

Summary Sentence: You are God's temple and belong to Him; do your work for the Lord as it will be tested with fire

Central Idea: "Serve the Lord faithfully and humbly and God will reward you."

Aim: that we will build on the foundation of Jesus Christ, with gold, silver and precious stones.

Divisions:

1: "Growing in your Faith" – 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

2: "Build on the Foundation, which is Jesus Christ" – 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

3: "Become a fool for God in order to become wise" – 1 Corinthians 3:16-23

Introduction: From last week, Paul wrote that there are two kinds of people in the world: saved and unsaved. Now in ch3 he says that there are two kinds of Christians: mature and immature. You could call the immature 'worldly' Christians: concerned with things of the flesh, rather than things of the Spirit. These worldly Christians are immature; like babies still suckling from their mothers. Paul tried to feed these baby Christians during the 18 months he was with them and had hoped they had continued growing and maturing in the time since then. But from what Paul has heard about their behaviour, it is clear that the Corinthian church are still baby Christians.

The Word of God is our spiritual food: Spiritual food comes in all strengths – so to speak. There is milk(1Pet2:2), bread(Mat4:4), meat(Heb5:11-14), and even honey(Ps119:103). These baby Christians were still only able to be fed on milk. Paul is keen to grow them so they can take in more of the Bible's diet - solid food that will help them grow strong – like bread and meat.

So let's have a look at how Paul deals with these milk-fed Christians.

Division 1: "Growing in your Faith" – 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

[READ v1-9]. In v1 Paul called the Corinthian Church "infants in Christ.", referring back five years when he was with them, when he said, I "**could not address you as spiritual people**_(v1)...". He'd been with them 1½ years, but when he left them they were still spiritually immature, unable to be fed meat.

However, they had believed in and accepted Jesus into their hearts. They were God's children. So by faith they were saved; they were granted peace with God_(Rom5:1-2); by faith they were now justified before God. To justify is "to pardon and clear from guilt...and to accept as righteous on account of_(Webster's 1828 Dictionary)" Jesus' sacrificial death. Justification is a one-time-only act by God. Paul would have taught them some basics of the Christian faith, like the many blessings that come with being a Christian. He fed them with milk. But "the message of the cross" also includes sanctification and righteousness; sanctification is a renewal of attitude and deed in a saved person. Righteousness means purity of heart, including conforming your life, thoughts and actions to God's Law_(Heb5:11-14). These things were the solid food that the church needed. But they were still behaving in worldly ways, so Paul, fed them more milk in this letter. They were not yet ready for solid teaching.

Secondly, the church was focussed on people, not God. The people, Paul, Apollos, and Peter were all servants of God. God alone is the source of blessing and answered prayer. Paul and Apollos were given their ministries by Christ. They were the means by which the Corinthians believed_(1Cor2:4-5), but God was the cause.

Paul makes that clear to the Corinthians in his brilliant choice of the word "through" in v5, saying that he and Apollos were "**servants through whom you believed.**" In other

words, they believed in the Lord Jesus through their preaching and teaching. Paul had to tell them this to help them focus on God, not on Paul and Apollos.

God produced the results; God caused the seeds-(v6) to grow. So Paul and Apollos were not competing with each other, but were complementing each other. The overall goal was to grow the people into Christ-likeness and, to that end, God gave Paul and Apollos different gifts, different roles/assignments, and abilities.

The hierarchical structure of businesses and many other organisations, is the shape of a triangle, with the CEO at the top, other key directors below the CEO, and so on down to the ordinary workers/people at the bottom. CBS is set up differently. Every leader in CBS receives a manual, and in the manual is this statement, “The most important person in Community Bible Study is the individual class participant.” So in CBS, that hierarchical triangle-shaped diagram is flipped upside down, meaning Kimm Carr, Executive Director of CBS, is at the bottom, and class participants are at the top. Paul and Apollos were servants to the Corinthian church, each with his God-given assignment; CBS leaders are servants to those in their class, again, each called by God and given her/his God-given gifts, abilities, and life experience, having moulded them for their role in this ministry, in order to make disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, through in-depth Bible study available to everyone; all the leaders are servants of God, accountable to Him. Leaders are, (only in part), the means of growth, but the Lord is the cause. Our goal is to build on the foundation of Jesus Christ, with gold, silver and precious stones. And every believer, in their own ministry needs to have that same goal, which will give God the glory He deserves through our work.

