

## 1 Corinthians 3 - Chapter Study

### INTRO

As we've seen in the previous 2 studies, while Paul was in Ephesus, just across the Aegean Sea from Corinth, he received a report about a serious problem in the church he'd planted there.

Word was the church was divided into *factions* that were at odds with one another.

Paul knew such division crippled their witness because it negated the love that was the main evidence of new life in Christ.

So he wrote a bold rebuke of their lack of unity.

He'd also received a letter from them asking for clarification about several issues.

Once he deals with the problem of their disunity, he turns to answer those questions.

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### I. GREETING 1:1-9

### II. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: A CALL TO UNITY 1:10-17

### III. Main Body 1:18-16:18

#### A. God's Way vs. the World's Way 1:18-2:16

#### B. Disunity Chs. 3-4

##### 1. Factions a sign of spiritual immaturity 3:1-4

**<sup>1</sup> And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.**

As always, we need to look at the context to get a grip on what Paul means here.

Remember how we ended last week—Paul drew a bold line between those who are born again & those who aren't in terms of their ability to understand spiritual things.

He said the *natural man*, that is the person who is *not born again* & only knows the realm of nature & the 5 senses is incapable of understanding spiritual truth,

While the person indwelt by the Spirit of God does understand because they have the spiritual capacity to do so.

With these 2 categories of people, natural & spiritual—Paul turns to the Corinthians and says – **I, brethren,**

Note that he identifies them as *spiritual brothers*, which means they are indeed born again -- **could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.**

He's referring to when he was first there planting the church.

When they were brand new believers, they were spiritual infants.

And like any infant, while they had new life, they had *no maturity*; they had a long way to go in growing in grace.

At that time they weren't the kind of spiritual people he'd described at the end of ch. 2 who're able to understand the deep things of God.

No – at first, he uses the term “carnal” which means fleshly.

Okay, let's recap . . .

The *natural* person is the lost unbeliever, bereft of the Spirit of God.

The *spiritual* person is born again & indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

The *carnal* person is someone who's born again, but so spiritually immature *their living is dominated by the flesh.*

They have the Spirit of God *living within* but they do not *live in the Spirit.*

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This phase of spiritual life is where we all begin, but it's something we ought to grow out of quickly.

It's left behind soon after coming to faith in Christ because *repentance* remains a permanent part of a healthy walk.

Repentance is that process whereby *we recognize the need* to confront that within us that is not of

God, lay it down, turn away from it, & embrace those truths & traits that are part of our new life.

Some believer think repentance is something they only need to do when they first come to faith. No – it's essential to growth in Christ.

Without repentance there can be no progress in spiritual maturity.

**<sup>2</sup> I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it,**

Let's pause there to make sure we're following Paul's line of thought.

Remember, he's referring here to when he was first in Corinth planting the church and they were brand new believers.

Like spiritual babes, they needed to be fed the basics fo the faith.

They were incapable of learning harder lessons because they'd not yet cut their spiritual teeth.

Everything in it's time. The *problem* is – it was *way past time* for the Corinthians to have moved on to solid food --

**and even now you are still not able; <sup>3</sup> for you are still carnal.**

The Corinthians were *still* spiritually immature, still trying to go about the Christian life from the perspective of the flesh.

Long after they ought to have moved on to spiritual adolescence & adulthood, they were stuck in infancy.

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When I was in high school, one of the most annoying insults you could say was, "You're so immature!"

I mean, if you said that tom someone, there was really no comeback.

It was mean – a grave put down that showed your utter disdain for someone.

We *expect* babies to be immature.

It's normal for them to be totally self-centered & mindful of only one thing – their personal comfort.

While we *expect* that from an infant, we *expect adults* to grow out of that & show a sense of care & concern for others.

As a dad, I enjoyed the early years of each of my kids.

They were so cute when they were infants and just learning to do the basic things of life.

How sad if they were still in the same place when they were 10, 15, 25 years old.

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Though the Corinthians had plenty of time to grow up, they were still acting like infants.

