

# 1 Corinthians 3 Commentary-Wayne Barber

PREVIOUS **1st Corinthians**  
**Dr Wayne Barber**

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## 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 Spiritual Babies

Spiritual babies are cute when they are babies, but they are not supposed to remain that way. We are birthed into the kingdom. We come in as new-born babes in Jesus Christ. Then there is the growth process and the stages that God wants to take us through, one day to conform us even into the image of Christ Jesus. And to refuse to grow, to make a choice and say, "I am not going to do what you tell me, God. I am not going to grow," that is sin.

Have I told you lately about my granddaughter, little Holly? I don't think I have. She is just the cutest little thing. I know that every grandparent thinks this about their grandchild, but I just want to tell you, mine is the prettiest who has ever been born. We are having so much fun watching her grow up and learning those little words. She is trying to say Poppy. She hasn't been able to say that too good. She gets Nana and Mama and Daddy, but she hasn't gotten mine down right yet. But she is so precious. She is running and walking and just having the best time seeing everything afresh.

Today she came over, and she had a brand new dress on. Boy, she was something else. She was walking around in our kitchen so proud of that dress, just acting prissy. I mean, it is just so much fun. I love watching them grow up. No parent or grandparent in their right mind wants a child to remain a child. The very fact that they are born begins to give you the anticipation, expectation that they are going to grow, that they are going to change, that they are going to be different. Every stage in my own children's lives has been just as wonderful as the other, if not even better. And now that they are our friends and are adults and have their own life, it is just even another dimension of it. They grow and grow and grow.

It is a tragic thing when you see a child's mind in a 20year old person. Some people have had to suffer with that. It is a very tragic thing. But the same thing is true in the spiritual life. When you get saved, when you put your faith into Jesus, it doesn't stop, it starts. There is a process that begins. We are birthed into the kingdom. We come in as newborn babes in Jesus Christ. Then there is the growth process and the stages that God wants to take us through, one day to conform us even into the image of Christ Jesus. And to refuse to grow, to make a choice and say, "I am not going to do what you tell me, God. I am not going to grow," that is sin.

This is the problem we are dealing with at Corinth. Spiritual babies. Spiritual babies are cute when they are babies, but they are not supposed to remain that way. We must remember that when we become a believer, the body of sin is still there. I don't know why it is that we tend to forget that. Romans 6:6 tells us, "knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with." That word is *katargeo*. *Kata* is an intensive and usually means to cease something, but not to cease to exist. It is still there. He has shifted the power of sin into neutral by putting His Spirit into our life. Therefore, He has delivered me from the penalty of sin by dying for me. Now He has delivered me from the power of sin by coming to live in my life. And as I learn to yield to Him, as I learn to surrender to Him, I can walk in more and more victory that He has already given me in Himself. I can no longer be in the flesh, Romans says, but I can be after the flesh.

A baby is one who chooses to continue to want to be after the flesh. What happens is, you refuse the growth process. You impair your spiritual growth. So spiritual babies can be a good term, but spiritual babies can be a bad term.

Since 1:10 Paul has been dealing with the biggest symptom of a spiritual baby and that is attaching yourselves to people, to preachers with the message, rather than attaching yourself to Christ and living in the depth of your relationship to Him. Babies have to cling to somebody they can see, don't they? They just have to have somebody around them to remind them that God really is alive.

When my daughter was little she was so precious. My wife Diana was in the room with her one night, and she was just learning about God and things like that. She looked at Diana and said, "Mama, is Jesus in this room?" Diana said, "Why sure He is in this room, honey. He is everywhere." She said, "Well, I don't mean to be mean, but would you tell Him to leave. He is scaring me. It is okay if you stay, but tell Him that He has to go. He is bothering me."