Paul says in v6, “***I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.***” Despite

having different roles, both the planter and the waterer are one. Both are needed and neither can do without the other. If the planter doesn't plant the seeds, there will be no plants to water, and if the one who waters doesn't water the plants, they'll die. Though they had different roles, they both were helping the church mature in their faith.

Keeping with the gardening analogy, God wants to see increase in His field. He wants the local church to produce many things: the fruit of the Spirit^(Gal5:22-23), holiness^(Rom6:22), giving^(Rom15:26), good works^(Col1:10), praise to the Lord^(Heb13:15), and people becoming Christians^(Rom1:13). As well as spiritual growth God wants numerical growth. Commentator Warren Wiersbe says "*Fruit has in it the seed for more fruit*^(Commentary pg464)." If we produce real fruit, it will eventually produce more fruit. As we serve in our ministry, we must take care of the soil in our church. It takes hard work by everyone to keep the soil healthy and weed free. And the leadership must model this for her/his flock.

Lastly, each person doing their ministry, will receive from God a reward based on the work they've done. Paul and Apollos were servants to the Corinthian church, and based on the faithfulness to their calling, each would receive his reward from God. When we take on ministry, whatever it is, we need to do our best because we are accountable to the Lord. So as you faithfully and humbly serve the Lord, and build on the foundation of Jesus Christ with gold, silver and precious stones, God will reward you.

Division 2: "Build on the Foundation, which is Jesus Christ" – 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

[READ v12-15]. In ch2:1-2, Paul said he did NOT come proclaiming the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom, but decided to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him

crucified. That was, rather Jesus was, the foundation upon which Paul preached and taught the Corinthian church. So, in the church across the world, that is the foundation, or the cornerstone upon which to build everything the church does. This is the only foundation that will last. Churches that try to build themselves around a preacher, or a special doctrine or program instead of the Gospel of Christ do not last. The Corinthians were building theirs around the person they liked the most, Peter, Paul or Apollos. All three factions should have been united under Christ.

The foundation is Jesus Christ. The foundation is first laid down by proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thereafter it must be reinforced as the foundation is the most essential part of a building. It determines everything else.

Second you must use the right materials to build the church. Paul's list says a lot. Gold silver and precious stones have these four characteristics: permanent, beautiful, valuable and hard to obtain. The characteristics of wood, hay and straw are: temporary or perishable, ordinary and plain, cheap and easy to obtain.

Paul had just said, in v6, that he laid the foundation and Apollos built on it, but here in v10, he says, ***“I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.”*** In v6 the verbs are past tense, but in v10 someone else “is” building on it, present tense. That’s all he says, so the implication is this person was known by the church because he isn’t named. And the context here, according to what follows, is that this person was preaching a false Gospel, based on human wisdom, so Paul gives him a warning to change his ways, and to the church not to accept his teaching. ***“Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For...”***

Warren Wiersbe believes that Paul was using analogies to refer to biblical doctrines. And these symbols fit the image of the church. v1-2: the feeding of milk and meat. The Word of God is food for the church family. V6-9: the seed planted in a field is the Word of God preached to the church. v12-13: the building materials for the temple is the storehouse of wisdom in the Bible, to grow and build up the church.