This was a tragedy Paul laments & calls them to recognize as such.

**For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?**

Their sectarianism was clear evidence of their spiritual immaturity.

Factions are a sign of the flesh, not the Spirit.

If the Holy Spirit was having His way, the Corinthian church would have been a place of *harmony* & spiritual *unity*.

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Paul says the carnal believer acts *no different* from the person who's lost.

And that's just *not* the way it's supposed to be.

In Corinth, the entire city was divided into factions.

They lined up behind their favorite philosophical schools.

They had their favorite political parties.

Their society was divided along strict economic & racial lines.

The world at Corinth was a highly divided house, a checkerboard of different groups all angling for their own piece of the social pie.

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And the only way to rise to the top was by pulling others down.

Sad to say, this same mentality marked the Church.

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I think it would behoove us to take a moment and ask ourselves if this is a problem here.

Are we divided by factions? Is *race* a problem here? How about *where* we live?

Now – let’s be clear about something—it’s normal for people to be drawn together by common affinities like age or season of life.

Because of common experiences they’re able to relate to one another and can support each other.

That’s a good & healthy thing & to be encouraged.

What’s *wrong* is when a group turns from sharing a commonality to thinking they’re *better than others because of it*.

Some years ago we did a parent-training program that received a lot of complaints, not really here but in many other places.

In fact, it became such a scandal., it contributed to the demise of the ministry.

The complaint was that those who took the training became so arrogant & superior that they treated parents who hadn’t taken the program in a haughty & judgmental way.

The people who ran our program were concerned about this & did their best to make sure such elitism didn’t stain our classes.

But despite their best efforts, we still had some families who became judgmental of other parents & their kids.

It’s sin. It’s falling in to the very trap of factionalism Paul decries here & calls a sign of fleshly spiritual immaturity.

Another area that’s been a consistent source of division in the church is home-schooling.

People on both sides become judgmental of those who don’t line up with their view.

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#### **4 For when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I am of Apollos,” are you not carnal?**

Paul identified this cause of their factionalizing in 1:12.

They were lining up behind their favorite teachers, turning them into celebrities, then arguing over their merits.

But of course, such arguing wasn’t limited to just bragging about their favorite’s abilities; no, they also *tore down* the other group’s star.

And this is why Paul mentioned having only fed the Corinthians milk.

Apollos was vaunted as an eloquent & deep teacher. His supports poked fun at Paul because he was so basic.

Paul tells them the reason for his keeping things simple when he’d been there was because that’s all they could take.

In fact, it’s all they could *still* take!

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Paul now sets out to dismantle the foolish exaltation of human personalities the Corinthians had engaged in.

### **2. Each works / God blesses 3:5-8**

#### **5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos,**

And the Corinthians would say, “Our hero!” to one & “Nobody!” to the other. So Paul corrects them - **but ministers [servants] through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?**

We’re not stars! We’re no celebrities – we’re *servants* THROUGH whom God worked to bring you to faith.

#### **6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.**

“We just did our work, played our part – but it was *God* Who produced the results.”

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**<sup>7</sup> So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. <sup>8</sup> Now he who plants and he who waters are one,**

They are equal & united in purpose – which is to be faithful to their calling, knowing each must do his/her part in order for the results to come.

**and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.**

While each of us have a role to play, the results are totally up to God.

All we can do is be faithful to play our part, knowing that as we are, we'll be rewarded.

That reward is all the praise we ought to aim for.

We ought never seek the praise of man & must be very careful that in our honoring of those to whom honor is due, we never turn them into stars, then set them against one another in a kind of *Star Wars*.

### **3. Work wisely 3:9-17**

#### **a. Our work will be tested vs. 9-15**

**<sup>9</sup> For we [Paul & Apollos] are God's fellow workers;**

The Corinthians had turned Paul & Apollos into competitors in their own minds.

Paul says, "We're brohs who recognize & affirm each other's gifts."

**you are God's field, you are God's building.**

Which he & Apollos were together seeking to grow & build.

Again, they were not in competition for the Corinthians' favor.