Now that is a baby. But you see, when you grow in the depth of your relationship to Him, you don't need to attach yourself to people because you have the Holy Spirit of God living in you. That has been the message we have preached for years: live in the fullness of your faith. Understand that Christ is in you and you are complete in Him and He is your sufficiency. But when you refuse to do that, when I refuse to do that, when I refuse to say yes to Him, then what happens is I am stunting my growth. I am getting in the way of what God is trying to do in my life. Yes, He is in me to will and to work. Yes, He started the work and He will continue it and perfect it until that day. But remember, we can also get in the way. God works those things into His marvelous plan. He is still there, but we are still spiritual babies by the way that we behave.

Well, that is the problem in Corinth. Look at 1Cor 3:1-3. Let's read the whole context and we will come back and address it. 1Cor 3:1 says, "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?"

### **There is a time to be a babe in Christ**

There are three things that I want to show you in this text. First of all, and it is so critical to understand this, there is a time to be a babe. It is okay. There is a time to be a babe in Christ. He says, "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ." When he says "could not," that is aorist indicative. He seems to be pointing back to a time in the past when he was with them and he could not speak to them as unto spiritual men. He obviously is pointing back to the time when he was there, when they were first birthed into the kingdom because of the preaching of himself and then later on Apollos and others. But he is pointing back. He said, "When I was with you at that time, I could not speak to you as unto spiritual men."

We know the history of that. Acts 18 covers the account of Paul going to Corinth. I learned something when I was in Corinth. I learned that when he went to Corinth, he went there for the Isthmian Games. You may ask, "Well, why would he do that? Is he a runner? Did he just like games?" No. But the situation was that many, many people would come into the area for the Isthmian Games which was held over by the Temple of Poseidon. When they did this, they would stay in tents. Guess what? Paul was a tentmaker. Paul was a businessman. Paul never asked for offerings from people. He made his own living. He was a tentmaker. That is where he got with Priscilla and Aquila. For a year and a half he stayed with them up until the games. That probably financed his ministry for quite a while. So he was there with them.

Well, when Timothy and Silas came down and joined him, it wasn't long until many of them devoted themselves fully to ministry and many people believed. Many people were saved. They were babies. They would come into the door now of [[salvation]]. So he says, "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men [you weren't there yet] but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ." They had just entered the door of [[salvation]]. The process had just begun. They had not yet learned to be dominated by the Spirit of God. They were still fleshly minded.

Now, the word there for "men of flesh" is sarkinos. I know that means a lot to you, but sometimes I need to bring this out because these words help you so much in understanding what the text is saying. Sarkikos is the word used in 1Cor 3:3 and 1Cor 3:4. You say, what is the difference in sarkinos and sarkikos? Well, they are both adjectives. Sarkinos, in 1Cor 3:1, comes from the word sarkikos, and sometimes it is translated just that way. However, I see a difference in sarkinos in 1Cor 3:1 and sarkikos in 1Cor 3:3 and 1Cor 3:4. Now, don't let me lose you. I am just trying to show you something here. It is like a black and white TV becoming a color set. Sarkinos has the idea of the attitude of a baby, whereas sarkikos has more of the action of a baby. One is the attitude, one is the activity or the action of the child. He begins to describe that in 1Cor 3:3 and 1Cor 3:4. He says, "You still have a fleshly attitude."

Now, have you ever seen a little, bitty baby? I mean, it is the perfect picture here. Even though I love little Holly, and she is the prettiest thing, and she can't even say Poppy right now, I want to tell you, her world revolves around her. Have you ever noticed that

about a child? When a baby is born, it is fleshly minded. I mean it is whatever concerns “me”. I want food and I want it now. And I don’t want to do that. And when you pick her up, put me down. When you put her down, pick me up. I mean, it is constant, me, me, me. There is a fleshly something about a newborn child that is also a part of a brand new babe in Christ. He hasn’t learned yet to die to the flesh. He hasn’t learned yet to be dominated by the Spirit. So, they are still fleshly. They are men of flesh. The word sarkinos or sarkikos simply means they are fleshly minded.