The book of Proverbs highlights this storehouse of wisdom in the Word of God, that it should be sought out and treated as the most valuable treasure there is:

Proverbs 3:13-15 ***“¹³Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, ¹⁴for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. ¹⁵She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her.”***

Proverbs2:1-5 ***“My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, ⁴if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, ⁵then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.”***

Proverbs8:10-11 ***“¹⁰Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold, ¹¹for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.”***

Wisdom has been a theme in these first three chapters and Paul in his brilliance has captured the essence of God's wisdom put against human wisdom. Just like when Paul

wrote this letter, preachers today need to seek out, dig for/mine for those precious stones and minerals to build God's truth into people's lives. It's certainly true for **teachers** of the Word, but also **everyone seriously studying God's Word**. We all need to desire and labour at discovering those gems to grow us more like Jesus. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to see wondrous things in God's Word^(Ps119:18). And then take those gems God has revealed to you and build on the foundation of Jesus Christ. Serve the Lord faithfully and humbly and God will reward you.

Division 3: "Become a fool for God in order to become wise" – 1 Corinthians3:16-23

In v9 Paul referred to the church in Corinth as a building. Here in v16-17 he says, ***"¹⁶Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?*** And as before, the verb tense is plural in the Greek, so the church, as well as each person individually, is God's temple. And this is not the outer court where the Gentiles go, but the "holy of holies" where only the high priest would enter, only on one day in the year, the Day of Atonement.

People tend to see religious temples as holy, so this was revolutionary. And in the 1stC they met in homes; there were no buildings as such. And like them, we here today, each believer, is indwelt by the Holy Spirit who makes us holy, as individuals but also collectively. Picture that. We are all holy in God's eyes! How amazing is that. What a privilege, what an honour, and what a responsibility!

¹⁷If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. Paul is talking here about disunity caused by the factions, and in

2nd Corinthians, he says this about idol worship, the perverse sexual practices. From the Greek, Paul's carefully chosen word order, and play-on-words in v17 reads, ***"If anyone God's temple destroys, destroy this person God will."*** This very severe warning is recorded in Scripture because it applies today as much as it did two thousand years ago. ***"God's temple is holy, and you are that temple"***^(v17b). Every believer is holy before the Lord – so we should do nothing that will turn another away from the Lord. If the person who builds poorly into the temple so that it falls – is a true believer – then his/her salvation is secure BUT we're told they will be punished in some way. We're just not told what the punishment will look like. We do know it will be bad for the one who destroys!

Paul declares to them, ***"Do you not know..."***, the first of ten occurrences of this phrase^(3:16,5:6,6:2-3,9,15-16,19,9:13,24). He shocks them by saying these indisputable, irrefutable statements, impossible to deny. With this truth before them, Paul warned not just the leaders, but the entire congregation to stay clear of self-deception by examining their ministries to see whether there was any worldly wisdom in what they did or held to be true; eg boasting in their support of Paul or Apollos. Instead they should boast in God, to whom they belonged, and who was the source of every blessing.

Here's a personal challenge: Search your heart for ways of the flesh in your life, and with determination, cast them aside.

V16-17. The church is not just any building, it is the most holy and valuable of buildings or structures. "you" in these verses is plural, so corporately these Christians form one temple. The end of v16 which says, ***"God's Spirit dwells in you,"*** is better translated, "among you."

[READ v21-23]. Again, as in v16-17, Paul addresses the church, not so much the individual. By comparing the men, the people were dividing the church. Paul said that each believer possessed all things in Christ. Each member belonged to all the others. So no one should say, "I belong to, or I prefer Paul/Apollos." Everyone belongs to everyone else equally.

We all have personal preferences, but we must not let them lead to disharmony or disunity. We must show grace to each other. The preacher we like the least may be the one we most need to hear.

Paul goes on saying, "***all things are yours***^(v21)." ALL things. How rich we are in Christ! So we need to keep our eyes fixed on Him and work for Him and with Him to grow the church. and we may need to discard some worldly things. Our memory verse last week said the word of the cross was folly or foolishness to the world. So let's become a fool for God, to become wise in God's eyes. When you serve the Lord faithfully and humbly, God will reward you.

My prayer is that each of us will build on the foundation of Jesus Christ, with gold, silver and precious stones.

Let's pray: