Hamlin's set-up as he is. But that's okay.

"Luke 14:14 introduced me to the founding principle for the clinic," he explains. "It was God's personal promise to me. 'And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.' " Even now, though, "when a patient's eyes well up with tears because someone is willing to give him medical care, it's humbling," Hamlin says.

Teaming up with a Christian dentist, Hamlin is heard weekly on "Healing Touch," a radio call-in program. In 1992, Hamlin entered the congressional race in his district, finishing a respectable third out of six candidates. He took his cue to "plead the cause of the poor and needy" from Proverbs 31:9. always the initiator, Hamlin enjoys "being a loud voice. Confrontation has a way of making politicians stay on their toes." The future may include more campaigning, especially to lobby for health-care reforms.

In 10 years, when his youngest child is grown, Hamlin hopes to be practicing medicine in Haiti. Since his first visit to Haiti in 1989, Hamlin admits "materialism has lost its value. Before I went to Haiti, where I worked with the Haitian Christian Mission and on my own, I carried a lot of fears in my life. Fear of dying. Fear of financial hardship. But after awhile, the fears began to dissipate. God was weaning me from the world's attractions. He was showing me his vision for my life. To be a fool for him every day. But realize how rich I am." —Christian Reader, "Ordinary Heroes."

**1 Corinthians 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, "He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS";**

Amplified - For this world's wisdom is foolishness (absurdity and stupidity) with God, for it is written, He lays hold of the wise in their [own] craftiness;

Wuest - for the wisdom of this world system is foolishness as God looks at it. For it has been written and is at present on record, He catches those who are wise in their false wisdom, and again ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

NET 1 Corinthians 3:19 For the wisdom of this age is foolishness with God. As it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness."

NLT 1 Corinthians 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God. As the Scriptures say, "He traps the wise in the snare of their own cleverness."

ESV 1 Corinthians 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness,"

NIV 1 Corinthians 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness";

GNT 1 Corinthians 3:19 γ ρ σοφ α το κ σμου το του μω ρ α παρ τ θε στιν. γ γραπται γ ρ, δρασσ μενος το ς σοφο ς ν τ πανουργ α τ ν.

KJV 1 Corinthians 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.

YLT 1 Corinthians 3:19 for the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, for it hath been written, 'Who is taking the wise in their craftiness;'

ASV 1 Corinthians 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He that taketh the wise in their craftiness:

CSB 1 Corinthians 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, since it is written: He catches the wise in their craftiness;

NKJ 1 Corinthians 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness";

NRS 1 Corinthians 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness,"

NAB 1 Corinthians 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God, for it is written: "He catches the wise in their own ruses,"

NJB 1 Corinthians 3:19 For the wisdom of the world is folly to God. As scripture says: He traps the crafty in

the snare of their own cunning

GWN 1 Corinthians 3:19 The wisdom of this world is nonsense in God's sight. That's why Scripture says, "God catches the wise in their cleverness."

BBE 1 Corinthians 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolish before God. As it is said in the holy Writings, He who takes the wise in their secret designs:

- **the wisdom:** 1Co 1:19,20 2:6 Isa 19:11-14 29:14-16 44:25 Ro 1:21,22
- **For:** Job 5:13
- **He:** Ex 1:10 18:11 2Sa 15:31 16:23 17:14,23 Es 7:10 Ps 7:14,15 Ps 9:15,16 141:10
- 1 Corinthians 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passage:

Job 5:13 "He captures the wise by their own shrewdness, And the advice of the cunning is quickly thwarted.

1 Corinthians 1:18;For the word of the cross is **foolishness** to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 1:21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the **foolishness** of the message preached to save those who believe.

1 Corinthians 1:23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles **foolishness**,

1 Corinthians 1:25 Because the **foolishness** of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

## WORLDLY WISDOM FOOLISH, CRAFTY

**For** ([gar](#)) - term of explanation. Always begs question "What is being explained?"

**The wisdom of this world is foolishness** ([moria](#) > "[moronic](#)") **before God** - [Wuest](#) - "the wisdom of this world system is foolishness as God looks at it." In 1 Cor 1:20+ Paul asked the rhetorical question (expecting an affirmative reply) "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" The world's wisdom is antithetical to God's wisdom and thus is always destined to be intellectually weak and/or even irrational/foolish. **Utey** adds it is foolish "because it is based on limited, worldly, finite, fallen knowledge." Paul is speaking of course of spiritual things, not things like how to solve a math problem, how to build a warm house, etc. Human wisdom is fine for the secular activities everyone must pursue (although even there is good to always seek the Lord's wisdom, will and way). In the context of the spiritual division in the Corinthian church, only God's wisdom would correct the problem. Men's ways were (and are) **foolishness before God**.

**Hodge** on the **wisdom of this world** - "Even truth or true knowledge becomes folly, if employed to accomplish an end for which it is not adapted."

As **MacArthur** says "When believers look to psychology alone, instead of to God's Word, for answers to personal or marital or moral problems, spiritual disaster results. When Christian businessmen look to popular methods of expediency alone, rather than to the principles of Scripture, to determine business ethics, their spiritual life and testimony are undermined. In science and technology men have made great advances, for which we should be glad and from which we can profit. But in regard to the things of God and His plan and will for men, human ideas and understanding stand completely empty and helpless."

**Wisdom** ([4678](#))([sophia](#) compare [saphes](#) = clear) is the ability to judge correctly and to follow the best course of action, based on knowledge and understanding. **Sophia** is used in an ironic sense (ironic because it is not true wisdom in God's estimation) by adding "of this world" (1Cor 1:20), "of this age" (1Cor 2:6), or "fleshy wisdom" (2Cor 1:12). **Sophia** in Corinthians - 1 Co. 1:17; "wisdom of the wise" = 1 Co. 1:19; God has made "foolish the wisdom of the world" = 1 Co. 1:20; 1 Co. 1:21; 1 Co. 1:22; 1 Co. 1:24; 1 Co. 1:30; 1 Co. 2:1; 1 Co. 2:4; 1 Co. 2:5; 1 Co. 2:6; 1 Co. 2:7; 1 Co. 2:13; 1 Co. 3:19; 1 Co. 12:8; 2 Co. 1:12 **Note that SOPHIA is a KEY WORD in 1 Corinthians 1 (8 times) and in 1 Corinthians 2 (7 times)!**

**World** ([2889](#))([kosmos](#) related to the verb [kosmeo](#) = to order or adorn, to put in order [Mt 25:7 = "trimmed"], to adorn literally [1Ti 2:9], to adorn figuratively [Titus 2:9+]) describes something that is well-arranged, which has order or is arranged harmoniously. Generally **kosmos** does not refer to the material earth per se but the ordering forces that hold it together, including the involvement of humankind in culture and society. It follows

that "Often kosmos has a negative force associated with human sinfulness and moral depravity and stands in opposition to God, but it will ultimately be destroyed. Thus, its association in this context with human foolishness is not surprising." (Baker) **Kosmos** is used in James 4:4+ with this negative meaning. **Kosmos** in the letters to the Corinthians (NOTE 4X IN CHAPTER 1) - 1 Co. 1:20; 1 Co. 1:21; 1 Co. 1:27; 1 Co. 1:28; 1 Co. 2:12; 1 Co. 3:19; 1 Co. 3:22; 1 Co. 4:9; 1 Co. 4:13; 1 Co. 5:10; 1 Co. 6:2; 1 Co. 7:31; 1 Co. 7:33; 1 Co. 7:34; 1 Co. 8:4; 1 Co. 11:32; 1 Co. 14:10; 2 Co. 1:12; 2 Co. 5:19; 2 Co. 7:10

**Foolishness** (3472) (**moria** from **moros** = foolish; Eng = **moron**) is a noun which is that which is folly, foolish, intellectually weak or irrational. It means lacking good judgment. It "denotes inappropriate behaviour, thought or speech, both of single lapses of sense as well as in the sense of a permanent attribute. It is concerned as much with lack of knowledge as with lack of discernment. The use of the word for the state of mental derangement (Soph., Aj. 1150) or for a man's behaviour when acting under the influence of his desires (Eur. Hippolytus 966; Soph., Ant. 469 f.) suggests the thought of a power which dominates man." (NIDNTT) "The Group in Classical Greek. **moros** and cognates denote deficiency, e.g., physical sloth, but more especially mental dullness." (TDNT) All NT uses by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians - 1 Co. 1:18; 1 Co. 1:21; 1 Co. 1:23; 1 Co. 2:14; 1 Co. 3:19

**For** (**gar** - term of explanation) explains why the world's wisdom is foolishness before God.

**it is written - Written** (1125) is **grapho** in the perfect tense which means it was written in the past and stands written, written and applicable for every age, yea, for all time. Wuest's paraphrase expresses this sense of the perfect tense = "For it has been written and is at present on record." In Ro 15:4+ Paul affirms the value of the OT writing "For whatever was **written** in earlier times (LIKE Isaiah 29:14) was **written** for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." Paul uses 14 clear quotations from the Old Testament in 1 Corinthians, this passage taken from Job 5:13. .

**Kistemaker** comments that Paul "turns first to the Book of Job and then to the psalter to show that God despises wisdom that originates in the heart of man. The first quotation (v. 19) is Paul's literal translation from the Hebrew text of Job 5:13. It is part of a lengthy speech which Eliphaz the Temanite addresses to Job. Eliphaz compares God to a hunter as he catches Job in his craftiness. In a sense, this quotation is taken out of context, but Paul has chosen it because of the keyword wise. Nevertheless, the text applies directly to the wise people of Paul's day who craftily scheme to further the cause of their worldly wisdom. This is a wisdom without God. But God catches the wise in their own craftiness and turns their wisdom into folly. "Man's ability to reason cannot stand up against divine sovereignty."....the wise are like a bird caught in a net; they are unable to escape.