Then he goes on, I think, and describes it. He says, “as to babes in Christ.” The word for “babes” is nepios. It is the word that means an infant, a helpless and unlearned child who has no ability to speak intelligently, one who is not mature. He has all that is needed but does not know how to use it. And so Paul says there was a time when I was with you that I could not speak to you as unto spiritual men because you were still fleshly, you were babes in Christ. There is a time to be a baby in Christ. When you are first born into the kingdom, don’t think that you are going to jump ten miles down the road in your growth. It is going to be a slow growth. It is a process. There is a time to be a babe in Christ. Paul had grounded them in the faith. He is not saying that. But he says, “I could not speak to you as to spiritual men.”

Look back in 2:35, and you will see what he taught them. “And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.” Even though they were babies, Paul still grounded them in the faith in the time that he spent with them. There is a time to be a babe in Christ.

This is why you don’t take a person who is brand new in the kingdom of God and make them a leader in the church. That is why you don’t want a novice to be an elder. You want somebody who has walked down the road, somebody who has grown up in their faith, somebody who has become spiritual, dominated by the Spirit of God, has learned to deal with their flesh. But there is a time to be a babe in Christ.

### **There is a thirst which a babe in Christ has**

The second thing I want you to see in this text is not only that, but there is a thirst which a baby in Christ has. He says that in 1Cor 3:2. He says, “I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it.” Now the analogy here is tremendous.

When Holly was a few months old, she was over at the house. I was eating some french fries or something and I really wanted to give one to her. But I was reminded, now wait a minute now, she can’t chew anything. You don’t give a piece of steak or something you have to chew to a baby. You give them milk. They can receive that. No chewing to it. It is easy. It is palatable. It goes right down. But you don’t give them solid food. They don’t even have teeth yet. Those are going to come in later on.

Now in the spiritual life, you are born with everything you need, you just don’t know how to use it. But they don’t have all the essential things here, so you don’t give them solid food, you give them milk. He said, “I gave you milk to drink, not solid food [Now that is aorist active indicative and he is pointing back to the time when he taught them. It was the milk of the Word, not the solid things of the Word. Why was that? He says] for you were not yet able to receive it.” The word “able” is the word dunamai. It means you didn’t have the ability to receive it. The word “not” is the word ou, which means not in any way, shape or form.

The word “receive” is not in the text but it is implied. You were not able to handle it. Therefore, when I was with you, you were a babe and you were thirsty and I gave you something to drink. I gave you milk, but I couldn’t give you solid food. The word for “solid food” there is broma, anything that you chew. It doesn’t have to necessarily be meat. It can be anything that you have to chew. He said, “I couldn’t give that to you.”

Now let’s make sure we understand something. It doesn’t mean that Paul taught them one thing then and taught them something else later on. No, he always taught the whole counsel of the Word of God. But he didn’t go into the depth and to the detail with them at that time with what he taught them because they couldn’t handle it. They were brand new babies. He stayed on the surface. It was the same teaching, he just didn’t have the freedom to go as deep as he would like to go with it.

Let me give you an example of that. Somebody might be describing the atonement and what happened to them. They say, “You know, let me give you my answer, Jesus died for my sins.” Well, that is fine. That is good. That is milk. That is right off the top. But somebody else who has grown a little bit might say, “Well, let me talk about my atonement. Let’s talk about justification. Let’s talk about sanctification. Let’s talk about substitution. Let’s talk about propitiation.” The guy who is over here says, “Do what?” You see, one can go a little deeper than the other. One has to drink the milk, but the other one can eat the solid food.

So Paul says, “When I was with you I didn’t sacrifice any of the teaching of the Word of God. But at the same time I couldn’t give you the solid food. I had to give you the milk. You couldn’t go beyond where you were. There is a thirst to a baby and I fed that thirst.”

I think Hebrews 5 gives us an insight into what this solid food refers to. Some say Paul wrote Hebrews, but we don’t know that. We do see a lot of Pauline theology in it. It is interesting though. What if he did write it? What if we get to heaven and we find out that

Paul did write the book of Hebrews? Let's just say he might have. Okay? Well, if he did, then this is real interesting because he is explaining something here that he wrote in Corinthians. Let's just look and see what the solid food is. He says in Hebrews 5:13, "For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe."

Now what in the world is "the word of righteousness"? Well, it has to refer to the walk of faith by the believer. Romans says that righteousness comes by faith and the righteous walk by faith. He is not accustomed to handling the word of righteousness. That is the solid food.

You have a brand new baby in Christ. He hasn't got a clue what he has gotten himself into yet. I mean, he knows he is surrendered to Christ and he knows that Christ has come to live in him, but he has got a lot to learn now what all of that means. By the way, it is never a goal that we surrender everything to Christ. We surrendered everything to Christ when you bowed before Him at salvation. We are working from that, not towards it. And so more and more we are understanding what this commitment means. We are growing in it and are learning to use and handle the word of righteousness.

I'll never forget the day Diana and I got married. When Diana got ready to walk down the aisle, she had forgotten her shoes, so she sent her brother-in-law, George, to go get the shoes. He brings back a heel and a flat. Come on, George, let's get with the program. If you are going to bring heels back, bring heels. If you are going to bring flats, bring flats, but at least bring the same shoe. He brings one heel and one flat. Well, Diana should have just kicked her shoes off and come down bare footed. You know, with those big dresses, you can't tell if they have shoes on or not. But Diana put them on. That is the way she is. She is so loyal. She came down like a hopeless cripple, walking on a heel and a flat.

Think about a wedding. Who really remembers anything? I mean, seriously. How many bride and grooms really remember anything of the wedding? Usually the guests get a lot out of it, but the bride and groom are not going to remember it. But I want to tell you something. About two years down the road when the bills are coming in and the baby is squalling and all that kind of stuff, all of a sudden that boy who made that commitment that day should have paid attention because what he committed to he is beginning to understand and he is growing in his understanding of what he did when he walked down that aisle, you see.

It is the same way in Christianity. When you come to Christ, there is only so much you can comprehend, but you give all that you understand to Him and He comes to live in you. You have a lot of growing to do to realize what that commitment that day really means for all of eternity. You get in the Word of God, the word of righteousness, and that is what gets you to grow.

You move away from the emotional realm of the unintelligible and the feelings and all that kind of garbage that was going on in Corinth and you move into the depths and the reality of the intelligent, reasonable walk with God. You don't have to hear something spoken, something you can't understand. You want to hear God speak to your spirit through His Word and you want to grasp that and bow to it and die to self and walk on into the depths of what God has for you. That is the growth that God has planned for your life. So, there was a thirst. This solid food, that he couldn't feed them with at that time, is something they are going to have to have.

I am so thankful that little Holly has teeth now. That is so much fun watching those teeth coming in. It is the cutest little thing. But it is fun now because she is already able to eat things that are solid because she is growing up. She is growing up. Isn't that great!

I want to tell you there are Christians all over this world who ought to have a big sign over their church, "Adult nursery, Shhhh!!!" There are people who won't grow up. There are people who attach themselves to a preacher or attach themselves to a person and they are emotionally wrecked because they don't know how to live in the fullness of what God has given to them. They won't grow. They have impaired their growth, you see. Solid food has to do with the word of righteousness. If I am studying this correctly, evidently the gospel, the simple gospel message, is just the ABC's, is just the milk of the word. That same gospel has a depth to it that you can't know when you first get saved, but you will know as you grow along.

I do a lot of meetings, and when I go into some meetings, they want to preach on evangelism. I am concerned about people getting saved. But I want to tell you my biggest burden is not seeing them get saved. Once they get saved, send them to me and let me teach them. That is where my burden is. But they want me to preach on evangelism all the time. Do you know why they want evangelism all the time? Because they are little, bitty babies and they can't stand the solid meat of the Word. Do you know why? Because it is going to take them to the cross. When you start growing, you have growing pains that go along with it and you are going to have to deal with pain and pressure and people.