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You know, this is one of the things that concerns me today – that religious media can foster the idea of competition among the various ministries & teachers.

After all, we all know about ratings.

So it's easy to think that Charles Stanley is in competition with Alistair Begg who's at odds with John MacArthur, who's vying with Chuck Smith, who's teamed up with Greg Laurie in a campaign against David Jeremiah & RC Sproul.

That's silly! Those guys don't agree on every point of doctrine, but love one another as brothers in Christ and affirm what they're all doing in growing the Kingdom.

**<sup>10</sup> 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.**

Paul knew he was called & gifted to be a church planter. He was really good at it.

While he was also very good at taking people deep in the things of God, as his time in Ephesus proved, he knew his unique *niche* in Kingdom-building was church-planting, leaving it for others to build on the foundation he laid.

**But let each one take heed how he builds on it.**

Paul now gets to the important issue of motivation for ministry.

This was crucial & where the Corinthian's sectarianism posed the greatest danger.

You see, it was bad enough that their disunity was destroying their witness.

What was worse was the message that was being given to everyone in the Church at Corinth –

That ministry was a means of self-promotion.

Paul was concerned that instead of using their calling *to serve*, they'd use it as a way to gain prestige.

So he issues a caution – be careful *how* you go about your work.

**How** links the *why* to the *what* of our work.

WHY is the motive behind what we do.

WHAT is the actual work itself – what's done.

HOW is a careful consideration of our *why*, our motive, then shaping our work in such a way that *what's done* is an accurate reflection of the why.

If I'm a professional custom car maker & my motive is to get my name out everywhere, then I'm going to do flamboyant designs and put my name all over them.

But if my motive is to turn my customer's desires into reality, then I'll bend every effort to understanding & produce what they want, without concern that my fame grows.

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Everyone has a role to play in growing & building the Kingdom of God.

In Corinth, they were turning that into a means of growing their own prestige.

He says, watch out!

**<sup>11</sup> For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.**

In both 2 Cor. 5:10 & Romans 14:10, Paul speaks of the judgment seat of Christ.

This is a time when our works will be put to the test to see what they were based on, what their motive was.

If the motive was pure, a simple desire to love & serve God, it'll be rewarded.

If it was self-serving, it'll dissolve into nothing.

As he says here at the end of v. 15, we won't lose our salvation, but there'll be no reward.

Actually, the word used for the judgment seat is the 'bema.'

That was the special platform erected in the stadium where the races of the Greek games were held.

A special judge sat on a small throne watching the event.

When the race was over and it was time to pass out the award to the winner, he had to cross over and stand in front of the judge for a final ruling.

The question was, did the winner compete within the rules?

If he did, then the judge placed a crown of laurel leaves on his head.

If not, the crown was passed over his head but not set on it – the athlete was passed over because he broke the rules.

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One day, all that we've done will be subjected to the fiery gaze of the Heavenly Judge.

If we've worked with the motive to honor & love the Lord, then our reward will be great.

If it's been aimed at gaining prestige and the approval of people, it'll be burned up.

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Now, before we move on – have to say that what Paul says here is distressing to many because they know from personal experience that the purely selfless act is just about impossible.

No matter how right & good our motive might be, there's always some little stench of self that stains it.

Being the imperfect people we are, we can't break away completely from self-interest.

Does this mean there'll be no rewards at all?

No – God's grace covers us. And His love **WANTS** to reward us.

God is not a miser Who's stingy with His favors. On the contrary, He looks for excuses to bestow them.

Whatever smidge of self-interest does taint our work will be consumed to leave ONLY that which is done with good motive.

#### **b. The church is God's temple vs. 16-17**

**<sup>16</sup> Do you not know**

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In Greek, this is a mild rebuke. To paraphrase we'd say, "You ought to know better!"

**16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?**

There were 2 words for temple – *hieron* & *naos*.

*Hieron* refers to the entire temple precinct, grounds.

*Naos* means the central shrine that housed the presence of deity. Naos is the word used here Paul means the believers at Corinth collectively comprise the dwelling place of God.