**"He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE (sophos) IN THEIR CRAFTINESS (panourgia)** - They are sly, subtle, wily, deceitful, and fraudulent. These are those who think they are wise, but they cannot fool God. No matter how **clever** the "wise" are, God traps them in their cleverness. Sooner or later the worldly wise men who oppose God's Word of wisdom will be tripped up. The verb **catches** in Greek is **drassomai** used only here in the NT and literally means grasp or catch with the hand, then to seize or lay hold of, to take a handful, as in one use describing clutching a handful of dust. That last description is intriguing because man is made from the dust of the ground (Ge 2:7)! The cognate noun (**dragma**) describes "as much as one can grasp in a handful."

**Zodhiates** adds that **catches (drassomai)** in the present tense "implies that this activity of God is an essential part of His character. He does not just do this occasionally, but, whenever He sees the conceit of a man who thinks himself wise and secure in his own way, God acts to bring him to Himself He takes hold of him in His hand. He catches him. Our crises are God-given to break up the crust of our vaunted human wisdom. The verb **drássomai** implies speedy action, taking advantage of an opportunity. In fact, in Modern Greek it is used in the expression **drássomai téis eukairías**, "I take advantage of an opportunity." God takes advantage of the humanly wise when they are showing their craftiness, in order to rescue them from themselves. The word "craftiness" in Greek is **panourgía**, which comes from **pan**, "all," and the root **érgon**, "work" (see also Luke 20:23; 2 Cor. 4:2; 11:3; Eph. 4:14). All the work of earthly wisdom is cheating, is craftiness, simply because man in his sinful state seeks his own. God has a way of catching him in this. One of the most dangerous characters in the world is a clever person who is not saved by the grace of God. He is crafty. But he cannot escape God's net. That is what the expression from Job 5:13, quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:19, means." (1 Corinthians Commentary)

**Ralph Earle** explains that Craftiness (**panourgia**) "originally meant "**cleverness**," almost always in a bad sense in classical Greek. It is sometimes translated "cunning." No matter how clever the "wise" men are, God traps them in their cleverness!" (Word Meanings in the NT).

**Craftiness (panourgia)** speaks of cunning schemes devised by men's wisdom, but like a boomerang their plans will return and trap them, bringing them to a quick end (like Haman below).

**ILLUSTRATION** - A perfect illustration from Scripture is **Haman** who thought his wisdom would result in annihilation of the Jews (Esther 3:5-7+), but God caught him (using His vessel of honor "Esther"), with the

result that [Haman](#) was hung on the very gallows he had erected to hang his nemesis [Mordecai](#)! (Read Esther 7:7-10+).

**Henry Morris** sees this as another reference to the fact that "The preaching of the cross may be foolishness to those who are unsaved, but their wisdom is "foolishness with God." (Defender's Study Bible)

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**Craftiness** ([3834](#)) ([panourgia](#) from **pas** = all + **ergon** = work) is literally "all working" or capable of all work. In the NT it takes on a negative meaning and conveys the ideas of trickery involving cunning, cleverness, craftiness or treachery. It is always used in a bad sense in N.T. **Panourgia** conveys the idea of clever manipulation of error to make it look like the truth. Someone who practiced **panourgia** would be willing to do anything to achieve his goals. Used 5x in NT and three are in the letters to the Corinthians

Luke 20:23+ But He detected their (Scribes and chief priests - Lk 20:19) **trickery** and said to them, (Lk 20:24-26).

**Comment** on Mark 12:15+ from **Ralph Earle** (borrow [Word meanings](#)) - This verse and its two parallels (Mt. 22:18; Luke 20:23+) furnish **an interesting example of how the three Synoptic accounts supplement each other**. Three different verbs and three different nouns are used. Let us look first at the nouns. Matthew has **poneria**, Luke has **panourgia**, while Mark has **hupokrisis**. In his excellent commentary on the Greek text of Mark, Swete writes: **Malice** (**poneria**) lay at the root of their conduct, unscrupulous cunning (**panourgia**) supplied them with the means of seeking their end, whilst they sought to screen themselves under the pretence (**hupokrisis**) of a desire for guidance and an admiration of fearless truthfulness" (p. 259). **Now to the verbs**. Mark uses **eidōs**, a form of the verb **oida** (**eido**) (know intuitively). Matthew has **gnous**, the aorist of **ginosko** (know by experience or experimentation). Luke has **katanoesas**. The verb is **katanoeo**, which means "notice" or "observe" (AG). **Swete** comments: **"The Lord detected their true character intuitively (eidōs), He knew it by experience (gnous), and He perceived it by tokens which did not escape His observation (katanoesas)." He adds: "Thus each Evangelist contributes to the completeness of the picture."**

1 Corinthians 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, "He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR **CRAFTINESS**";

2 Corinthians 4:2+ but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in **craftiness** or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

2 Corinthians 11:3+ But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his **craftiness**, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

Ephesians 4:14+ As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by **craftiness** in deceitful scheming;

**1 Corinthians 3:20 and again, "THE LORD KNOWS THE REASONINGS of the wise, THAT THEY ARE USELESS."**

Amplified - And again, The Lord knows the thoughts and reasonings of the [humanly] wise and recognizes how futile they are.

Wuest - The Lord knows the reasonings of those who are wise, that they are futile reasonings. [Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#)

NET 1 Corinthians 3:20 And again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile."

NLT 1 Corinthians 3:20 And again, "The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise; he knows they are worthless."

ESV 1 Corinthians 3:20 and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

NIV 1 Corinthians 3:20 and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile."

GNT 1 Corinthians 3:20 καὶ πάλιν, ὁ Κύριος γινώσκει τὸς διαλογισμοὺς τῶν σοφῶν τι εἶσιν ἄχρηστοι.

KJV 1 Corinthians 3:20 And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.

YLT 1 Corinthians 3:20 and again, 'The Lord doth know the reasonings of the wise, that they are vain.'

ASV 1 Corinthians 3:20 and again, The Lord knoweth the reasonings of the wise that they are vain.

CSB 1 Corinthians 3:20 and again, The Lord knows that the reasonings of the wise are meaningless.

NKJ 1 Corinthians 3:20 and again, "The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

NRS 1 Corinthians 3:20 and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

NAB 1 Corinthians 3:20 and again: "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain."

NJB 1 Corinthians 3:20 and again: The Lord knows the plans of the wise and how insipid they are.

GWN 1 Corinthians 3:20 Again Scripture says, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are pointless."

BBE 1 Corinthians 3:20 And again, The Lord has knowledge of the reasonings of the wise, that they are nothing.

- **THE LORD KNOWS:** Ps 94:11
- **THAT:** Job 11:11,12 Ps 2:1 Ro 1:21 Col 2:8
- 1 Corinthians 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passages:

Psalm 94:11+ The LORD knows the thoughts of man, That they are a mere breath.

**Kistemaker** - Paul relies on the text of the Septuagint, which has the plural men (**man**). By replacing the words of the men (**man**) with of the **wise**, Paul alters the text and at the same time interprets it. He changes the wording but not the meaning. Once more the keyword is "wise," even though Paul had to substitute it for the word men (**man**). Yet the context of Psalm 94 speaks of the foolish reasoning of arrogant men who oppress and kill the innocent. They boast that they are safe because the Lord neither sees nor pays attention (Ps. 94:7). These people resemble those who oppose God with worldly wisdom. Their thoughts are fully known to the Lord, for nothing is hidden from him. The Lord declares that man's thoughts are empty; that is, the opinions of the wise are futile and useless (compare Rom. 1:21).

Spurgeon comments on Ps 94:11 - Whether men admit or deny that God knows, one thing is here declared, namely, that **The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity**. Not their words alone are heard, and their works seen, but he reads the secret motions of their minds, for men themselves are not hard to be discerned of him, before his glance they themselves are but vanity. It is in the Lord's esteem no great matter to know the thoughts of such transparent pieces of vanity as mankind are, he sums them up in a moment as poor vain things. This is the sense of the original, but that given in the authorised version is also true—the thoughts, the best part, the most spiritual portion of man's nature, even these are vanity itself, and nothing better. Poor man! And yet such a creature as this boasts, plays at monarch, tyrannizes over his fellow worms, and defies his God! Madness is mingled with human vanity, like smoke with the fog, to make it fouler but not more substantial than it would have been alone. How foolish are those who think that God does not know their actions, when the truth is that their vain thoughts are all perceived by him! How absurd to make nothing of God when in fact we ourselves are as nothing in his sight.

Psalm 2:1+ Why are the nations in an uproar And the peoples devising a **vain thing**?

Romans 1:21+ For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but **they became futile (mataioo) in their speculations (dialogismos)**, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing to be **wise**, they became **fools**, (**NOTE HOW THE WORD OF TRUTH TURNS THINGS RIGHT SIDE UP SO TO SPEAK = CHRISTIANS ARE COMMANDED TO BECOME FOOLS REGARDING THE WORLD'S WISDOM THAT THEY MIGHT BECOME WISE!** - 1 Cor 3:18+)

Colossians 2:8+ **See to it (present imperative see our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey)** that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty (**kenos** = in the sense without any basis, without truth or power) deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

### **WORLDLY WISDOM: FUTILE, EMPTY, USELESS!**

And again, "**THE LORD KNOWS** (**ginosko** in present tense - continually) **THE REASONINGS (dialogismos) of the wise (sophos), THAT THEY ARE USELESS (mataios).**" - This is a general truth stating that not only does the omniscient God know the thoughts of



men who claim to be wise, but even more important, He knows that their wisdom is worthless, even deceptive (self-deceptive) and ineffectual and will lead to [naught](#). In sum their wisdom is **naught** and is that in which they are **caught** (1 Cor 3:19)!

**THE LORD KNOWS** - We could stop right there, because He always knows and knows everything, not only in the present but in eternity past and eternity future! We call that [Omniscience](#)!

**Kistemaker** - even before they are able to formulate their thoughts, God already declares their deliberations useless. Whoever seeks to oppose God with human wisdom inevitably loses.

