

# 1 CORINTHIANS 3

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*Be Intentional*  
*Philippians 2:12-13*  
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IN CHAPTERS 3 AND 4, PAUL DEALS WITH THE MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL AND TELLS US WHAT A MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL IS AND DOES, AND HOW THE CHURCH SHOULD LOOK UPON HIM AND HIS WORK. IT IS SAD THAT WE HAVE SUCH EXTREMES TODAY: SOME CHURCHES “DEIFY” THEIR MINISTERS AND MAKE GODS OUT OF THEM, WHILE OTHER FELLOWSHIPS “DEFY” THEIR MINISTERS AND REFUSE TO RESPECT THEM. IN THESE TWO CHAPTERS, PAUL GIVES SIX PICTURES OF CHRIST’S SERVANTS, THREE IN CHAPTER 3 AND THREE IN CHAPTER 4.

## I. A SERVANT TO OTHERS (3:1–5)

THE WORD “MINISTER” HERE IS THE SAME WORD FROM WHICH WE GET OUR WORD “DEACON,” AND IT MEANS “A SERVANT.” FOR EIGHTEEN MONTHS PAUL WAS CHRIST’S SERVANT IN CORINTH, FEEDING PEOPLE THE WORD, DISCIPLINING THEM, ENCOURAGING THEM, AND HELPING THEM WIN OTHERS.

IF THERE WERE PROBLEMS IN THE CHURCH, IT WAS NOT PAUL’S FAULT; IT WAS THEIR FAULT FOR BEING SUCH IMMATURE CHRISTIANS. THEY WERE BABES IN CHRIST AND COULD NOT RECEIVE THE SOLID MEAT OF THE WORD, THE DEEPER TRUTHS OF THE SCRIPTURES (HEB. 5:11–14) ABOUT THE HEAVENLY MINISTRY OF CHRIST AS HIGH PRIEST. HE HAD TO FEED THEM WITH MILK LIKE A NURSE! JUST LIKE LITTLE CHILDREN THEY ARGUED AND DIVIDED INTO CLIQUES, FOLLOWING HUMAN LEADERS. READ JAMES 3:13–4:17 TO SEE WHY THERE ARE WARS AND DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH.

A TRUE PASTOR MUST BE A SERVANT. HE MUST HAVE A SERVANT’S MIND (PHIL. 2) AND BE WILLING TO PUT CHRIST FIRST, OTHERS SECOND, AND SELF LAST. THIS IS NOT ALWAYS EASY TO DO! WE MUST PRAY FOR OUR SPIRITUAL LEADERS, THAT GOD WILL GIVE THEM GRACE AND STRENGTH TO BE SERVANTS TO OTHERS.

## II. A SOWER OF GOSPEL SEED (3:6–9)

PAUL NOW CHANGES THE IMAGE FROM THAT OF A FAMILY TO THAT OF A FIELD; HE PORTRAYS THE MINISTER AS A FARMER WORKING IN THE FIELD. THE SEED IS THE WORD OF GOD (NOTE THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER IN MATT. 13:1ff), AND THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE ARE THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF SOIL. THE LOCAL CHURCH IS A “SPIRITUAL GARDEN” WHERE THE PASTOR ACTS AS THE GARDENER (NOTE V. 9—“YOU ARE GOD’S HUSBANDRY [GOD’S GARDEN]”).

ON ANY FARM, MANY DIFFERENT WORKERS ARE NEEDED. ONE PREPARES THE SOIL; ANOTHER PLANTS THE SEED; A THIRD PULLS THE WEEDS; AND A FOURTH REAPS THE HARVEST. BUT ALL OF THEM SHARE IN THE HARVEST, AND EACH RECEIVES WAGES. “HOW FOOLISH OF YOU TO COMPARE ONE WORKER WITH ANOTHER!” SAYS PAUL. “WE ARE ALL WORKING TOGETHER. I PLANTED THE SEED BY FOUNDING THE CHURCH AT CORINTH; APOLLOS CAME ALONG AND WATERED THE SEED BY HIS PREACHING AND MINISTERING; BUT ONLY GOD CAN GIVE THE HARVEST. APOLLOS AND I DESERVE NO GLORY! WE ARE NOTHING, BUT GOD IS EVERYTHING!” THE CHURCH WAS DIVIDED OVER HUMAN LEADERS, BUT PAUL SAYS IN V. 8 THAT THE WORKERS ARE ONE, UNITED IN PURPOSE AND HEART; THEREFORE THE CHURCH SHOULD ALSO BE ONE. HOW TRAGIC WHEN CHRISTIANS COMPARE

