

## 1 CORINTHIANS 3 | *Gold, Silver, Precious Stones*

### 1. Milk for the Fleshly (1 Co 3:1-4).

- a. **1 Co 3:1-4** 1 But I, brothers and sisters, was unable to speak to you (pl.) as spiritual people (πνευματικοίς), but as fleshly people (σαρκίνοις), as infants (νηπίοις) in Messiah (ἐν Χριστῷ). 2 I fed (aor.) you (pl.) with milk, not solid food (βρῶμα), for you were not able (δύναμαι, imperf.) for it. And even now you are not yet able (δύναμαι, pres.), 3 for you (pl.) are still fleshly (σαρκικοί). For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly (σαρκικοί) and walking (περιπατέω, pres.) according to man (κατὰ ἄνθρωπον)? 4 For when one says, I follow Paul, and another, I follow Apollos, are you not being merely human (ἄνθρωποι)?
  - b. Paul can't speak to the Corinthians as spiritual persons, but only as fleshly persons, as infants in Messiah (v. 1).
    - (1) σαρκίνοις: “[P]ert. to being human at a disappointing level of behavior or character, (*merely*) human, in ref. to the state or condition of a human being, with focus on being weak, sinful, or transitory, in contrast to or in opposition to that which is spiritual...” (BDAG, 914).
    - (2) Paul is speaking to the Corinthian church as a whole, whom he considers believers.
    - (3) We can be adopted, justified, and indwelt by the Spirit, and yet be fleshly.
    - (4) Immaturity is not blameworthy if one is a new believer.
    - (5) Immaturity is blameworthy if one has been a believer for some time.
      - (a) “The evangelical church is the greatest nursery in the world.”
  - c. Paul fed them with milk, not solid food, which they couldn't handle (v. 2a).
    - (1) Milk is appropriate for new believers, but new believers need to grow up.
      - (a) **Heb 5:11-14** 11 About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, because you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, 13 for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, because he is a child. 14 But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.
      - (2) Believers are utterly to blame who do not endeavour to grow.<sup>1</sup>
  - d. They are still not able to handle solid food, for they are still fleshly (v. 2b-3a).
    - (1) σαρκικοί: “[P]ert. to being human at a disappointing level of behavior or characteristics, (*merely*) human” (BDAG, 914).
    - (2) As believers, our fleshliness can last for an extended period of time.
    - (3) Extended fleshliness results in sustained immaturity.
    - (4) Interpreters have understood Paul as describing several different kinds of people.
      - (a) Some believe that he saw only a difference between unbelievers (natural) and believers (spiritual).
      - (b) Others have seen three kinds of people in view: unbelievers, spiritual believers, and carnal believers.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Henry.

- (c) Still others have seen four: unbelievers (*psychikos*), believers (*pneumatikos*), immature believers (*sarkinos*), and carnal believers (*sarkikos*). I believe the last view is the best.<sup>2</sup>
- e. The proof of their fleshliness is the jealousy and strife among them (v. 3b).
  - (1) Works of the flesh prove a believer's fleshliness.
    - (a) **Ga 5:19-21** 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those [unbelievers] who do such things [as a matter of course] will not inherit the kingdom of God.
    - (b) **Ja 3:14-15** 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. 15 This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.
  - f. The Corinthian believers are living just as unbelievers do (v. 3c).
    - (1) Believers behave as a believer or an unbeliever, depending on whether they are living by the Spirit or by the flesh. In other words, it is possible for a believer not to walk by the Spirit and so to carry out the desire of the flesh.
      - (a) **Ga 5:16** 16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.
    - (2) Works of the flesh in the believer's life indicates fleshliness, not lack of eternal life. Beware of labelling someone a non-Christian because you believe they habitually live in the flesh. Because fleshly Christians behave just as natural people do, it is sometimes very difficult to tell who is a believer and who isn't.
      - (a) **Mt 13:27-30** 27 And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds? 28 He said to them, An enemy has done this. So the servants said to him, Then do you want us to go and gather them? 29 But he said, No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.
      - (b) When it comes to whether someone is a believer, *don't* be a fruit inspector.
      - (c) When it comes to whether someone is a false teacher, *do* be a fruit inspector.
  - g. As they form factions around favourite teachers, they are acting as unbelievers (v. 4).
    - (1) Partisanship is a sign of believers are thinking humanly and fleshly rather than spiritually.

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Constable, *Notes on 1 Corinthians*, 56.

## 2. The Nature of the Christian Ministry (1 Co 3:5-9).

- a. **1 Co 3:5-9** 5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants (δίακονοι) through whom you believed (aor.), as the Lord [Jesus] gave to each. 6 I planted (aor.), Apollos watered (aor.), but God was causing the growth (αὐξάνω, imperf.). 7 So neither the planter nor the waterer is anything, but only the causing-the-growth God (ὁ αὐξάνων θεός). 8 The planter and the waterer are one (εἷς), and each will receive his own wages (τὸν ἴδιον μισθὸν) according to his own labor (τὸν ἴδιον κόπον). 9 For we are God's co-workers (συνεργός). You are God's field (γεώργιον), God's building (οἰκοδομή).
- b. Apollos and Paul are servants carrying out the assignments Jesus gave them (v. 5).
  - (1) What each of is able to do in the church is undeserved grace gift. Give God thanks.<sup>3</sup>
- c. Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth of the church (v. 6).
  - (1) The Corinthians lack understanding of how Christian ministry really works.
- d. The planter and waterer are nothing. The causing-the-grow God is everything (v. 7).
  - (1) We are to be preoccupied with God, not with God's servants. Preoccupation with God brings the church together.<sup>4</sup>
- e. The planter and waterer are on the same team (v. 8a).
- f. The planter and waterer will receive their own wages based on their own labor (v. 8b).
  - (1) If we aren't working for God, we shouldn't expect a reward.
    - (a) **Lk 19:15-27** 15 When he returned, having received the kingdom, he ordered these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by doing business. 16 The first came before him, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made ten minas more.' 17 And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.' 18 And the second came, saying, 'Lord, your mina has made five minas.' 19 And he said to him, 'And you are to be over five cities.' 20 Then another came, saying, 'Lord, here is your mina, which I kept laid away in a handkerchief; 21 for I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man. You take what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.' 22 He said to him, 'I will condemn you with your own words, you wicked servant! You knew that I was a severe man, taking what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow? 23 Why then did you not put my money in the bank, and at my coming I might have collected it with interest?' 24 And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give it to the one who has the ten minas.' 25 And they said to him, 'Lord, he has ten minas!' 26 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. 27 But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me.'
- g. The planter and waterer are God's co-workers (v. 9a).
  - (1) God is able to do everything himself, but he has chosen to use us!
- h. The Corinthian church is God's field, God's building (v. 9b).

<sup>3</sup> Richard C. H. Lenski, 127.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Constable, Notes on 1 Corinthians, 59.

### 3. Building on the Foundation of Jesus (1 Co 3:10-15).

- a. **1 Co 3:10-15** 10 According to the grace of God (τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ) given to me, like a skilled master builder (σοφὸς ἀρχιτέκτων) I laid (aor.) a foundation (θεμέλιος), and someone else is building upon it (pres.). Let each one take care (βλέπω, pres.) how he builds (pres.) upon it. 11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Messiah. 12 Now if (first class cond.) anyone builds (pres. ind.) on the foundation [and this happens] with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— 13 each one's work will become (fut.) manifest (φανερὸς), for the Day (ἡ... ἡμέρα) will disclose (δηλώω, fut.) it, because it is being revealed (ἀποκαλύπτω, pres.) by fire, and the fire will test (δοκιμάζω, fut.) what sort of work each one has done. 14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives (μένω, fut.), he will receive (fut.) a reward (μισθός). 15 If anyone's work is burned up (κατακαίω, fut.), he will suffer loss (ζημιόω, fut. pass.), though he himself will be saved (σῶζω, fut.), but only as through fire.
- b. God gave grace to Paul to lay the foundation of the church in Corinth (v. 10a).
  - (1) Paul was like a skilled master builder (v. 10a).
  - (2) Paul's special mission was to plant new churches.
- c. Others who build upon that foundation must take care how they do so (vv. 10b-c).
  - (1) The quality of the materials and workmanship that go into building the superstructure of the local church are vitally important.<sup>5</sup>
  - (2) Paul is specifically talking of founders and builders of local churches, not every believer. But it is valid to apply these principles to every believer.<sup>6</sup>
- d. No one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, Jesus Messiah (v. 11).
  - (1) **Is 28:16** 16 ... Thus says Lord Yahweh, Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: Whoever believes will not be in haste.
- e. Those who build on the foundation should use gold, silver, and precious stones, not wood, hay, and straw (v. 12).
  - (1) Gold, silver, and precious stones are good works done to the glory of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. These works contribute to the permanent spiritual strengthening of the church. Examples:
    - (a) Teaching from a literal, grammatical, historical hermeneutic.
  - (2) Wood, hay, straw are any works, good or evil, done for human glory or by the power of the flesh. Examples:
    - (a) Teaching popular ideas.
    - (b) Mixing non-biblical worldviews into Christian theology.
    - (c) Social work done without reference to Jesus.
    - (d) Doing any church activity for the purpose of getting noticed.
  - (3) The six materials are arranged in a descending scale from three good materials to three bad ones.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Constable, *Notes on 1 Corinthians*, 61.

<sup>6</sup> Warren Wiersbe, 1:579.

- (4) At issue is the quality of our theology, our disciples, our activity, and our own character.<sup>7</sup>
- f. Each one's work will become manifest at Jesus' judgment seat (v. 13a).
- (1) Every believer will stand before Jesus and give an account of his or her stewardship.
- (a) **Lk 19:12-15** 12 A nobleman [Jesus] went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself and return. 13 And he called ten of his slaves [believers], gave them ten minas, and said to them: Do business until I return. ... 15 When he returned after receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves to whom he had given the money be called to him so that he might know what business they had done [Jesus' judgment seat].
- (b) **2 Co 5:9-10** 9 We [believers]...have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to [the Lord]. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Messiah, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.
- (2) We are to build with quality materials and workmanship that will meet Jesus' approval and receive reward.
- (3) This judgment has no relationship to unbelievers at all.
- (4) Most judgment passages in the New Testament have to do with the judgment seat of Jesus and not final judgment. This is because the bulk of the New Testament is written to believers, not unbelievers.
- (5) See Lewis S. Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, ch. XLVI: "Judgment of the Believer's Works," 283-87; or Joe L. Wall, *Going for the Gold*, 31-37.
- g. Fire will test what sort of work each builder has done (v. 13b).
- (1) If a believer's work survives the fire, he will receive a reward (v. 14).
- (a) The fire is metaphorical, not actual.
- (2) If a believer's work is burned up by the fire, he will suffer loss of reward (v. 15a).
- (a) Notice the fire is not testing the believer, who by God's grace is justified and not condemned. But certainly the believer's work is being tested.
- (b) This passage is not teaching purgatory!
- (c) This is a fire of evaluation, not the lake of fire.
- (3) The believer himself will be saved, but only as through fire (v. 15b).
- (a) Some believers will have little or nothing to show for their Christian life. What a disappointment!
- (4) I see it has my job to see each and every one of you receive maximum rewards at the judgment seat of Jesus. This is why I hate to see unmotivated, sloppy, unreliable Christians.
- (a) **Mt 25:19-21** 19 Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. 20 And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more. 21 His master said to him, Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little. I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.

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<sup>7</sup> James E. Rosscup, "A New Look at 1 Corinthians 3:12—'Gold, Silver, Precious Stones,'" *Master's Seminary Journal* 1:1 (Spring 1990):33.

- (b) **Lk 19:15** 15 When he returned, having received the kingdom, he ordered these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by doing business.
- (5) Great quotes.
- (a) “As I see it, the Christian position is one of invincible assurance of salvation combined with awesome warnings concerning forfeiture of blessing (but not of salvation itself).”<sup>8</sup>
- (b) “If the idea of serving God for a reward makes you uncomfortable, may I suggest that you read again the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7)? There Jesus repeatedly appealed to His hearers to follow His teaching with the prospect of receiving an eternal reward for doing so. Scripture appeals to us on many levels to serve the Lord. Certainly love for Him should be our primary motivation. However the biblical writers also urged believers to serve the Lord out of love for other people, the fear of the Lord, the prospect of having to give an account of our lives to Him at the judgment seat, and for other reasons.”<sup>9</sup>
- (c) “Throughout the Bible, God motivates us in three primary ways: love, fear, and rewards. You may be surprised to learn which motivator He uses most often. ... When we track those passages where God motivates us, we discover that reward is first, fear second, and love third.”<sup>10</sup>
- (d) “After we have been saved, there is superabounding grace for, of course, the reward too is of grace, for we could not have earned anything but by divine power. He enables us and then rewards us.”
- (e) “Though not the only motivating factor, I am convinced that the doctrine of the judgment seat (bema) is meant to be one of the major scriptural motivations for godly living.”<sup>11</sup>
- (6) Are you, believer, giving your absolute best for Jesus and for the right reasons?

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation*, 37.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Constable, *Notes on 1 Corinthians*, 65.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Bailey, *To Follow Him*, 55.

<sup>11</sup> Joe Wall, *Going for the Gold*, 21.

#### 4. You Are God's Temple (1 Co 3:16-17).

- a. **1 Co 3:16-17** 16 Do you not know that you (pl.) are God's temple (ναὸς θεοῦ) and that the Spirit of God dwells in you [corporately] (pl.)? 17 If anyone destroys (φθείρω, pres.) God's temple, God will destroy (φθείρω, fut.) him. For the temple of God is holy, and you (pl.) are that temple.
- b. The Corinthian church is God's temple-sanctuary (v. 16a, 17c).
  - (1) Paul asks, "Do you not know?" ten times in this letter. Each time the question introduces an indisputable statement.<sup>12</sup>
  - (2) We must remember who we are, corporately.
- c. The Spirit of God resides in them corporately (v. 16b).
- d. God will destroy anyone who destroys his temple, the local church (v. 17a).
  - (1) "This is perhaps the strongest warning in the New Testament against taking the church lightly and destroying it with the world's wisdom and division."<sup>13</sup>
  - (2) This destruction refers to temporal divine discipline up to and including the sin unto death.
- e. This is because the temple of God, the local church, is holy (v. 17b).
  - (1) Every local church is extremely important to God.

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas Constable, *Notes on 1 Corinthians*, 67.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Constable, *Notes on 1 Corinthians*, 67.

## 5. All Things Are Yours (1 Co 3:18-23).

- a. **1 Co 3:18-23** 18 Let no one deceive (ἐξαπατάω, pres.) himself. If anyone among you (pl.) thinks (δοκέω, pres.) that he is wise in this age (ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ), let him become a fool (μωρός) that he may become wise (σοφός). 19 For the wisdom of this world (ἡ...σοφία τοῦ κόσμου τούτου) is folly (μωρία) with God. For it is written, The one who catches (ὁ δρασσόμενος) the wise in their craftiness (πανουργία), 20 and again, The Lord knows the thoughts (τοὺς διαλογισμοὺς) of the wise, that they are futile (μάταιοι). 21 So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, 22 whether Paul, Apollos, Cephas, the world (κόσμος), life (ζωή), death (θάνατος), things present, or things future—all are yours [pl.], 23 and you [pl.] are Messiah's, and Messiah is God's.
  - b. The Corinthians must not deceive themselves by thinking they are wise in this age (v. 18a-b).
  - c. They are to become fools that they may become wise (v. 18c).
  - d. This is because the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God (v. 19a).
    - (1) God catches the wise in their craftiness (v. 19b).
      - (a) **Job 5:13** 13 He catches the wise in their own craftiness, and the schemes of the wily are brought to a quick end.
        - 1) This is the only New Testament quote from Job.
      - (2) God knows the thoughts of the “wise” are futile (μάταιοι)(v. 20).
        - (a) **Ps 94:11** 11 Yahweh—knows the thoughts of man, that they are but a breath.
      - (3) 1 Co 1:18-19 and these verses form an inclusio.
        - (a) **1 Co 1:18** 18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.
    - e. The Corinthians are not to boast in men (v. 21a).
      - (1) We cannot help liking certain preachers and teachers and the way they communicate. But we must not permit our personal preferences to become divisive preferences. The preacher we may enjoy the least may be the preacher we need to most.<sup>14</sup>
    - f. This is because:
      - (1) All things are theirs already (vv. 21b, 22e), including:
        - (a) Paul, Apollos, and Cephas (v. 22a).
        - (b) The world (κόσμος)(v. 22b).
          - 1) Under Jesus, believers will one day co-rule the world.
        - (c) Life (ζωή) and death (θάνατος)(v. 22c).
          - 1) In a merism, objects poles apart encompass everything in between them.
        - (d) Things present or things future (v. 22d).
          - 1) **Ro 8:38-39** 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Messiah Jesus our Lord.
      - (2) They belong to Jesus, who belongs to God (v. 23).
        - (a) Jesus is economically/functionally subservient to the Father, but he is certainly is not ontologically unequal.

<sup>14</sup> Warren Wiersbe, 1:581.