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1 Corinthians 3 Paraphrased



By Dan Maines

1 Corinthians 3 Paraphrased

Introduction

† Paul continues correcting the divisions in Corinth. Some believers were claiming loyalty to different teachers instead of recognizing that Christ alone is the foundation.

† The problem wasn't knowledge, it was spiritual immaturity. They were acting like people of the flesh instead of people led by the Spirit.

† This chapter explains how God builds His people, who the

true foundation is, and how every person's work will be tested.

1 Corinthians 3:1

Brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't speak to you as people living by the Spirit, but as people still controlled by human thinking, like infants in Christ.

† Paul isn't saying they weren't believers. He's saying they were immature believers who hadn't grown yet (Hebrews 5:12-13).

† Spiritual maturity comes through understanding and living out the truth of Christ, not just claiming His name (Ephesians 4:13-14).

† Early Christian writer Clement of Alexandria wrote that believers must move beyond infancy and grow into spiritual understanding (Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*).

1 Corinthians 3:2

I fed you with milk instead of solid food because you weren't ready for anything stronger, and even now you're still not ready.

† Milk represents basic teaching about Christ. Solid food represents deeper understanding of God's purposes (Hebrews 5:14).

† The Corinthians were stuck at the beginning because their behavior showed they were still thinking like the world.

† Irenaeus explained that immature believers remain on basic instruction until they learn obedience and unity (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*).

1 Corinthians 3:3

You are still acting like people ruled by the flesh. When jealousy and arguments exist among you, doesn't that show you're behaving like ordinary people?

† Jealousy and division are signs of worldly thinking, not spiritual maturity (James 3:16).

† The church was supposed to reflect unity in Christ, but their behavior showed they were imitating the culture around them.

† Tertullian noted that divisions in the church reveal a lack of spiritual discipline and submission to Christ (Tertullian,

Prescription Against Heretics).

1 Corinthians 3:4

When someone says I follow Paul and another says I follow Apollos, aren't you acting like ordinary men?

† Paul exposes the root problem, they were turning teachers into leaders of factions.

† The gospel never intended believers to attach themselves to personalities, but to Christ alone (1 Corinthians 1:12-13).

† Eusebius recorded that early Christians rejected personality cults because the apostles taught loyalty to Christ, not to themselves (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History).

1 Corinthians 3:5

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, each doing the work the Lord gave him.

† Paul reduces the apostles to their proper role, servants of Christ, not objects of devotion.

† God assigns different roles in the work, but none of the workers are the source of the faith itself (1 Corinthians 12:5).

† Clement of Rome emphasized that ministers in the church are servants appointed to carry out God's work, not masters over believers (1 Clement).

1 Corinthians 3:6

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God is the one who caused it to grow.

† Ministry has different roles, planting and watering, but only God produces spiritual life.

† This reminds believers that success in ministry doesn't belong to human effort but to God's power (John 15:5).

† Early Christian teaching repeatedly stressed that the growth of the church was God's work, not the apostles' achievement (Irenaeus, Against Heresies).

1 Corinthians 3:7

So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is

anything, but only God who causes the growth.

† Paul strips away human pride. The focus must remain on God, not on ministers.

† This truth destroys the idea of elevating church leaders above others.

† Origen later wrote that teachers serve as instruments, but the power that brings life always comes from God (Origen, Commentary on Romans).

1 Corinthians 3:8

The one who plants and the one who waters work together, and each will receive his reward according to his own work.

† Different roles exist, but the workers are united in the same mission.

† God will evaluate the faithfulness of each servant individually (Romans 14:12).

† Early Christian writers often spoke of future reward for faithful service, not salvation earned by works (Tertullian, On the Resurrection).

1 Corinthians 3:9

We are God's fellow workers, and you are God's field, God's building.

† Paul uses two pictures, a field being cultivated and a building under construction.

† Both images show that believers belong to God and are part of His work.

† The church isn't owned by leaders, it belongs to God alone (Ephesians 2:20-22).

1 Corinthians 3:10

According to the grace God gave me, I laid a foundation like a skilled builder, and another person builds on it. But each one must be careful how he builds.

† Paul describes his apostolic role as laying the foundation of the gospel.

† Others would build on that foundation through teaching and

ministry.

† The warning shows that teachers carry responsibility for how they instruct the church (James 3:1).

1 Corinthians 3:11

No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

† Christ is the only true foundation of the church.

† Any teaching that replaces Christ as the foundation is false (Ephesians 2:20).

† Irenaeus argued strongly against heresies that tried to establish new foundations outside of Christ (Irenaeus, Against Heresies).