**MacArthur** adds that "Human philosophy is totally inadequate to bring men to God, to show them how to be saved or how to live. It will always become entrapped in its own schemes, and entrap those who trust in it. The one who trusts in human understanding does not have the right understanding of himself. He does not see that his spiritual opinions, ideas, and reasonings are useless (mataios), vain and empty. The proper view of ourselves, the godly and true view, is that apart from divine truth we are fools with empty thoughts. **Recognizing this truth opens the door to true wisdom and closes the door to division**" (See [1 Corinthians Commentary](#)) (Bolding added)

**Jack Arnold** - All worldly wisdom is deplored by God. He hates it because it leaves Him out of the reasoning process. Therefore, worldly wisdom is futile, empty, vain and it will sooner or later backfire on any Christian who depends upon it for his own life or the life of his local church. A Christian must choose to operate on God's wisdom. Divine wisdom is believing what the Lord says is right and acting upon it. But this will cause the world to call the Christian a fool. Every Christian must come to the place where he renounces the world and worldly reasoning as having anything of value for him. It was said of Moses who was immersed in the worldly wisdom of Egypt, "**He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward**" (Heb. 11:25-26+). Jesus said the same thing another way, "**For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it**" (Mk. 8:35+). Paul's point is that worldly wisdom has no place in the local church. When worldly wisdom comes into the local church, there is always division, strife and conflict as there was at Corinth. It really does not make any difference what the world says or does, for its wisdom will be proven to be utterly faulty in the end. So then, no more boasting about men! How do we boast in ministers? We isolate them in our thinking and exalt them above other preachers in such a way we will only follow the preacher we like, even if the ones we dislike are truly preaching the Word of God. We soon begin to see our particular preacher as our only source of blessing and we depend upon him rather than on the Lord. We find ourselves leaning upon a man for spiritual strength, guidance and courage. ([1 Corinthians 3:18-4:5 Stewards Of The Gospel](#))

As the hymn writer so aptly said,

["I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold.](#)

I'd rather have Him than riches untold.

I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands.

I'd rather be led by his nail pierced hands

than to be the king of a vast domain

And be held in sin's dread sway.

I'd rather have Jesus than anything

this world affords today."

**Albert Barnes** - This admonition is of special applicability to ministers of the gospel. They are in special danger on the subject; and it has been by their yielding themselves so much to the power of speculative philosophy, that parties have been formed in the church, and that the gospel has been so much corrupted..([Barnes Notes](#))

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**Knows** (1097)([ginosko](#)) refers to experiential knowledge, not merely the accumulation of known facts and has many shades of meaning in the NT, in this context meaning to comprehend, to come to know, to perceive. As [Wuest](#) paraphrases 1 Cor 2:8 the sense is "known in an experiential way." **Louw-Nida** says that in 1 Cor 2:8 [ginosko](#) means "to come to an understanding as the result of ability to experience and learn." Of course the only way a sinner can come to that understanding is by the divine bestowal of beneficent grace.

**Reasonings** (thoughts, speculations) (1261)([dialogismos](#) from [diá](#) = through or as a preposition to intensify meaning of + [logizomai](#) = reckon, take an inventory, conclude; source of our English *dialogue*) means literally reasoning through and so to think or reason with thoroughness and completeness, think out carefully, reason thoroughly, consider carefully, weighing. In the Greek writings [dialogismos](#) described the thinking of a man deliberating with himself. It refers to calculated consideration (good or bad as discussed below). It pictures one deliberating with one's self which conveys the basic meaning of inner reasoning. **Friberg** - 1) in a positive sense thought (process), reasoning, design (Lk 2.35); (2) in a negative sense doubt, dispute, argument (Lk 24.38)

**Wise** (4680)([sophos](#)) is the practical application of acquired knowledge. Friberg says *sophos* generally describes "acquired intelligence characterized by the ability to use knowledge for correct behavior. Jesus uses **sophos** to describe worldly wisdom (Mt 11:25; cp Lk 10:21, 1Co 1:19-20), emphasizing that what the world refers to as "**wise**" does not allow one to see spiritual truth. In Ro 1:14, Paul refers to the Greeks as the "**wise**" (although not in spiritual matters). Paul then refers to self-deceived persons who profess they are **wise**, (Ro 1:22), but in fact have jettisoned the clear evidence (Ro 1:19-20) of the natural revelation of God (and mock the truth of a Creator and substitute the lie of Evolution). Used 19x in NT - Mt. 11:25; Mt. 23:34; Lk. 10:21; Ro 1:14; Ro 1:22; Ro 16:19; Ro 16:27; 1 Co. 1:19; 1 Co. 1:20; 1 Co. 1:25; 1 Co. 1:26; 1 Co. 1:27; 1 Co. 3:10; 1 Co. 3:18; 1 Co. 3:19; 1 Co. 3:20; 1 Co. 6:5; Eph. 5:15; Jas. 3:13

**Useless** (vain)(3152)([mataios](#) from **maten** = groundless, invalid, cf cognate verb [mataioo](#)) means vain, empty, devoid of force, and refers to the ineffectiveness or uselessness of something in this passage the **reasonings of the wise**. It denotes the appearance of something as distinct from its essence, and it suggests the "deceptive" quality of something; This adjective describes an ineffectual attempt to do something or an unsuccessful effort to attain something. **Mataios** emphasizes aimlessness or the leading to no object or end and thus is used to describe false gods or idols in contrast to the true God. **Colin Brown** writes that **mataios** "denotes a person who falls short of God's standard and human norms. His life is illusory, motiveless, aimless, scandalous and foolish " (NIDNTT). Used 6v in NT - Acts 14:15; 1 Co. 3:20; 1 Co. 15:17; Titus 3:9; Jas. 1:26; 1 Pet. 1:18

### 1 Corinthians 3:21 So then **let no one boast** in men. For all things belong to you,

Amplified - So let no one exult proudly concerning men [boasting of having this or that man as a leader], for all things are yours,

Wuest - Wherefore, let no one continue to be boasting in men, for all things are yours, ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

NET 1 Corinthians 3:21 So then, no more boasting about mere mortals! For everything belongs to you,

NLT 1 Corinthians 3:21 So don't boast about following a particular human leader. For everything belongs to you--

ESV 1 Corinthians 3:21 So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours,

NIV 1 Corinthians 3:21 So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours,

GNT 1 Corinthians 3:21 στε μηδε ς καυχ σθω ν νθρ ποις· π ντα γ ρ μ ν στιν,

KJV 1 Corinthians 3:21 Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours;

YLT 1 Corinthians 3:21 So then, let no one glory in men, for all things are yours,

ASV 1 Corinthians 3:21 Wherefore let no one glory in men. For all things are yours;

CSB 1 Corinthians 3:21 So no one should boast in human leaders, for everything is yours--

NKJ 1 Corinthians 3:21 Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours:

NRS 1 Corinthians 3:21 So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours,

NAB 1 Corinthians 3:21 So let no one boast about human beings, for everything belongs to you,

NJB 1 Corinthians 3:21 So there is to be no boasting about human beings: everything belongs to you,

GWN 1 Corinthians 3:21 So don't brag about people. Everything belongs to you.

BBE 1 Corinthians 3:21 So let no one take pride in men. For all things are yours;

- **let no one boast in men:** 1Co 3:4-7 1:12-17 4:6 Jer 9:23,24
- **For all things belong to you:** Ro 4:13 8:28,32 2Co 4:5,15 Rev 21:7
- 1 Corinthians 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passages:

1 Corinthians 1:29+ so that no man may **boast** before God.

1 Corinthians 1:31+ so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO **BOASTS**, **BOAST** IN THE LORD."

1 Corinthians 4:6+ Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, **so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.**

## PROPER VIEW OF SPIRITUAL LEADERS

**So then** ([hoste](#)) - So that, accordingly, thus, so that.

**Albert Barnes** - These considerations (PRECEDING CONTEXT) should lead us to live above contention, and the fondness of party. Sect and party in the church are not formed by the love of the pure and simple gospel, but by the love of some philosophical opinion, or by an admiration of the wisdom, talents, learning, eloquence, or success of some Christian teacher. Against this the apostle would guard us; and the considerations presented in this chapter should elevate us above all the causes of contention and the love of sect, and teach us to love as brothers all who love our Lord Jesus Christ. ([Barnes Notes](#))

**Let no one boast in men** - NET = "no more boasting about mere mortals." **No one** is [medeis](#) which means absolutely no one, not even one whoever he may be. This is not a suggestion from Paul, but a commandment from the Spirit to stop boasting as they were clearly doing. Obedience to this command would enable them to overcome the church divisions that were occurring. The command is [present imperative with a negative](#) and the only way these fleshly men and women would be able to stop boasting in men was to learn to daily [depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#). The same is true of us in regard to our fleshly tendency to boast, whether it be in other men, things, ourselves, etc, etc. Boasting is a manifestation or outworking of pride, which is our root problem. It's the BIG "I" smack dab in the middle of the word "sin" and interestingly is also the middle letter of "pride!" Don't say the devil made you do it! We have plenty of devilish deception in our old flesh to energize boasting for the rest of our days on earth! Paul has already given the perfect cure/antidote for the poison of boasting "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD." (1 Cor 1:31+).

**THOUGHT** - We are more excited about being with the influential and famous of this world than about being with God. We value the gifts and honors of men more than the gifts and honors God gives. How we need to hear, let no one glory in men! (Guzik)

**Kistemaker** - The point of Paul's directive is to not boast in men, be they Paul, Apollos, or Cephas. In 1:31, Paul quoted from the Scriptures to bolster his argument and said: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord" (Jer. 9:24). Now he gives the negative side of the same exhortation by telling the readers not to glory in the achievements of human beings. God grants his bountiful gifts to his people, and in their complete dependence on him they are unable to boast in themselves. They must acknowledge that God, not man, rules the world and everything in it.