But they don't want that. Let's go back to the milk. It was more fun. It is like a 15 year old walking around with a baby bottle trying to suck on that bottle. That is how stupid it is for people not to want to grow in their faith. Yet, that is what we have in Corinth. Believers who had it all in Christ and were still babies in Christ. They would not grow. They wouldn't do it. They wouldn't let the solid food get into their life, even though it was their command to do that.

### **The tragedy of a baby in Christ**

Well, there is a time to be a baby and there is a thirst to a baby. It is for milk. It is not a hunger for food yet. It is a thirst because milk is something that quenches that thirst. But the third thing I want you to see is there is a tragedy of a baby in Christ. You see, that baby can be good and that baby can be bad. Look at what he says here. These believers were once brand new in the faith, babes in Christ. There's nothing wrong with that. The problem is, they are still babies in Christ. In 1Cor 3:2 we read, "I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it." Now look, he changes tenses. "Indeed, even now you are not yet able." Do you see the difference here? Paul says, "When I was with you before, I couldn't give you the solid food, because you were a baby. But now I am with you and you are still a baby and I still can't take you into the solid things of the Word of God."

Growth is not only commanded by God, it is enabled by His Spirit living in us. When a believer lives a life that is not growing in the Lord, I want to tell you, that is sin before God. You are impairing what God the Spirit began in your life by your refusal to surrender to the Word of God.

Let's go back to the context of Hebrews 5:12. This is important, I think, to understand what Paul is talking about here. There was a group of people in Hebrews who weren't growing either. They impaired their own growth. They had intentionally chosen not to grow from that point on. Hebrews 5:12 says, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food." Now, "you have come to need milk" is the perfect active indicative. The perfect tense means that something has happened here that has caused you to be in the state that you are in. What in the world happened? Something happened in these people's lives. Of course, we know that Hebrews was written to those who were scattered about because of persecution.

Several things were going on at that time. At that time, to be a Jew and to practice Judaism was no problem, but to be a Jew and practice Christianity was a problem. They said, "Hey, we are Jewish anyway, let's just practice Judaism." That is why the author of Hebrews wrote and said, "What are you doing? You can't walk away. Christ is greater than the prophets. He is greater than the angels. He is greater than all these other things." That was part of the problem. Somewhere they made a choice not to grow, not to go on in their faith.

Look at Hebrews 5:13. He says, "For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe." The word "not accustomed" is the word *apeiros*, which means without skill in handling the word of righteousness. There is no skill there. You have done nothing to build this skill. If you have a skill, you know that doesn't happen overnight. You build that skill. You have got to do something to train yourself in it. It says here in Heb 5:13 that you have no skill in handling the word of righteousness. It doesn't seem to be a question of not knowing to do it. It seems to be a question of doing it. They have chosen not to and for that reason they have gone back to the milk instead of solid food.

Look at Heb 5:14. He says, "But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil." Now this is a very, very important verse here: "Who because of practice." The word is *hexis*, which means the practice or exercise of something. They had all the equipment that was necessary. You know, if you want to prove this point, take your right arm and tie it behind your back for about three months. You are going to find you are going to lose the use of it. There is no exercising of it. That is like people who get into Bible study groups. You know that is a big thing these days, to get into a Bible study group. Hey, but if you get in and learn what to do and you don't do it, it hasn't done you a bit of good. And what has happened is, you have impaired your own growth by your refusal to do what you know to do. There is no exercising of the skill, no exercising of what God has taught you.

Then it says, "they have their senses trained." The word "trained" there is the word we get the word gymnasium from. Have you ever seen something that is trained? You know, you train your children not to go out and play in the road. You know training takes time. You say, "Children, don't you go out and play in the road." Okay, Mama, okay, Daddy. Are they taught? Yeah, they are taught. They know exactly what you are talking about. You turn them loose and what do they do? Go out in the road, every time! So what do you do to train them? You go out and get them, paddle them on the backside and say, "Don't do that again." Well, the next day you tell them, "Don't go out and play in the road." Okay, Mama and Daddy. And you look away and what do they do? Go right back in the road. So what do you do? You bring them back in, paddle them again. The third day, the fourth day, the fifth day, the sixth day. What are you doing? You are training them. You have to do this over and over and over again. Well, what happens? One day you forget to tell them and you think, "Oh no, I didn't tell them. No telling where they have gone this time." You look outside, and they are in the yard. Well, bless their hearts. They have been trained. They were taught the first day, but now they have been trained. They have these senses trained unto righteousness.

