

1 Corinthians 3:1–23

Growing Up in Christ and Building What Will Last

Introduction: Three Kinds of People

Paul has already described two kinds of people. The natural person does not know Christ and cannot receive the things of God because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person is governed by the Spirit and possesses the mind of Christ. Now, in this chapter, Paul introduces a third category—the carnal believer.

This is not an unbeliever, but a genuine Christian who continues to live under the influence of the flesh. The Corinthian church was filled with people who had truly come to Christ, yet had failed to grow. Paul addresses them not to condemn them, but to call them forward into maturity.

Spiritual Infancy and Carnality (1 Corinthians 3:1–4)

Paul speaks plainly:

“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.”

They were in Christ, yet not walking like Christ. Spiritual birth had occurred, but spiritual growth had stalled. Paul explains why:

“I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able.”

Milk is appropriate for infants. It becomes a tragedy when a grown believer refuses to mature. Spiritual infancy shows itself through attitudes and behaviors rather than lack of knowledge.

Paul identifies the symptoms:

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

Jealousy, rivalry, and division reveal a life still ruled by the flesh. These attitudes are not harmless personality traits; they are signs of arrested spiritual growth.

Party Spirit Reveals Fleshly Thinking (1 Corinthians 3:4–7)

The Corinthians were aligning themselves with personalities:

“For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not carnal?”

Paul dismantles their thinking:

“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?”

No human leader gives life. No teacher saves souls. Paul planted the seed. Apollos watered it.

“But God gave the increase.”

Spiritual fruit is God's work. Human instruments matter, but they are never the source. When believers elevate servants above the Lord, division is inevitable.

Faithfulness, Not Results, Is What God Rewards (1 Corinthians 3:8–9)

Paul makes a crucial clarification:

“Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.”

God does not reward outcomes—He rewards obedience. Success in God's eyes is faithfulness to the task He assigns. This truth frees believers from discouragement and pride alike.

Paul reminds them:

“For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.”

The church is not the project of men. It is the work of God.

The Only Foundation That Matters (1 Corinthians 3:10–11)

Paul shifts metaphors from agriculture to construction:

“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.”

Then he makes an absolute statement:

“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

Everything God builds rests on one foundation—Jesus Christ. Not personalities. Not institutions. Not traditions. Christ alone.

Building for Eternity or for Loss (1 Corinthians 3:12–15)

Paul warns that not all building lasts:

“If anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear.”

A day is coming when every work will be tested by fire. What is eternal will endure. What is superficial will be consumed.

“If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

Salvation rests on Christ's finished work, secured by His shed blood. Rewards, however, depend on faithfulness, motive, and substance.

God's Temple and God's Holiness (1 Corinthians 3:16–17)

Paul delivers a sobering reminder:

“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”

Believers are not merely visitors in God's presence—they are His dwelling place. God's Spirit lives within those who belong to Christ.

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

This is a call to reverence, purity, and responsibility. Grace never excuses spiritual carelessness. Holiness matters because God lives within His people.

Rejecting the Wisdom of the World (1 Corinthians 3:18–20)

Paul exhorts believers:

“Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.”

Human wisdom often exalts itself against God. But:

“The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.”

True wisdom begins with humility and submission to God's truth, not confidence in human reasoning.

Why Boasting in Men Is Empty (1 Corinthians 3:21–23)

Paul concludes with a sweeping declaration:

“Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours.”

Everything God provides belongs to His people—not because they earned it, but because they belong to Christ.

“And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.”

The believer's identity is secure, rooted in Christ, sealed by His blood, and confirmed by His resurrection.

Practical Application for Believers

- Examine your growth. Are you still living on spiritual milk when God desires maturity?
- Reject division. Party spirit and rivalry reveal fleshly thinking.
- Build carefully. Invest in what is eternal, not what merely looks impressive.
- Live as God's dwelling place. Honor the holiness of the One who lives within you.

A Challenge to the Church

The church must stop measuring success by popularity, programs, or personalities. God is building something eternal. Only what is built on Christ, through faithfulness and humility, will remain.

An Invitation to Non-Believers

If you are not in Christ, there is no foundation beneath your life that will last. Jesus shed His blood to forgive your sin. He died in your place. He rose from the dead, proving that He is God, Savior, and Lord.

If you will turn to Him, trust Him, and call upon His name, He will give you new life and make you part of what God is building for eternity.

Today, place your life on the only foundation that cannot fail—Jesus Christ.