**Charles Hodge** - To "boast about" any person or thing is to trust in him or it as the ground of confidence or as the source of honor or blessedness. It is to regard ourselves as blessed because of our relationship to it. Thus people are said to boast about the Lord or the cross because God, or Christ as crucified, is regarded as the ground of confidence and the source of blessedness. Others are said to glory in the flesh, in the law, or even in themselves. The apostle has shown that ministers are mere servants and nothing in themselves, and that the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God; now he draws the inference that they are not the ground of the believer's confidence. The Corinthians did boast about men when they said, "I follow Paul," "I follow Apollos," "I follow Cephas." They forgot their own dignity when they regarded as masters those who were their servants. ([1 Corinthians 3 Commentary](#))

**Boast** (exult, glory) ([2744](#))([kauchaomai](#) akin to **aucheo** = boast + **euchomai** = pray to God <> **auchen** = neck which vain persons are apt to carry in proud manner) means to boast over a privilege or possession. The idea is to take pride in something. This verb was used in the Septuagint in the OT of any proud & exulting joy. Uses in the letters to the Corinthians (especially the **second** letter) - 1 Co. 1:29; 1 Co. 1:31; 1 Co. 3:21; 1 Co. 4:7; 2 Co. 5:12; 2 Co. 7:14; 2 Co. 9:2; 2 Co. 10:8; 2 Co. 10:13; 2 Co. 10:15; 2 Co. 10:16; 2 Co. 10:17; 2 Co. 11:12; 2 Co. 11:16; 2 Co. 11:18; 2 Co. 11:30; 2 Co. 12:1; 2 Co. 12:5; 2 Co. 12:6; 2 Co. 12:9

**For** ([gar](#) - term of explanation) - He explains why we should not boast.

**All things belong to you** - Amplified = "or that man as a leader], for all things are yours." This seems to be a sudden shift of focus from the previous negative command (don't boast) to a positive truth that **all things belong** to the saints at Corinth (and to all saints of all time).

**Guzik** explains **all things belong to you** this way - To say I am of Paul or I am of Apollos is to have a view that is too narrow, too constricted. Both Paul and Apollos belong to you; the whole universe is yours in Christ.

**Jack Arnold** - Paul's point is obvious—as heirs of all things in Christ, Christians possess even the ministers of the gospel. All

ministers belong to and serve the church; therefore, we should never claim to follow just one particular minister. These Corinthians were limiting themselves by clinging to only one minister. God has given many teachers and preachers to the Body of Christ, the church, to build it up. Instead of enriching themselves, these Corinthians were impoverishing themselves by following one particular minister in preacher worship which is a form of idolatry. Idolatry is putting anything or anyone above Jesus Christ the Lord. God has told us He will never share His glory with any mere man. These Corinthians did not belong to any human leader. They belonged only to Christ and owed allegiance only to Him. By exalting human leaders, these Corinthians were acting like their own masters rather than as people who belonged to the Master, Jesus Christ. All of us must stop exalting ministers and see them as mere men with a special calling from God who are appointed to serve God and the church. ([1 Corinthians 3:18-4:5 Stewards Of The Gospel](#))

**Knofel Staton** - Instead of saying, "I am of Paul," or , "I am of Apollos," We say, "I am of the Baptists," "I am of the Methodists," "I am of the Assembly of God," "I am of the Church of Christ," "I am of the Presbyterians." And then we build our fences so high that none of us can see the other, and we make our doors so thick that none will walk through and associate with the others as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. We have come full circle. We are living out today the seed of what the Corinthians started. They were not divided into separate groups, but we are today. We are so sharply divided that many of us do not believe that there are any Christians in any other group. We believe that all things that belong to God are ours and no one else's ([1 Corinthians](#)).

**Hodges** explains **all things belong to you** this way - The amplification of these words, given in the next verse, shows that they are to be taken in their widest sense. "The universe is yours. How unworthy it is, then, for you to boast about men." Paul often appeals to the dignity and destiny of the church as a motive to right action. Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? (1 Cor 6:2). There are two senses in which we may understand the declaration that all things are yours. 1. It means that all things are designed to promote the interests of the church. The consummation of the work of redemption is the great end to which all things are directed and to which they are to be made subservient. 2. The church is the "heir of the world" (Romans 4:13). All things are given to Christ as the head of the church and to the church in him. His people are to reign with him (Romans 8:17), and the glory that the Father gave him, he gives to them (John 17:22). The church that is to be exalted like this is not any external society with its hierarchy; nor is it the body of poor, imperfect believers as they are now, who for their own good are despised and downtrodden. But it is the consummated church to be formed out of materials now so unpromising. The people of God, however, should not be unmindful of their high destiny, nor act unworthily of it. ([1 Corinthians 3 Commentary](#))

**Kistemaker** explains it this way - God's people must see Christ's handiwork in every aspect of creation; they should glorify him for everything he has made and constantly upholds by his power. By using the expression all things, Paul includes the ministry of those who preach and teach the gospel. Thus he exhorts the Corinthians to see that the Lord gives them everything, both spiritual and material. God's people indeed possess all things.

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### **Bob Utley's [SPECIAL TOPICS \(LIST\): BOASTING](#)**

These Greek terms **kauchaomai**, **kauchēma**, and **kauchēsis** are used about thirty five times by Paul and only twice in the rest of the NT (both in James). Its predominate use is in I and II Corinthians.

#### **There are two main truths connected to boasting.**

1. no flesh shall glory/boast before God (cf. 1 Cor. 1:29; Eph. 2:9)
2. believers should glory in the Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 1:31; 2 Cor. 10:17, which is an allusion to Jer. 9:23–24)

#### **Therefore, there is appropriate and inappropriate boasting/glorying (pride).**

##### **1. appropriate**

- a. in the hope of glory (cf. Ro 4:2)
- b. in God through the Lord Jesus (cf. Ro 5:11)
- c. in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ (Paul's main theme, cf. 1 Cor. 1:17–18; Gal. 6:14)
- d. Paul boasts in
  - (1) his ministry without compensation (cf. 1 Cor. 9:15, 16; 2 Cor. 10:12)
  - (2) his authority from Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 10:8, 12)
  - (3) his not boasting in other men's labor (as some at Corinth were, cf. 2 Cor. 10:15)
  - (4) his racial heritage (as others were doing at Corinth, cf. 2 Cor. 11:17; 12:1, 5, 6)
  - (5) his churches
    - (a) Corinth (2 Cor. 7:4, 14; 8:24; 9:2; 11:10)
    - (b) Thessalonica (cf. 2 Thess. 1:4)
  - (6) his confidence in God's comfort and deliverance (cf. 2 Cor. 1:12)

##### **2. inappropriate**

- a. in relation to Jewish heritage (cf. Rom. 2:17, 23; 3:27; Gal. 6:13)
- b. some in the Corinthian church were boasting

- (1) in men (cf. 1 Cor. 3:21)
- (2) in wisdom (cf. 1 Cor. 4:7)
- (3) in freedom (cf. 1 Cor. 5:6)

c. false teachers tried to boast in the church at Corinth (cf. 2 Cor. 11:12)

**1 Corinthians 3:22 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,**

Amplified - Whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas (Peter), or the universe or life or death, or the immediate and threatening present or the [subsequent and uncertain] future—all are yours,

Wuest - whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the existing order of material things or life or death or present things or things about to come, all belong to you, ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

NET 1 Corinthians 3:22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future. Everything belongs to you,

NLT 1 Corinthians 3:22 whether Paul or Apollos or Peter, or the world, or life and death, or the present and the future. Everything belongs to you,

ESV 1 Corinthians 3:22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future-- all are yours,

NIV 1 Corinthians 3:22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future--all are yours,

GNT 1 Corinthians 3:22 ε τε Πα λος ε τε πολλ ς ε τε Κηφ ς, ε τε κ σμος ε τε ζω ε τε θ νατος, ε τε νεστ τα ε τε μ λλοντα· π ντα μ ν,

KJV 1 Corinthians 3:22 Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours;

YLT 1 Corinthians 3:22 whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things about to be -- all are yours,

ASV 1 Corinthians 3:22 whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours;

CSB 1 Corinthians 3:22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come-- everything is yours,

NKJ 1 Corinthians 3:22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come-- all are yours.

NRS 1 Corinthians 3:22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future-- all belong to you,

NAB 1 Corinthians 3:22 Paul or Apollos or Kephas, or the world or life or death, or the present or the future: all belong to you,

NJB 1 Corinthians 3:22 whether it is Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, the world, life or death, the present or the future -- all belong to you;

GWN 1 Corinthians 3:22 Whether it is Paul, Apollos, Cephas, the world, life or death, present or future things, everything belongs to you.

BBE 1 Corinthians 3:22 Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours;

- **Paul:** 1Co 3:5-8 9:19-22 2Co 4:5 Eph 4:11,12
- **or the:** Ro 8:37-39 Php 1:21
- 1 Corinthians 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**AMPLIFICATION OF "ALL"**

## THINGS" BELONGING TO THE CHURCH

### Related Passage:

Ro 8:37-39+ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world (kosmos) or life (zoe) or death (thanatos) or things present (enistemi in perfect tense) or things to come** - Paul had just stated **All things belong to you** in 1 Cor 3:21 and now he begins to enumerate those **things**. **Paul or Apollos or Cephas** echoes his previous mention in 1 Cor 1:12+. And as stated in 1 Cor 4:1 these men were "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" and were to minister to the spiritual needs of the people. Therefore in that sense these leaders belong to the Corinthians.

**Gordon D. Fee** has an interesting comment noting that the five things (**world, life, death, things present, things to come**) "are the ultimate tyrannies of human existence, to which people are in lifelong bondage as slaves." (NICNT-1Cor)

**Kistemaker** - Paul says that all things (**world, life, death, things present, things to come**) belong to the believers, because they are not slaves but possessors.

How does **life** belong to us? In Colossians 3:4+ Paul writes "Christ our **life**" (cf Col 1:27+, 2 Pe 1:3-4+, Jn 14:23 = Father and Son in us!) and Christ Himself said "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10b) Only believers can truly live life as God meant it to be live. Now we are still hampered by our residual fallen flesh, but we can still experience abundant life in Christ. But one day when our body is glorified, we will experience a dimension of life that in beyond our wildest imagination and expectation, for that is our sure hope (cf 1 John 3:2-3+).