PASTORS, EVANGELISTS, AND BIBLE TEACHERS IN THE WAY THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD COMPARE ATHLETES OR MOVIE STARS! "LABORERS TOGETHER" MUST ALWAYS BE OUR MOTTO AND MOTIVE. WE MUST TAKE CARE THAT THE SOIL OF OUR OWN HEARTS IS NOT HARD AND COLD AND UNABLE TO RECEIVE THE SEED OF THE WORD.

### **III. A BUILDER OF GOD'S TEMPLE (3:10–23)**

THIS SECTION IS ONE OF THE MOST MISUNDERSTOOD PASSAGES IN ALL THE BIBLE. THE ROMAN CATHOLICS USE IT TO "PROVE" THEIR DOCTRINE OF PURGATORY, THAT FIRE WILL PURIFY PEOPLE IN THE NEXT LIFE AND MAKE THEM FIT FOR HEAVEN; THE MODERNISTS USE IT TO "PROVE" SALVATION BY GOOD WORKS; AND MANY EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS INTERPRET THIS SECTION AS APPLYING TO THE JUDGMENT OF INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIANS RATHER THAN THE BUILDING OF THE LOCAL CHURCH. WHILE THIS PASSAGE TEACHES THAT THERE WILL BE A JUDGMENT OF BELIEVERS' WORKS AT THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST, THE BASIC APPLICATION IS TO WORKERS AND PASTORS OF THE LOCAL CHURCHES. THE LOCAL CHURCH IS COMPARED TO A BUILDING, OR A TEMPLE, AND THE PASTOR IS A BUILDER WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS TO KEEP THE MATERIALS IN THE TEMPLE AT THEIR VERY BEST. PAUL WAS THE BUILDER GOD USED TO LAY THE FOUNDATION AT CORINTH, AND THAT FOUNDATION WAS CHRIST AS PREACHED IN THE GOSPEL. ALONG CAME APOLLOS, WHO BUILT UPON THAT FOUNDATION, AND OTHER PASTORS FOLLOWED HIM. "EACH ONE SHOULD BE CAREFUL HOW HE BUILDS" (V. 10, NIV) IS PAUL'S WARNING. HE THEN DESCRIBES THREE KINDS OF CHRISTIAN WORKERS:

#### *A. THE WISE BUILDER (V. 14).*

THE FIRST WORKER USES LASTING MATERIALS (GOLD, SILVER, JEWELS) AND NOT THE CHEAP, SHABBY THINGS OF THE WORLD (WOOD, HAY, STUBBLE). THIS BUILDER SEEKS TO HONOR CHRIST, AIMING FOR QUALITY THAT WILL GLORIFY CHRIST, NOT QUANTITY THAT WILL WIN THE PRAISE OF MEN. WISE BUILDERS USE THE WORD, THEY PRAY AND DEPEND ON THE SPIRIT; AS A RESULT, THEIR WORK IS LASTING. WHEN THE FIRE TRIES THEIR WORK IN GLORY, IT WILL STAND!

#### *B. THE WORLDLY BUILDER (V. 15).*

THE SECOND BUILDER USES MATERIALS THAT CANNOT STAND THE TEST. THIS IS THE CHRISTIAN WORKER WHO IS IN A HURRY TO BUILD A CROWD, BUT DOES NOT TAKE TIME TO BUILD A CHURCH. THE MATERIALS COME FROM THE WORLD—WOOD, HAY, STUBBLE. THESE WORKERS DO NOT TEST PEOPLE'S PROFESSIONS BY THE WORD TO SEE IF THEY ARE TRULY BORN AGAIN; THEY MERELY TAKE THEM INTO THE CHURCH AND REJOICE IN BIGGER STATISTICS. WHEN THIS MINISTRY IS TESTED IN ETERNITY, IT WILL BURN UP. THE WORKER WILL BE SAVED, BUT THERE WILL BE NO REWARD. LIKE LOT, THE WORKER WILL BE SAVED, AS BY FIRE.