1 Corinthians 3:12

If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw,

† These materials represent the quality of a person's teaching and ministry.

† Some work will endure because it reflects truth, while other work will prove worthless.

† Early teachers used this passage to warn against careless or false teaching within the church.

1 Corinthians 3:13

each person's work will become clear because the day will reveal it, since it will be tested by fire, and the fire will show the quality of each person's work.

† The day refers to God's moment of judgment and exposure.

† Fire symbolizes testing, revealing what is genuine and what is worthless.

† From the fulfilled perspective, this testing was especially seen in the judgment period that came upon Jerusalem in the first century (Matthew 24:34).

1 Corinthians 3:14

If the work someone built survives, he will receive a reward.

† Faithful work done for Christ carries eternal value.

† Reward isn't about earning salvation but about recognizing faithful service.

† Early Christian writers spoke of rewards for those who built the church faithfully (Clement of Alexandria, Stromata).

1 Corinthians 3:15

If someone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, but he himself will still be saved, though it will be like escaping through fire.

† Paul clearly separates salvation from reward.

† A person may still belong to Christ even if their work proves worthless.

† The image shows a person escaping danger but losing what they tried to build.

1 Corinthians 3:16

Don't you know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

† Paul reminds believers that God's dwelling place is His people, not a physical building.

† This truth became especially important as the old temple system was approaching its end (John 4:21-23).

† Early Christians repeatedly taught that the church itself was the temple of God (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History).

1 Corinthians 3:17

If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him, because God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

† Those who damage the church through division or corruption face serious judgment.

† The holiness of God's people must be protected.

† Tertullian warned that those who divide the church oppose the very house of God (Tertullian, On Modesty).

1 Corinthians 3:18

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks he's

wise according to this world, he must become foolish so that he may become truly wise.

† Worldly wisdom often opposes God's truth (1 Corinthians 1:20).

† True wisdom begins with humility and submission to God.

† Early Christians frequently warned believers not to rely on Greek philosophy over the teaching of Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:19

The wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, He catches the wise in their own cleverness.

† Paul quotes from the Old Testament to show that human pride ultimately traps itself (Job 5:13).

† God overturns the plans of those who rely on their own intelligence instead of trusting Him.

1 Corinthians 3:20

And again, The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are useless.

† Human wisdom without God leads nowhere (Psalm 94:11).

† God sees through intellectual pride and exposes its emptiness.

1 Corinthians 3:21

So no one should boast about men. Everything belongs to you.

† Believers shouldn't elevate leaders because all things ultimately belong to those who belong to Christ.

† The church doesn't exist to glorify human teachers.

1 Corinthians 3:22

Whether Paul, Apollos, Cephas, the world, life, death, things present, or things to come, all belong to you.

† Paul expands the idea, believers inherit everything through Christ.

† Nothing in creation ultimately controls those who belong to God.

1 Corinthians 3:23

And you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

† This final statement restores the proper order, believers belong to Christ, and Christ serves the will of the Father.

† The focus returns to unity under God's authority.

Historical References

† Clement of Alexandria taught that believers must grow from spiritual infancy into maturity through obedience to Christ.

† Irenaeus warned against building teachings on any foundation other than Jesus Christ.

† Eusebius recorded how early Christians rejected divisions centered on teachers and emphasized unity in Christ.

† Tertullian warned that those who divide the church damage the temple of God.

How It Applies To Us Today

† The church must never divide around personalities, leaders, or movements. Christ alone is the foundation.

† Believers are called to grow beyond spiritual infancy and develop mature faith and understanding.

† Every teacher and ministry will ultimately be tested by God, which means truth must always guide what we build.

† The people of God are His temple, which means unity and holiness must always be protected.

Q & A Appendix

Q: Why did Paul call the Corinthians infants?

A: Because their jealousy and division showed they hadn't matured spiritually yet (Hebrews 5:12-13).

Q: Who is the only foundation of the church?

A: Jesus Christ alone (1 Corinthians 3:11).

Q: What does the fire represent in this chapter?

A: The testing of each person's work to reveal whether it was

faithful or worthless (1 Corinthians 3:13).

Q: Does losing reward mean losing salvation?

A: No, Paul says a person may still be saved even if their work is burned up (1 Corinthians 3:15).

Q: What is God's temple according to this passage?

A: The people of God themselves, not a physical building (1 Corinthians 3:16).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† 1 Corinthians 3

† Clement of Alexandria, Stromata

† Irenaeus, Against Heresies

† Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History

† Tertullian, On Modesty

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