How is **death** ours? In Php 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." So for a believer, our death is not our loss, but our gain, another one of those things that is foolishness to the natural man (1 Cor 2:14)! Oh, blessed divine paradoxes! Beloved, the worst that can happen to us on this earth is really the best thing that can happen to us! (cf Php 1:23-24+).

**Albert Barnes** - Christians have an interest in all things that can go to promote their happiness. Life and death, things present and things to come - all shall tend to advance their happiness, and promote their salvation. Christians have nothing to fear in **death**. **Death** is theirs, and shall be a blessing to them. Its sting is taken away; and it shall introduce them to heaven. What have they to fear? Why should they be alarmed? Why afraid to die? Why unwilling to depart and to be with Christ? ([Barnes Notes](#))

**Things present** refers to our life on earth which as explained above is lived now in Christ and so it is good and meant to be abundant. (See also Ro 8:37-39+)

**Kistemaker** adds on **things present** - Christians possess the **present**, in which God rules. Nothing happens by chance, but rather all things (e.g., health and sickness, joy and woe) come from his hand. (NTC-1Cor)

**Things to come** surely refers to our glorious future forever with Christ in glorified bodies, where there is no pain, no sorrow, no sin but only eternal bliss and perfect eternal communion with Him to Whom we belong, Christ Jesus.

Regarding our relation to **death** Paul elaborated on this near the end of this letter writing

But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "**DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP** in victory. 55 "O **DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?**" 56 The sting of **death** is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57 but **thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**(1 Cor 15:54-57+)

**MacArthur** on **Paul or Apollos or Cephas** - Paul had spoken strongly against special loyalties to church leaders (1 Cor 1:12–14; 3:4–9), the same three leaders he mentions here. But now the emphasis is different. Although those men should not have been specially elevated or revered, they were sources of great help and blessing.....The point Paul makes in 3:22a is that we should rejoice in and profit from all the faithful leaders God sends us us, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas. If the Corinthians had been careful to understand and follow what all three of those men taught, rather than, for instance, how they looked or spoke, the church would have been united, not divided. Their view of others had to be corrected....Not only are all godly leaders ours, but everything else from God is ours as well. As believers we are "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ" (Rom 8:17). ([MNTC-1 Cor](#))

**MacArthur** on **the world** belonging to believers - the world (kosmos) is ours, even now. His main point is that, in the millennial kingdom and throughout eternity in the new heavens and new earth, we will possess the earth in a richer way (Matt. 5:5; Rev. 21).

But even now the universe is a possession of God's people. It is ours. Our heavenly Father made it for us. It is still in the grip of the evil one (1 John 5:19), but it will someday and forever belong to us, not to him. (Dan 7)...When we fully inherit the world, with Jesus on the throne, it will be perfect, and even more ours. In the meanwhile, this present world already belongs to us, with its wonders and glories, imperfections and disappointments. The believer can appreciate the world as no unbeliever can. We know where it came from, why it was made, why we are on it, and what its final destiny will be. We can sing with certainty as well as joy, "This is my Father's world." And we are His heirs. ([MNTC-1 Cor](#))

Daniel 7 makes a similar declaration

He (ANTICHRIST) will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time (AKA THE 3.5 YEAR GREAT TRIBULATION). 26 'But the court will sit for judgment, and his (ANTICHRIST'S) dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever (Rev 19:19-20+). 27 'Then (WHEN 3.5 YEAR TRIBULATION ENDED BY RETURN OF CHRIST) the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of **all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.**' (Daniel 7:25-27+)

**ILLUSTRATION** - **Joseph Parker** spoke to world belonging to him writing that "I began my ministry in Banbury, and my upper window looked over the vast estate of a wealthy man. It was I, really, who inherited that estate. Oh, I did not own a foot of it, but it was all mine. The owner came down to see it once a year, but I walked its miles day after day."

**MacArthur** explains why Paul has delineated **all things** that belong to the Corinthians (and us) asking "So why should we divide ourselves into factions? No man is the source of any of this inheritance, so there is no reason to "boast in men" (v. 21a)."

**Charles Hodges** - The **all things** mentioned here include: **1. The ministry**, which belongs to the church and is designed for its edification. The church does not belong to the ministry, as a kingdom belongs to a king, but the reverse. **2. The world** ([kosmos](#)) in its widest sense. The present order of things is maintained and aimed at promoting the great work of redemption. **3. Life and death.** This means not merely that the question whether the people of God live or die is determined with reference to their own good, but also that life and death are dispensed and administered so as best to fulfill God's plans for the church. The greatest men of the world—kings, statesmen and heroes, ministers, individual believers and unbelievers—live or die **in whatever way best serves the interests of Christ's kingdom.** **4. The present and the future.** What is meant is no temporary subjection of all things to the church. God plans the permanent exaltation of the redeemed. ([1 Corinthians 3 Commentary](#))

**Guzik** observes that " even death is "ours"; it is our servant, not our master! Death may be to us as the angel who touched Peter in Acts 12, causing his chains to fall off, and leading him through a gate that opens by itself, into real freedom.

**All things belong to you** - This is like a divine exclamation point, repeating **all things belong to you** in 1 Cor 3:21. How could this be true? Because of the next statement. We belong to Christ and He to God and God is the Owner of everything. So by association, by an unbreakable covenant bond, we are "omni-possessors!" The question of course is why do we so often live like spiritual paupers?

**Arnold** - There is no limit to a believer's possessions in Christ. Paul's point is obvious—as heirs of all things in Christ, Christians possess even the ministers of the gospel. All ministers belong to and serve the church; therefore, we should never claim to follow just one particular minister. These Corinthians were limiting themselves by clinging to only one minister. God has given many teachers and preachers to the Body of Christ, the church, to build it up. Instead of enriching themselves, these Corinthians were impoverishing themselves by following one particular minister in preacher worship which is a form of idolatry. Idolatry is putting anything or anyone above Jesus Christ the Lord. God has told us He will never share His glory with any mere man. These Corinthians did not belong to any human leader. They belonged only to Christ and owed allegiance only to Him. By exalting human leaders, these Corinthians were acting like their own masters rather than as people who belonged to the Master, Jesus Christ. All of us must stop exalting ministers and see them as mere men with a special calling from God who are appointed to serve God and the church. ([1 Corinthians 3:18-4:5 Stewards Of The Gospel](#))

**Staton** writes that this problem of "preacher preference" in Corinth is just as real today as it was in the first century - Instead of saying, "I am of Paul," or , "I am of Apollos," We say, "I am of the Baptists," "I am of the Methodists," "I am of the Assembly of God," "I am of the Church of Christ," "I am of the Presbyterians." And then we build our fences so high that none of us can see the other, and we make our doors so thick that none will walk through and associate with the others as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. We have come full circle. We are living out today the seed of what the Corinthians started. They were not divided into separate groups, but we are today. We are so sharply divided that many of us do not believe that there are any Christians in any other group. We believe that all things that belong to God are ours and no one else's (Borrow [First Corinthians : unlocking the Scriptures for you](#)).

## 1 Corinthians 3:23 and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.

Amplified - And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

Wuest - and as for you, you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God. [Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

NET 1 Corinthians 3:23 and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

NLT 1 Corinthians 3:23 and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

ESV 1 Corinthians 3:23 and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

NIV 1 Corinthians 3:23 and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

GNT 1 Corinthians 3:23 με ς δ Χριστο , Χριστ ς δ θεο .

KJV 1 Corinthians 3:23 And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

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NKJ 1 Corinthians 3:23 And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

NRS 1 Corinthians 3:23 and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

NAB 1 Corinthians 3:23 and you to Christ, and Christ to God.

NJB 1 Corinthians 3:23 but you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God.

GWN 1 Corinthians 3:23 You belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

BBE 1 Corinthians 3:23 And you are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

- **you:** 1Co 6:19,20 1Co 7:22 1 Cor 15:23 John 17:9,10 Ro 14:8 2Co 10:7 Ga 3:29 5:24
- and Christ: 1Co 8:6 11:3 Mt 17:5 Joh 17:18,21 Eph 1:10 Php 2:8-11
- 1 Corinthians 3 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### Related Passages:

1 Corinthians 6:19; 20+ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that **you are not your own?** 20 For **you have been bought with a price** (RANSOMED WITH PRECIOUS BLOOD - 1 Pe 1:18-19 +): therefore **glorify** ([aorist imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) God in your body.

1 Corinthians 7:22+; For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the **Lord's freedman**; likewise he who was called while free, is **Christ's slave**.

1 Corinthians 15:23+ But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that **those who are Christ's** at His coming,

Romans 14:8+ for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

## **BELIEVERS ARE NOT THEIR OWN BUT BELONG TO CHRIST**

**And you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God** - You is plural so he is speaking of the Corinthians as a body, the Body of Christ. There are actually no verbs in the Greek - "you of Christ, and Christ of God." **Guzik** has a great comment "**All are yours:** This is Christian liberty. And **you are Christ's:** This is Christian responsibility." Yes, they belonged to Christ and were in Christ and their exalted position called for holy practice, including laying aside party factionalism.

**Kistemaker** on the significance of **belong to Christ** - Hence they live for Christ, whose they are and whom they serve, and not for parties within the church. Let no one individually say, "I am of Christ" (1:12), for as a body they all belong to Christ. With this



summary, Paul effectively puts an end to the factionalism in the church. Sixteenth-century theologian [Zacharias Ursinus](#) posed the pertinent question, “What is your only comfort in life and death?” And he replied to his own query, “That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and death—to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.”

**MacArthur** explains Paul's reason for emphasizing this great truth - The greatest possible motive for maintaining the unity of the Spirit and for avoiding church division is knowing that we belong to Christ and that Christ belongs to God. Because we all belong to Him, we all belong to each other. (cf John 17:9–10, 21–23). We are tied together in an eternal oneness with God the Father and Jesus Christ, and thus with each other in them. How can men who are so much one, be divided? It begins with failure to understand the reality of our spiritual unity in the One who is our Possessor. With a common Possessor and possessions, common leaders and teachers, and common dependence on Scripture, there should be no cause for factions and disunity.