#### *C. THE DESTROYER (V. 17).*

FINALLY, THE DESTROYER DOES NOT BUILD THE CHURCH BUT TEARS IT DOWN. THE WORD "DEFILE" IN V. 17 REALLY MEANS "DESTROY." IT TAKES NO TALENT OR INTELLIGENCE TO TEAR SOMETHING DOWN; EVEN A CHILD (AND THE CORINTHIANS WERE LIKE BABIES) CAN DESTROY SOMETHING. SAD TO SAY, THERE ARE CHRISTIAN WORKERS WHOSE SELFISH MINISTRIES DESTROY LOCAL CHURCHES INSTEAD OF BUILDING THEM UP. GOD HAS A SEVERE JUDGMENT AWAITING THEM.

KEEP IN MIND THAT PAUL IS SAYING ALL THIS TO TEACH THE CORINTHIAN CHRISTIANS TO LOVE AND RESPECT THEIR PASTORS AND TO PRAY FOR THEM BECAUSE THEY HAD THIS TREMENDOUS TASK

OF BUILDING THE LOCAL CHURCH FOR GOD'S GLORY. THE CHRISTIAN WHO IS A "PREACHER FOLLOWER" IS HELPING TO BUILD WITH WOOD, HAY, AND STUBBLE. THE CHURCH MEMBER WHO LOVES THE WORD, OBEYS THE PASTOR'S TEACHING OF THE WORD, AND SEEKS TO KEEP THE LOCAL CHURCH AT ITS BEST SPIRITUALLY IS HELPING THE PASTOR BUILD WITH GOLD, SILVER, AND PRECIOUS STONES. THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST WILL REVEAL THAT MANY GREAT CHURCHES WERE NOT GREAT AT ALL.

IN 2:5, PAUL WARNED THE CORINTHIANS NOT TO TRUST IN MEN; NOW HE WARNS THEM NOT TO GLORY IN MEN (VV. 18–23). IMMATURE CHRISTIANS LOVE TO BASK IN THE LIGHT OF "GREAT MEN." PAUL REFERS TO JOB 5:13 AND PS. 94:11 IN VV. 19 AND 20. WHY MUST WE GLORY IN PEOPLE WHEN, IN CHRIST, WE HAVE ALL THINGS? IF PAUL OR APOLLOS WAS A BLESSING TO THEM, THEY SHOULD GLORIFY GOD AND NOT THE MEN. ALL THAT WE HAVE COMES FROM GOD, WHETHER IT BE GIFTED MEN AND WOMEN, THE BLESSINGS OF LIFE, OR THINGS YET TO COME. AND, IF THESE BLESSINGS COME FROM GOD, WE SHOULD GIVE THE GLORY TO GOD AND NOT TO MEN.

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT NEW CHRISTIANS REALIZE THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE LOCAL CHURCH AND THE PASTOR. AS MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY (VV. 1–5), WE RECEIVE THE FOOD AND GROW (SEE EPH. 4:1–16).

AS "PLOTS" IN GOD'S GARDEN (VV. 6–9), WE RECEIVE THE SEED OF THE WORD AND BEAR FRUIT. AS LIVING STONES IN THE TEMPLE (VV. 10–15, AND SEE 1 PETER 2:4–8), WE HELP THE TEMPLE GROW AND BE STRONG FOR THE GLORY OF GOD. THE LIVES THAT WE LIVE HELP TO DETERMINE WHETHER THE CHURCH IS BEING BUILT WITH GOLD, SILVER, AND PRECIOUS STONES, OR WOOD, HAY, AND STUBBLE. THE CHRISTIAN IS NOT TO GLORIFY HIS PASTOR, BUT IS TO RESPECT HIM AND OBEY HIM AS HE OBEYS THE LORD (SEE HEB. 13:17).