

BUILDING FOR SUCCESS

1 Corinthians 3

Introduction

The epistle of 1 Corinthians was written to a church in conflict. Before we continue with chapter 3 I would like to review for a moment the layout of Paul's letter to this church.

Put up chart to outline the themes of the book.

In the third chapter Paul talks about the kind of house we are building – speaking of course of our lives. But what he says is in the whole context of division in the church and immaturity in the lives of the believers. So that is where we need to begin.

The Danger of Immaturity vv. 1-4

Paul begins this section by addressing the problem of immaturity in the church in Corinth. The root of the division and disorder in the church was the lack of spiritual power in the lives of these believers. I am convinced that the biggest problem in many churches today is very similar to that of the Corinthians, and I don't think we can exclude our own church either. Look at Paul's words:

Spiritual ↔ worldly (NIV); carnal (KJV); fleshly (NASB); people of the flesh (ESV); unspiritual (J.B. Phillips)

What does he mean by carnal... worldly... fleshly? Are they unsaved? NO! But they are unspiritual – the flesh, the human passions are winning the battle in the daily temptations of life.

Why does he call them carnal?

1. They are babes in Christ, infants – they should long ago be taking solid food, the meat of the Word of God, yet they still need to be served milk, the most basic and simple teaching of the Word of God. Cf. Hebrews 5:11-14. These believers are immature, they are not growing...

2. They are demonstrating worldly, unspiritual attitudes – v. 3 – jealousy and quarreling.

He says, when you do this you are acting as mere men – in other words, like people without the Spirit of God. They are acting as people who are controlled by the flesh rather than the Spirit.

So how does this unspiritual, worldly, carnal life manifest itself? We see that in the next few verses.

The Danger of Worshipping Men vv. 5-9

This carnal spirit demonstrated itself in these believers in the way they put men ahead of the leadership of Christ. He says that when you begin to focus too much on human leaders you are ignoring the real leader, which is Christ.

Go through vv. 5-9 pointing out man's role in God's program – we are simply those who sow the seed and water it. God is the only one who can make it grow – refer to farming and gardening.

Quote from Chuck Swindoll – "Do we resist the temptation to boast in or even to worship other human beings, or do we yield to it? (See chapter 3.) Paul's message to the Corinthians was this: "Resist it. Follow the leaders God gives, by all means, but don't worship them. You belong to God, not to any human leader. God alone is worthy of your worship. If we yield to this temptation, we'll remain infant Christians or, at best, adolescents, and we'll keep waiting to get our signals from that person in whom we invested all our adoration. And that person will only fail us in the end. Paul said, in effect, 'Don't worship other believers, no matter how gifted or godly they may be. Grow up. Become mature in the Lord.'"

Now that he has set the context, and pointed out the dangers of immaturity, and division, Paul now comes to the important truth that everyone of us is building a structure – our own lives, and we must take care about how we build it

Building for Success vv. 10-15

Paul went on to point out that he had laid the foundation at Corinth, which was the Lord Jesus Christ. Other men had followed him, building the superstructure. But it is only as man builds that superstructure properly — in the power of the Spirit of God — that it counts for eternity. We should not be involved in the work of God to receive the

praise of men or to have people idolize some mere servant of God. If the Church of God performs the work of God properly, it will not succumb to the glorification of a leader but will bring praise and glory to God alone.

So, what are we building?

→ Illustration - A Palace or a Shack

It was late at night, but Leroy Shively couldn't sleep. He was in Chicago for a convention, and across the street from his hotel a new building was being constructed. At the moment, workers were laying the foundation in the half-block-sized hole. Cement truck after cement truck wheeled in, waited in line, dumped its load, and drove off for another load. Workers had begun at dawn and were still going strong.

As he was tossing and turning, Leroy wondered what was going to be built on that foundation. It surely had to be a skyscraper. Then he thought, "Wouldn't it be funny to come back in a year and find a hot dog stand on all that concrete! "

Strong foundations aren't intended for small buildings. The same is true in the Christian life. Jesus Christ is the solid foundation on which we must build our lives (1 Cor. 3:11), But what are we building on that foundation? It is a palace worthy of Him, built of the gold, silver, and gemstones of good works, obedience, and faith? Or is it a shabby little structure of the sticks and straw of legalistic works carried out in the energy of the flesh?

That is a challenging question for all of us. What are we building on the foundation that has been laid in Jesus Christ?

Someday the life that we are building will be put into the trial of God's judgment. And the truth about what we have done will be tested and only that which is pure and eternal will last. We may be able to fool people in this life about what we are doing but God always knows the difference.

→ Illus. - "Jewels" of Glass

During 1977 literally millions of people lined up at museums in different cities across the United States to view the treasures from the tomb of King Tutankhamen of Egypt. But not long after, a story appeared in a Chicago newspaper. It seems that Ali Hassan, curator of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, discovered that some of the jewels found in the tomb were not

genuine gemstones at all. They were nothing but glass! The question was raised, how could this fact go undetected for so many years? Here's the answer given by Mr. Hassan: "We were blinded by the gold. One just assumes that real gold and real gems go hand-in-hand. This is a case where they don't."

Think about Ali Hassan's explanation: "We were blinded by the gold. One just assumes that real gold and real gems go together." Even though even the experts were fooled, God never makes that mistake. He can tell the difference between "gold, silver, and precious stones and wood, hay and stubble ".

Conclusion

So then, how do we respond? *Read v. 16-17* – the challenge: you are God's temple; God's Spirit lives in you. Your body, your life is the dwelling place of God. The question is, what kind of temple are you building?

Conclude by reading w. 18-23 - Review and challenge:

- Beware of elevating people to positions that belong only to God
- Be aware of and alert to God's work and methods.

Never forget that you belong to God and your responsibility is to build your life so that it will stand in the day of Judgment.