Kistemaker on Christ belongs to God - The second part of the verse is a theological statement: “And Christ is of God.” Christ has been sent forth by God to accomplish his mediatorial work in this world. Through Christ, God is the ultimate source of life for all his people. Christ is subject to God the Father, as Paul explains elsewhere in this epistle: “The Son himself shall be subjected to the one who subjected all things to him so that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28, author’s translation). Christians possess all things in Christ, who derives all things from God.

Near the end of his letter Paul gives his commentary on the phrase Christ belongs to God -

For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. **28 When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.** (1 Cor 15:27-28+)

**Charles Hodge** - As **all things** (1 Cor 3:21) are subject to the church and belong to it, the church itself can be subject and belong to none but Christ. **Therefore, it can boast only about him.** As the church is subject only to Christ, so Christ is subject only to God. The Scriptures speak about a threefold subordination of Christ: 1. A subordination of the second person of the Trinity to the first in mode of subsistence and operation. This is perfectly consistent with their identity of substance and their equality in power and glory. 2. The voluntary subordination of the Son in his humbling himself to be found in appearance as a man and becoming obedient to death and therefore subject to the limitations and infirmities of our nature. 3. The subordination of the incarnate Son of God in the work of redemption and as the head of the church. He who is by nature equal with God becomes, as it were, subject to him. The passages most directly parallel with this one are 11:3 and 15:28, but the same truth is taught in Philippians 2:5–11 and Hebrews 1:3 and many other passages. ([1 Corinthians 3 Commentary](#))

## The Carnal Christian

### Ernest C Reisinger

#### Introduction

Many who regularly occupy church pews, fill church rolls, and are intellectually acquainted with the facts of the gospel never strike one blow for Christ. They seem to be at peace with his enemies. They have no quarrel with sin and, apart from a few sentimental expressions about Christ, there is no biblical evidence that they have experienced anything of the power of the gospel in their lives. Yet in spite of the evidence against them, they consider themselves to be just what their teachers teach them -- that they are 'Carnal Christians'. And as carnal Christians they believe they will go to heaven, though perhaps not first-class, and with few rewards.

That something is seriously wrong in lives which reveal such features will readily be admitted by most readers of these pages; no argument is needed to prove it. But the most serious aspect of this situation is too often not recognized at all. The chief mistake is not the carelessness of these church-goers, it is the error of their teachers who, by preaching the theory of 'the carnal Christian', have led them to believe that there are three groups of men, -- the unconverted man, the 'carnal Christian' and the 'spiritual Christian'.

My purpose in this booklet is to argue that this classification is wrong and to set out the positive, historic, and biblical answer to this 'carnal Christian' teaching. The argument from Church history is not unimportant, for it is a fact that less than two-hundred years ago this teaching was unknown in the churches of North America, but I am concerned to rest my case on an honest statement of the teaching of the Bible. I have written after study, private meditation and prayer, and after using many of the old respected commentaries of another day, but my appeal is to the Word of God and it is in the light of that authority that I ask the reader to consider all that follows.

I must also confess that I am writing as one who, for many years, held and taught the teaching which I am now convinced is erroneous and which has many dangerous implications. As one who has deep respect for many who hold this position, I am not going to attack personalities, but to deal with principles, and with the interpretation of the particular passages of Scripture on which the teaching is built.

In matters of controversy it must ever be kept in mind that a Christian's experience may be genuine even though his understanding of divine truth is tainted with error or ignorance. The opposite is also possible -- a man's intellectual understanding may be good and his experience poor. I pray that if I am in error on this or any other doctrine I shall be corrected before I leave this world. I trust I am willing ever to be a learner of divine truth.

I know that one of my motives is the same as that of many who hold this erroneous view, namely, to advance biblical holiness and to seek to 'adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour'.

To accomplish my purpose it is of the greatest importance that the whole subject should be set on a proper foundation. I do not want to make a caricature of the view of others and then demonstrate success by tearing it apart. I shall also seek to avoid disproportionate and one-sided statements. The danger that we may 'darken counsel by words without knowledge' is still with us. I pray that this effort will elicit truth and that the existence of varied opinions will lead us all to search the Scriptures more, to pray more, and to be diligent in our endeavours to learn what is 'the mind of the Spirit'.

My greatest difficulty will be to achieve brevity because this subject is so closely related to, and interwoven with the main doctrine of the Bible, particularly with justification and sanctification, the chief blessings of the new covenant. The subject therefore involves a right understanding of what the gospel really is and what it does to a person when applied efficaciously by the Spirit. Our view of this matter will also affect our judgment of the relationship of the Ten Commandments to the Christian in the area of sanctification, and of the biblical doctrine of assurance.

Some of the fundamental questions which need to be faced are these:

Are we sanctified passively, that is, 'by faith' only, without obedience to the law of God and Christ? If sanctification is passive -- a view represented by the slogan 'Let go and let God' -- then how do we understand such apostolic statements as 'I fight', 'I run', 'I keep under my body', 'let us cleanse ourselves', 'let us labour', 'let us lay aside every weight'? Surely these statements do not express a passive condition, nor do they indicate that by one single act we may possess the experience of 'victory' and thus become spiritual and mature Christians.

Does an appeal to the so-called 'carnal Christian' to become a 'spiritual Christian' minimize the real conversion experience by magnifying a supposed second experience, by whatever name it may be called -- 'higher life', 'deeper life', 'Spirit-filled life', 'triumphant living', 'receiving Christ as Lord, and not merely as Saviour', and so on? The words we read in 2 Corinthians 5:17, 'Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new', do not refer to a second experience but rather to what happens when any real conversion occurs.

Has the 'spiritual Christian' finished growing in grace? If not, what is he to be called as he continues to grow in grace? Do we need to make yet another class whose members are the 'super-spiritual Christians'? 4. Who is to decide who the carnal Christians are, and exactly what standard is to be used in determining this? Do the 'spiritual Christians' decide who the 'carnal Christians' are? Does a church or preacher decide where the line is to be drawn that divides the two classes or categories? Since all Christians have sin remaining in them, and since they sin every day, what degree of sin or what particular sins classify a person as a 'carnal Christian'?

Do not all Christians sometimes act like natural men in some area of their lives?

Do not the inward sins, such as envy, malice, covetousness, lasciviousness (which includes immorality on the mental level) demonstrate carnality as much as do the outward and visible manifestations of certain other sins?

In Romans 8:1-9 there is a division stated, but it is not between carnal and spiritual Christians. It is a division between those who walk after the flesh (the unregenerate) and those who walk after the Spirit (they that are Christ's). There is no third category.

Again, in Galatians 5:17-24 we have only two classes or categories -- those that do the works of the flesh and those that are led by the Spirit. There is no third or fourth class or group.

My purpose, then, in these pages is to contend that the division of Christians into two groups or classes is unbiblical. I want also to

show the dangerous implications and present-day results of this teaching.

The interpretation that I will seek to establish is a result of studying the proven and respected commentators of former days, such as, Matthew Henry, Matthew Poole, John Gill, and John Calvin; and theologians such as Charles Hodge (of the old Princeton Seminary), James P. Boyce (founder of the first Southern Baptist Seminary), Robert L. Dabney (the great theologian of old Union Seminary, Virginia) and James H. Thornwell (distinguished Southern theologian who was Professor of Theology at Columbia, South Carolina). I have also examined the writings of John Bunyan and searched the old Confessions and Catechisms, such as The Heidelberg Catechism, and Westminster Confession (that mother of all Confessions), the Baptist Confession of 1689 (The London Confession, later known as the Philadelphia Confession), and the Declaration of Faith of the Southern Baptist Church. In all these sources there is not one trace of the belief that there are three classes of men. All of them have much to say about carnality in Christians, and about the biblical doctrine of sanctification and its relationship to justification, but there is no hint of the possibility of dividing men into 'unregenerate', 'carnal' and 'spiritual' categories. If the sources I have named had come across the 'carnal Christian' theory, I believe that with one voice they would have warned their readers, 'Be not carried away with divers and strange doctrines' (Heb. 13: 9).

I confess that I take up my pen in this controversy with deep sorrow. Although the teaching that I wish to expose is so relatively new in the church, it is held by so many fine Christians, and taught by so many able and respected schools of the present day, that I can only approach my present undertaking with caution and anxiety.

We live in a day when there are so many books and such a variety of teaching on the subject of the Christian life that Christians are 'tossed to and fro', and liable to be 'carried about by every wind of doctrine' (Eph. 4:14). There is also the Athenian love of novelty and a distaste for the old, well-tested, and beaten paths of our forefathers. This excessive love of the new leads to an insatiable craving after any teaching which is sensational and exciting, especially to the feelings. But the old paths lead to a 'meek and quiet spirit' which the apostle Peter commends: 'But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price' (1 Peter 3: 4).

### **The Issue in Controversy**

At a church service that I attended recently, the preacher, a sincere minister, was expounding 1 Corinthians chapter 3, and he said to a large congregation, 'Now after you become a Christian you have another choice -- either to grow in grace, follow the Lord and become a spiritual Christian, or to remain a babe in Christ and live like natural men.' He used 1 Corinthians 3: 1 -- 4 to state that there were three categories of men -- the natural man, the spiritual man, and the carnal man. He described the carnal man as being like the natural man who was unconverted.

This is the essence of the 'carnal Christian' teaching. One reason why it is so widespread is that it has been popularized for many years in the notes of the Scofield Reference Bible. A statement from these notes will indicate the precise nature of the teaching: 'Paul divides men into three classes: "Natural" i.e. the Adamic Man, unrenewed through the new birth; "Spiritual" i.e. the renewed man as Spirit-filled and walking in the Spirit in full communion with God; "Carnal", "fleshly", i.e. the renewed man who, walking "after the flesh", remains a babe in Christ.' (Scofield Reference Bible, pp. 1213, 1214.)

It is very important to observe the two main things in this Scofield note. First, the division of men into three classes; second, we are told that one of these classes of men comprises the 'carnal', the 'fleshly', 'the babe(s) in Christ', 'who walk after the flesh'. To 'walk' implies the bent of their lives; their leaning or bias is in one direction, that is, towards carnality.