While individual believers each have the Spirit of God, a local congregation is indwelt by the Spirit in a special way that connects them on a spiritual level.

When they realize that & set themselves to maintain their unity, it becomes a powerful tool God can use in a community to spread the Kingdom.

We've noticed over the years that when our fellowship has been purposed to unity visitors comment on how touched they were by the presence of God.

There's a spiritual dynamic that happens when we endeavor to love & honor one another.

**17 If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.**

Among the Romans, one of the greatest crimes a person could commit was to defile a temple.

Since the peace & prosperity of the Empire depended on divine favor, they considered those who desecrated temples as traitors, the worst of all criminals.

As applied to the church, the temple of God, Paul is saying that sectarianism divides the Spirit; it's the worst kind of desecration because the Spirit is the very means God has given to unite us.

So those who aim at creating divisions in the body of Christ will themselves be divided.

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This is a great diagnostic for our spiritual lives.

If things are falling apart & you're at odds in the main/basic relationships of life – it may be because you're working against the unity of the body of Christ in some way.

Consider it. Meditate therein.

#### **4. True wisdom 3:18-23**

**18 Let no one deceive himself.**

What an important caution! The *worst lies* are the ones we *tell ourselves*.

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Paul now returns to what we looked at last week; the Corinthians' preoccupation with being thought wise & sophisticated.

He knew this was an enduring temptation for them so keeps hammering away at it.

**If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.**

He's not calling them to be on the lookout for *others* but for each of them to take an honest look at *themselves*.

That's why he begins with – "Let no one deceive *himself*."

What they need to be on the lookout for is thinking they're wiser & better because of the teacher they've lined up under.

Again, this is what the city of Corinth was all about – taking pride in their group & its leader.

But the way of Christ is different – so different it appears to the world to be foolish.

**19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written,**

He quotes Job 5:13 to show that his isn't merely his idea – it's Bible . . .

**"He catches the wise in their own craftiness";**

The word craftiness means cunning.

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In Greek it carried a strong negative connotation of someone who connives how to conduct evil by laying elaborate plans.

But no matter how conniving the lost are, no matter how skillfully they may weave their net of intrigue, they will never get way with it because God sees & judges all.

The net they weave will in the end trap them.

<sup>20</sup> **and again,**

From Psalm 94:11 -

**“The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.”**

The world considers the teachings of the sages & philosophers as deep & mysterious.

God knows they're empty.

Did you see that Maharishi Mahesh Yogi died yesterday at his home in the Netherlands?

He was 91. A spokesman said he died of “natural causes-his age.”

The founder of Transcendental Meditation, he claimed to have the ability to fly & tried to do so publicly in the 80's but obviously failed.

But he did have a helicopter he used to get around in.

Though the name Maharishi means *Great Seer*, all he really did was build a multi-billion dollar empire off the \$2500 fee he charged students wanting to learn TM.

In the 70's & 80's MMY called on all TM'ers to harness the power of group meditation to create world peace & banish poverty from the earth.

We can see how well that worked.

What's amazing is that today there are millions of people, including some of Hollywood's elite, who think MMY was the world's greatest guru/sage.

God calls it all empty.

<sup>21</sup> **Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: <sup>22</sup> whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come—all are yours. <sup>23</sup> And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.**

Paul finishes with a call for them to rise up from the silly games & distractions of the world to glory in what's there's in Christ.

Why boast about following Paul, or Apollos, or Peter, or Chuck, or Greg, or John?

Why brag about having the best this world has to offer, or even some *part* of what we have through faith.

In Christ, we have it ALL!

In Christ we have God Himself because He gives Himself to us completely in Christ.

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Catalogs – they're meant to inspire desire, stimulate lust, entice longing.

Buy, take delight, till you see something better.

Entertainment Tonight, Access Hollywood & such parade before us the *glamorous* lives of the celebrities Millions watch and wish they could live such a privileged life with such fame.

But those poor stars are like everyone else.

Lonely, disillusioned, empty. → Ask poor Brittany Spears.