

Text: 1 Co 3.1-17

As we move through Corinthians, we will keep our place by developing the broad outline we started with.

I. Introduction (1.1-9)**II. Conditions reported to Paul (1.10-6.20)****A. Divisions in the church (1.10-4.21)**

¹ Cor 1.11 For I have been **informed** concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's *people*, that there are quarrels among you.

Divisions Revealed (10-12)**Paul's Opening Apologetic (13-17)****The Gospel vs. Wisdom (1.18-2.5)**

Section 1: the cross vs. human wisdom (18-25)

Section 2: the world's view of believers (26-31)

Section 3: the powerful effect of Paul's preaching (2.1-5)

The Spirit and God's wisdom (2.6-16)**Today: Fleshly Immaturity and God's Church Building Program**

Read 1 Cor 3.1-17

General questions:

How do we know the discussion of "The Gospel vs. Wisdom" (1.18-2.5) and "The Spirit and God's Wisdom" (2.6-16) are related to the overall discussion of "Divisions in the Church" (1.10-4.21)? **Paul brings up the names of "Apollos" and "Paul" in vv. 4-9, we call this the literary device of inclusion.**

What action is Paul describing in 3.1-17? **Building the local church by spiritual leaders**

Fleshly Immaturity (3.1-4)

Paul contrasts speaking to "spiritual men" vs. "men of flesh" (or "infants"). What image does he use to make the contrast vivid in v. 2? **Milk vs. meat**

What sort of food do spiritual infants need? **Easily digestible milk, basic teachings**

What sort of food do spiritual men take in? **Solid food, sound doctrine, the wisdom of God**

As Paul writes to the Corinthians, how do we know they are not yet able to receive solid spiritual food (3-4)? **They persist in putting spiritual leaders at odds with one another, as if they were competing philosophers**

When Paul calls them “mere men” in vv. 3, 4, does he think of them as unsaved or saved? What makes you think so? **They are saved, because they are receiving spiritual milk, but they are immature and fleshly Christians**

What characteristics showed they were acting like “mere men”? (3)
Jealousy and strife

BONUS QUESTION: What do you think the Corinthians thought of themselves? Were they “spiritual” or “fleshly” in their own point of view? **They thought they were spiritual. Paul is making a very strong challenge.**

“This section of verses makes it very clear that it is possible for genuine Christians to behave like, and to appear to be, unbelievers (cf. Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43). The Corinthians’ conduct indicated both their immaturity and their carnality, not their lack of eternal life.”¹

“There is no question that Paul considers his Corinthian friends believers and that they are in fact acting otherwise. But Paul’s whole concern is to get them to change, not to allow that such behavior is permissible since not all Christians are yet mature. ... Spiritual people are to walk in the Spirit. If they do otherwise, they are ‘worldly’ and are called upon to desist. *Remaining worldly* is not one of the options.”²

God’s Church Building Program (3.5-17)

Contrasting Apollos and Paul (5-9)

General question: Why do you think Paul only mentions Apollos and himself here, and leaves off Cephas and Christ (see 2.10-12)? **The primary competing parties were the “Apollos” party and the “Paul” party**

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), 1 Cor 3.3.

² Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 128.

What are the roles that human leaders take in building the church? (5-6) **They are God's servants, sometimes planting, sometimes watering, acting in concert and not independently**

Who is actually in charge of building the church and how does he do it? **God is in charge and he builds his church through men who serve him**

What is God's viewpoint of the one who plants and the one who waters? (7) **Neither one has any significance over the other [ILLUSTRATION: "founder power"]**

What does Paul mean in v. 8 when he says, "each will receive his own reward"? **Those who work in the ministry labor together with others as servants, but each is rewarded by God for his individual effort**

In v. 9, Paul sums things up: Who are God's fellow workers? Who is God's building? **The spiritual co-laborers in the church are God's fellow workers [Apollos, Paul, Peter, etc.]. The church members make up God's building.**

Considering the rewards for spiritual leadership (10-15)

Verse 10 deals directly with the situation in Corinth. The following verses move out to a more generalized view (something that is true in every church).

What caution is given to spiritual leaders in verse 10? **Spiritual leaders need to be careful about the way they build God's building.**

What is the first item of care in building God's building? (11) **You must build on the right foundation**

What do the elements of verse 12 represent? [gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw] **They represent the works of spiritual leaders as they build on the foundation of Christ**

How do you tell whether a man's works are of high quality or low quality in building the church? (13-15) **There is a judgement coming that will test the works, the high quality works will endure, the low quality works will dissolve in fervent heat**

What is the expectation of the one who builds with high quality works? What about the one who builds with low quality works? (14-15) **The one who builds well will receive a reward, the one who builds poorly will have no reward (but will not lose his salvation)**

The value of God's temple (16-17)

When Paul speaks of the temple of God in v. 16, is he speaking of an individual or the church as a whole? **In the context, he speaks of the whole church as the building of God**

What warning does Paul make in v. 17? Two whom does it apply? **If anyone destroys a local church, God will destroy him. This applies to anyone who cause division in a local church (unless defending sound doctrine). Such people run a very grave risk.**

“God is holy; his temple is therefore also to be holy. As this letter reveals, this is not one of their strong suits. So the threat, which is real, is at the same time turned into an invitation for them to become what in fact they are by the grace of God, ‘God’s *holy* temple in Corinth.’”³

³ Fee, 149.