We ought not to miss three very salient and important facts about the teaching:

First, we note again that it divides all men into three classes or categories. With this fact none of its proponents disagree, though they may present it differently and apply it differently.

Second, one class or category is set out as containing the 'Christian' who 'walks after the flesh'. The centre of his life is self, and he is the same as the unrenewed man as far as the bent of his life is concerned.

Third, all those who accept this view use 1 Corinthians 3: 1 -- 4 to support it. Consequently, if it can be established that the preponderance of Scripture teaches only two classes or categories of men -- regenerate and unregenerate, converted and unconverted, those in Christ and those outside of Christ -- the 'carnal Christian' teaching would be confronted with an insurmountable objection. It would be in conflict with the whole emphasis of Scripture and of the New Testament in particular.

Before I turn to some of the errors and dangers of the 'carnal Christian' teaching it may be wise to indicate what I am not saying.

In this discussion of the 'carnal Christian' theory I am not overlooking the teaching of the Bible about sin in Christians, about babes in Christ, about growth in grace, about Christians who back-slide grievously, and about the divine chastisement which all Christians receive.

I acknowledge that there are babes in Christ. In fact there are not only babes in Christ, but there are different stages of 'babyhood' in understanding divine truth and in spiritual growth.

I also recognize that there is a sense in which Christians may be said to be carnal but I must add that there are different degrees of carnality. Every Christian is carnal in some area of his life at many times in his life. And in every Christian 'the flesh lusteth against the Spirit' (Gal. 5:17).

All the marks of Christianity are not equally apparent in all Christians. Nor are any of these marks manifest to the same degree in every period of any Christian's life. Love, faith, obedience, and devotion will vary in the same Christian in different periods of his Christian experience; in other words, there are many degrees of sanctification.

The Christian's progress in growth is not constant and undisturbed. There are many hills and valleys in the process of sanctification; and there are many stumblings, falls and crooked steps in the process of growth in grace.

There are examples in the Bible of grievous falls and carnality in the lives of true believers. Thus we have the warnings and the promises of temporal judgment and of chastisement by our heavenly Father.

These truths are all acknowledged and are not the point of this present discussion. The question we have to consider is: Does the Bible divide men into three categories? This is the issue at the heart of the 'carnal Christian' teaching.

The teaching that I am opposing involves nine serious errors:

### **1. The misuse of I Corinthians 3**

First: This 'carnal Christian' doctrine depends upon a wrong interpretation and application of 1 Corinthians 3:1-4, 'And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ... are ye not carnal?' To understand the true meaning of these words it should be remembered that 1 Corinthians is not primarily a doctrinal epistle. Like all Scripture it contains doctrine, but it was not written -- as was the Epistle to the Romans -- to lay doctrinal foundations. Paul's immediate concern in writing this Epistle was to deal with practical problems in a young church. In the third chapter, and earlier, he is dealing with the danger of division arising out of a wrong esteem for those from whom they heard the gospel. They were looking at second causes and forgetting the God to whom alone all glory belongs. Instead of saying, 'We are Christ's disciples' and recognizing their union in him, they were forming parties and saying, 'We are Paul's for he founded the church in our city'; or 'Apollon is more eloquent than Paul and he edifies us more'; or, 'We are of Peter'. Thus opposing parties were set up.

It is important to see that the whole context is dealing principally with this one problem of unwholesome division. However, it has a common root with all the other problems in 1 Corinthians -- the defrauding of one by another, the disorder at the Lord's Table, and so on. All the problems were the result of carnality, the outcome of that remaining principle of sin in all believers which Paul describes in Romans 7:21-23: "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

In endeavouring to understand how Paul thinks of those he addresses in 1 Corinthians 3 we must bear in mind the designation he gives to them in chapter 1. He says they are 'sanctified in Christ Jesus', they are recipients of 'the grace of God', enriched by Christ 'in all utterance, and in all knowledge' (1:2--5). They are rebuked in chapter 3, not for failing to attain to privileges which some Christians attain to, but for acting, despite their privileges, like babes and like the unregenerate in one area of their lives.

This is very different from saying that the Apostle here recognizes the existence of a distinct group of Christians who can be called 'carnal'. When Paul comes to speak of classes, he knows only two, as is clear in chapter 2 of this same Epistle where he divides men into 'natural' and 'spiritual', and says, 'But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man' (1 Cor. 2:14-15). Under the term natural the Apostle includes all those persons who are not partakers of the Spirit of God. If the Spirit of God has not given to them a new and higher nature then they remain what they are by their natural birth, namely, natural men.

The spiritual may be but babes in grace and babes in knowledge. Their faith may be weak. Their love may be in its early bud, their spiritual senses may be but little exercised, their faults may be many; but if 'the root of the matter' is in them and if they have passed from death unto life -- passed out of the region of nature into that which is beyond nature -- Paul puts them down in another class. They are all spiritual men although in some aspects of their behaviour they may temporarily fail to appear as such.

Certainly these Christians at Corinth were imperfectly sanctified, as indeed are all Christians to a greater or lesser degree. But Paul is not saying that they were characterized by carnality in every area of their lives. He is not expounding a general doctrine of carnality but reproving a specific out-cropping of carnality in one certain respect. When Paul does state a foundational truth respecting the position of all Christians it is in such words as, 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature', and for all who are 'in Christ' it is also true that, 'old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new' (2 Cor. 5:17). There is no place for two classes of Christians in Paul's letter to the church at Corinth, and indeed no place for it anywhere in the teaching of Scripture. To interpret 1 Corinthians 3:1--4 in such a way as to divide men into three classes is to violate a cardinal rule for the interpretation of Scripture, namely, that each single passage must be interpreted in the light of the whole. It was a wise saying of one of the church fathers, 'If you have one Scripture only on which to base an important doctrine or teaching you are most likely to find, on close examination, that you have none'.

## **2. New covenant blessings are separated**

Second: The 'carnal Christian' teaching divides the two basic blessings of the new covenant because it denies that one of them is experienced by all true Christians. Let me point out how basic the covenant is to Christianity. Jesus was the mediator of the new covenant -- Hebrews 8:6-10: 'But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises'. The New Testament preachers were ministers of the new covenant -- 2 Corinthians 3:5, 6: 'Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament (A.S.V. new covenant); not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.'

Every time we come to the Lord's table we are reminded of the blessings of the new covenant -- Luke 22: 20, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood...'

These facts are enough to establish the importance of the new covenant. But what are the two blessings of the new covenant? The answer is clearly seen in many scriptural statements:

'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah ... I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts ... I will forgive their iniquity, and will remember their sin no more'(Jer. 31:31 -- 34).

'For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them' (Ezek. 36: 24-27).

'Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more' (Heb. 10:15 -17).

It is important to note that this is one covenant with two inseparable parts -- the forgiveness of sins and a changed heart. When a sinner is reconciled to God something happens in the record of heaven, the blood of Christ covers his sins. Thus, the first blessing is the forgiveness of sins. But at the same time something happens on earth in the heart, a new nature is given.

From the above Scriptures we also learn that Christ purchased the benefits and blessings of the new covenant. And the Epistle to the Hebrews reminds us that the gospel which the apostles preached as the gospel of Christ was the gospel of the new covenant. Therefore, whatever else sinners may receive when they are savingly called by the gospel, they must come into the primary blessings of the new covenant, namely, the forgiveness of sins and a new heart.

Well, what is the forgiveness of sins? It is an essential part of the justification of a man before God. And what is a new heart? It is nothing less than sanctification begun. But the 'carnal Christian' teaching appeals to those who are supposed to be justified, as though a new heart and life are optional. Sanctification is spoken of as though it can be subsequent to the forgiveness of sins and so

people are led to believe that they are justified even though they are not being sanctified!

The truth is that we have no reason to believe that Christ's blood covers our sins in the record of heaven if the Spirit has not changed our hearts on earth. These two great blessings are joined together in the one covenant. The working of the Spirit and the cleansing of Christ's blood are inseparably joined in the application of God's salvation. Hence the teaching which calls for an act of submission or surrender (or whatever else it may be called) subsequent to conversion in order that the convert may live the spiritual life, cuts the living nerve of the new covenant. It separates what God has joined together.

### **3. Saving faith and spurious faith are not distinguished.**

The third major error is that this teaching does not distinguish between true, saving belief and the spurious belief which is mentioned in the following Scriptures: 'Many believed in his name ... But Jesus did not commit himself to them' John 2:23,24. 'Many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him' John 12:42,43. 'These have no root, which for a while believe' Luke 8:13. Simon Magus 'believed' and was baptized but his heart was 'not right in the sight of God' Acts 8:12-22. In other words, it was 'belief' without a changed heart and because this was Simon's condition Peter says he would perish unless he came to true repentance: he was 'in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity' (vs. 23). And the evidence that Simon Magus was indeed unsaved can be seen in his prayer. He, like all unregenerate people, was only concerned with the consequence of sin and made no request to be pardoned and cleansed from the impurity of sin. 'Pray ye,' he says to Peter, 'to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me'. Like the so-called 'carnal Christian' he wanted Jesus as a kind of hell-insurance policy but he did not ask for deliverance from sin!

In all these scriptural instances men 'believed'; they had 'faith', but it was not saving faith. And all 'carnal Christians' profess their faith but it is not always saving faith.

Charles Hodge, following the Scriptures, makes a clear distinction between the different kinds of faith,

- Speculative or dead faith,
- temporary faith,
- saving faith.'

Robert Dabney differentiates,

- Temporary faith,
- historical faith,
- miraculous faith,
- saving faith.'

The 'carnal Christian' teaching makes no allowance for these distinctions, it gives little or no recognition to the possibility of a spurious belief, instead it implies or assumes that all who say they 'invite Jesus into their lives' are in possession of saving faith. If these professing believers do not live and act like Christians, their teachers may well say that it is because they are not 'spiritual Christians'. The fact is they may not be true believers at all!