When some people hear the message of the Christ-life they think there is no activity in it at all for the individual. That is crazy. I am responsible for discipline and determination in my own life, to be diligent. There are certain things that I have to do, and if I am willing to do those things and train my senses unto righteousness, then they are going to line up and the growth process is taking on. Then I am going to start learning the joy of walking in the fullness of God, in the fullness of His Spirit. But if I am not willing to do that, then I have made a choice to go right back to drinking that milk again. Put that bottle in your mouth. That is the way people act in

churches all over the country today. They don't want to grow. They don't want to deal with their flesh. That is the problem with Corinth.

Well, he goes on to say "to discern good and evil." They are clearly able to discern. And the word for "good" is kalos, that which is inherently good, and the word for "evil" is kakos, which is inherently bad. God gives us that ability and the more we grow, the more we are in the Word, the more we are practicing and exercising our senses and having them trained to righteousness, the more we are able to see a fine line between that which is good and that which is evil.

Well, now we have a better understanding of the solid food versus the milk. In 1 Corinthians 3:3 Paul says, "for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?" Now here he is going to show you the symptoms of a person who refuses to grow in that which God has given to him. He has chosen to go back and be a baby and drink the milk. What is the biggest symptom? It is the symptom of jealousy and strife. The word "fleshly" again is sarkikos. You are fleshly acting.

Here are the two symptoms. When you see jealousy and strife together, almost every time they will be hooked together. They are strange bed fellows. Jealousy is that inward thing that you have and strife is the outward manifestation of it. The two work together. Almost every time you find them in Scripture, they are joined together. Jealousy, or the word zelos, really can be a good thing. It can be a person like me or you and we see somebody else and we see something good in that person and are motivated to have that same good worked out in our own life. This person blesses us, and so therefore, we want that quality in our own life. The Holy Spirit of God can enable you to have that. You can be zealous for that, and something inside of you is motivating you towards that. There is nothing wrong with the word. It can be a very good word, but it is not good here.

I have several friends who are just wonderful at dropping little notes at the right time, just jotting a note to somebody. I have asked God many times for that quality in my own life. I want to be zealous to have that in my own life. Somebody will say, "Well, you don't have that gift." Oh baloney, the Holy Spirit of God lives in you and that is something you can develop and train and have worked out in your life. So you can be zealous for something like that. I really long to have that in my own life because I really do care, but sometimes it doesn't come out that way and I want people to know that I care.

Well, there is nothing wrong with that. But when it goes and degenerates and becomes the fleshly kind he is talking about here, it is when you seek to not only covet that desire, but now you want to rob that person of it. You are angry with that person because they have it and you don't and therefore, you become contentious and filled with strife. The two things work right together.

The Texus Receptus adds another word that the New American Standard doesn't pick up on – the word "divisions." Now I want to tell you something, folks. Remember babies only think of themselves. Babies are jealous and full of strife. You put a bunch of babies in a room, put a bunch of toys out on the floor and before long there is going to be the biggest fight you have ever seen in your life. One baby gets a toy and the other one says, "You can't have that toy. I want that toy." He will go grab that toy away from the other one and before you know it, they are spitting and hollering and crying and clawing and everything else going on there.

That is the way it is in churches when people refuse to grow in respect to their salvation, when all they want is milk. "Tell me about how to be saved." That is all they want to hear. They don't want to hear the solid teaching of the word of righteousness. They are selfish and are always thinking of their own ideas, opinions and flesh. As a result, they are contentious and jealous and bring great division in the body of Christ.