### **4. The omission of repentance**

A fourth flaw in the 'carnal Christian' teaching lies in its virtual exclusion of repentance from the conversion experience. This is implied by the suggestion that the 'carnal Christian' has not changed in practice but lives and acts just like the natural man. This teaching is obviously set forth in the diagram given above where self is still on the throne in the case of those in the second group. But thus to suggest that repentance, including a changed attitude to sin, is not an essential part of conversion is a very grave error. It is to depart from the apostolic gospel. No one who so minimizes the necessity of repentance can say with Paul, 'I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ' (Acts 20: 20, 21).

John Cotton, one of the Puritan leaders of New England, was right when he wrote: 'There is none under a covenant of grace that dare allow himself in any sin; for if a man should negligently commit any sin, the Lord will school him thoroughly and make him sadly to apprehend how he has made bold with the treasures of the grace of God. Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid: None that has a portion in the grace of God dareth therefore allow himself in sin; but if through strength of temptation he be at any time carried aside, it is his greatest burden'.

### **5. Wrong teaching on assurance**

In the fifth place the three-class theory is prone to give assurance to those who were never really converted. When a person professes to belong to Christ and yet lives like the world, how do we know that his profession is genuine? How do we know it is not genuine? We don't! There are always two possibilities: he may be a true Christian in a condition of back-sliding, or it is quite possible he was never savingly united to Christ. Only God knows. Therefore when we speak of a back-slider two errors must be avoided:

Saying unequivocally that he is not a Christian;

Saying unequivocally that he is a Christian. The fact is that we do not know, we cannot know!

The Bible certainly teaches that to make men consider they are Christians when in reality they are not is a great evil, and insofar as the 'carnal Christian' theory allows for a whole category of 'Christians' whose hearts are not surrendered in obedience to Christ, its tendency is to promote that very evil. Nothing could be more dangerous. Lost, self-deceived souls who should be crying out to God for that supernatural change which is made known to themselves and to the world by a changed heart and life are often found hiding comfortably behind this very theory. As long as they believe it they will never seek a real salvation. Although they profess to hold evangelical truth their position is far worse than that of natural men who know that they are not converted!

The 'carnal Christian' teaching ignores much biblical teaching on the doctrine of assurance, especially those Scriptures which show that Christian character and conduct have a bearing on our assurance. The short First Epistle of John was written in order that those who believe may know that they have eternal life; that is, may know that they are born of God (5:13). Throughout the Epistle John stresses the marks that accompany the new birth (3:9; 5:18). He shows that a man born again is not at home in the realm of sin, and that disobedience to God's commandments cannot be the bent of a Christian's life, as the 'carnal Christian' teaching would lead us to believe. 'For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith (5:4). 'And hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him (2:3-5).

From such texts it is clear that obedience is intimately related to assurance; if we do not live and practice righteousness we have no reason to think that we are 'born of God'.

Again, Jesus said, 'If you love me, keep my commandments,' (John 15:10) not, 'To be a spiritual Christian keep my commandments', for obedience is for all disciples. 'Follow holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord' (Heb. 12:14). 'Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him' (Heb. 5:8, 9). 'But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation, because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy'(1 Peter 1:15, 16).

The Bible makes it crystal clear that there is a close relationship between assurance and obedience; but the 'carnal Christian' teaching gives assurance to those who are at home in the realm of sin. They are classed as Christians. Many times this is a false and damning assurance because such have no biblical reason to believe that they are Christians at all.

## **6. A low view of sin.**

Sixth: The fruits of this teaching are not new to Christianity even though the teaching appears on the present scene under a new mask. It is the old doctrine of Antinomianism. Paul attacks this in Romans 6:1, 2 when he asks, 'What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid...' By implication, the answer of the three-category teaching to Paul's question is, 'Yes, you can continue in sin and be a carnal Christian'. And that is Antinomianism!

## **7. A second work-of-grace made necessary**

Seventh: 'carnal Christian' teaching is the mother of many second work-of-grace errors in that it depreciates the biblical conversion experience by implying that the change in the converted sinner may amount to little or nothing. It goes on to say that the important change which affects a man's character and conduct is the second step which makes him a 'spiritual Christian'.

## **8. A wrong view of Christ**

Eighth: The 'carnal Christian' teaching is also the mother of one of the most soul-destroying teachings of our day. It suggests that you can take Jesus as your Saviour and yet treat obedience to his lordship as optional. How often is the appeal made to the so-called 'carnal Christians' to put Jesus on the throne and 'make him Lord'! When they accept Jesus as Lord, they are told, they will cease to be 'carnal Christians'. But such teaching is foreign to the New Testament. When our Lord appeared in human form in history the angel announced his coming in the words, 'For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord' (Luke 2:11). He cannot be divided. The Saviour and Lord are one. When the apostles preached they proclaimed Christ to be

Lord. To bow to his rule was never presented in the Bible as a second step of consecration. 'For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake' (2 Corinthians 4:5).

When sinners truly receive him they do receive him as Lord. 'As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him' (Colossians 2:6).

Matthew Henry, in his Introduction to the Gospel according to Matthew said: 'All the grace contained in this book is owing to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour; and, unless we consent to him as our Lord we cannot expect any benefit by him as our Saviour.'

Charles Haddon Spurgeon warned his students: 'If the professed convert distinctly and deliberately declares that he knows the Lord's will but does not mean to attend to it, you are not to pamper his presumption, but it is your duty to assure him that he is not saved. Do not suppose that the Gospel is magnified or God glorified by going to the worldlings and telling them that they may be saved at this moment by simply accepting Christ as their Saviour, while they are wedded to their idols, and their hearts are still in love with sin. If I do so I tell them a lie, pervert the Gospel, insult Christ, and turn the grace of God into lasciviousness.'

It is vital in this connection to notice how the apostles preached the lordship of Christ. The word 'Saviour' occurs only twice in the Acts of the Apostles (5:31; 13:23), on the other hand the title 'Lord' is mentioned 92 times, 'Lord Jesus' 13 times, and 'The Lord Jesus Christ' 6 times in the same book! The gospel is: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.'

It is the 'carnal Christian' teaching that has given rise to this erroneous teaching of the divided Christ. When Peter preached what we might call the first sermon after our Lord's ascension he made it abundantly clear that we do not make Christ Lord at all: 'Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ' (Acts 2:36). God has made him Lord! 'For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord of the dead and living' (Rom. 14: 9). And the same grace which saves brings sinners to recognize this. But the three-category teaching invites 'carnal Christians' to make Christ Lord and thus become spiritual Christians. Again, we see that this is treating our acceptance of his lordship as something additional to salvation, when, in fact, recognition of him as Lord is an integral and necessary part of conversion. A. A. Hodge has written:

'You cannot take Christ for justification unless you take him for sanctification. Think of the sinner coming to Christ and saying, "I do not want to be holy;" "I do not want to be saved from sin;" "I would like to be saved in my sins;" "Do not sanctify me now, but justify me now." What would be the answer? Could he be accepted by God? You can no more separate justification from sanctification than you can separate the circulation of the blood from the inhalation of the air. Breathing and circulation are two different things, but you cannot have the one without the other; they go together, and they constitute one life. So you have justification and sanctification; they go together, and they constitute one life. If there was ever one who attempted to receive Christ with justification and not with sanctification, he missed it, thank God! He was no more justified than he was sanctified.'

## **9. False spirituality**

Ninth: This teaching breeds Pharisaism in the so-called 'spiritual Christians' who have measured up to some man-made standard of spirituality. There ought to be no professed 'spiritual Christians', much less 'super-spiritual' ones! George Whitefield, a man who lived very close to his Saviour, prayed all his days, 'Let me begin to be a Christian'. And another Christian has truly said: 'In the life of the most perfect Christian there is every day renewed occasion for self-abhorrence, for repentance, for renewed application to the blood of Christ, for application of the rekindling of the Holy Spirit'.

## **Conclusion**

The effect of believing the truth set out in these pages ought to be that we long to see more true evangelism.

The 'carnal Christian' teaching is, after all, the consequence of a shallow, man-centered evangelism in which decisions are sought at any price and with any methods. When those pronounced to be converts do not act like Christians, do not love what Christians love, and hate what Christians hate, and do not willingly serve Christ in his church, some explanation must be found other than calling upon them to 'decide' for Christ. They have already done that and have already been pronounced by the preacher or personal worker to be 'Christians'. But when they don't act like Christians something is wrong. What is it? The teaching I have sought to answer says that the trouble is that they are just 'carnal Christians'; they have not made Christ 'Lord' of their lives; they have not let him occupy the throne of their hearts. Once this explanation is seen to be unscriptural it will also be seen to be closely connected with an initial error over evangelism itself. Too often, modern evangelism has substituted a 'decision' in the place of repentance and saving faith. Forgiveness is preached without the equally important truth that the Spirit of God must change the heart. As a result decisions are treated as conversions even though there is no evidence of a supernatural work of God in the life.



Surely the best way to end this evil is to pray and labour for the restoration of New Testament evangelism! Whenever such evangelism exists it is certain that men will learn that it is not enough to profess to be a Christian, and not enough to call Jesus 'Lord, Lord' (Luke 6:46). The gospel preached in awakening power will summon men not to rest without biblical evidence that they are born of God. It will disturb those who, without good reason, have believed that they are already Christians. It will arouse backsliders by telling them that as long as they remain in that condition the possibility exists that they never were genuine believers at all. And to understand this will bring new depths of compassion and urgency to the hearts of God's people in this fallen world.

One of the greatest hindrances to the recovery of such preaching is the theory we have considered. To reject that theory is to be brought back to a new starting-point in evangelism and in the understanding of the Christian life. It is to bring God's work into the centre of our thinking. It is to see afresh that there are only two alternatives -- the natural life or the spiritual life, the broad way or the narrow way, the gospel 'in word only' or the gospel 'in power and in the Holy Ghost' (1 Thess. 1:5), the house on the sand or the house on the rock.

There is no surer certainty than the fact that an unchanged heart and a worldly life will bring men to hell. 'Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience' (Eph. 5: 6)

It is not only in the world today that evangelism is needed. It is needed in the church.