Now folks, understand we just nailed about every church in America, including ours, when people refuse to grow in respect to their salvation. They won't take off that garment of malice so they can grow as a new born babe who really longs for that milk so they can grow with that same kind of attitude and say, "God, take me deeper into the things that you have for me."

Let me ask you a question. How long have you been saved? 20 years? 10 years? 5? Only you know when you got saved and where you are now, but let's just say somehow there was a way we could have a roll call where you are in your spiritual growth on a graph would pop up on a screen. Would it be embarrassing for you? Where are you in your spiritual growth? Are you allowing the word of righteousness, the solid food, to take you deeper into faith, or, are you camping out with the milk and satisfied with it because you just don't want the pain of the growth that goes along with the growth?

That is just what happened at Corinth. Paul takes it ingenuously and ties it right back to his context. What does it mean to act like mere men? He said, "and are you not walking like mere men?" And the word for "mere men" there is the word anthropos, basic humanity. That is all he is saying. Are you acting like people who don't even have Christ in their life? Why are you doing that?

Then he shows them what it is like to act that way. Look in 1Cor 3:4. He ties it right back to his context. He has never left this context from all the way back in 1Cor 1:10. 1Cor 3:4 reads, "For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not mere men?" Do you realize all that jealousy and all that strife and all that division is camped around attaching yourself to a preacher? Isn't that incredible?

When I went as pastor to one church, the pastor before me was a great visitor. He visited everybody. I mean, constantly, everybody. He visited shut-ins every single day of the week. Well, I came in, and I am of a little different cut than he was. He never studied, and therefore, all he ever taught the people was milk. I don't know when I have ever been to church that had less doctrine than these people had. All they could tell you about the atonement was that Jesus died for your sins. That is all they could tell you. You could ask them about justification or sanctification and they would say, "I am sorry, but I have never had that before. The medicine cured me." They wouldn't even know what you were talking about.

The way I loved the people was not knock their door down and be in their home all the time. The way I loved them was to spend time in the Word of God and feed the people when I got into the pulpit. But, oh, a holy war broke out. I won't name the pastor who was there before me because he was a great man. His gifts were in different areas. He wasn't gifted in equipping the people. Maybe he wasn't called to be in that position. I don't know. But they said, "I am of him, because you know what, he really showed me that he really loved me. He was always there when I needed him." Others would say, "Oh no, I am of Brother Wayne because I want to tell you, I have never gotten into the Word like I have gotten into the Word under this preacher. I am really of him." I told Diana one time I believe I could start a fight staying in bed. I hadn't done a thing. All I did was go in and start teaching the people and all of a sudden, factions began to grow in our church. What is wrong with my church? They are spiritual babies, that is what is wrong with them. They won't grow up and they won't get in the Word of God.

Folks, this was Corinth. This is the whole problem. He doesn't stop dealing with them. Listen, studying the book of 1 Corinthians is like studying the pathological behavior of a child who won't quit, who absolutely is just going to be consistent all along. That is what it is like. I had a doctor over at St. Luke's Hospital in Thessalonica tell me, "I have studied textbooks on pathology. But I am telling you, you study 1 Corinthians and the habitual patterns of these immature babies in Christ are incredible if you will just look at it one by one as he deals with them in the book." Why? Because they won't grow up. They like that gospel, son. Teach me how to be saved all over again. I just love it. But don't tell me how to live, Brother, because I am not willing to deal with the rottenness of my flesh.

That is Corinth. There is a time to be a baby, folks, and it is wonderful. There is a thirst to being a baby, but there is a tragedy to being a baby if you refuse to come out of that nursery and grow in the solid food of the Word of God. I mean, these people are sick. They don't understand they have all of God they will ever have. They haven't learned to live in light of all that He wants to do in their life. Then they can stand on their own two feet. Nobody has to stand with them. They are complete in Christ Jesus.

The book of Psalms says He is in front of us, He is behind us, He is beneath us, He is above us. The New Covenant teaches He lives in me. Now what else do I need? Do I need people running around that I can get the appreciation from or can I stand on my own two feet in the fullness and the sufficiency of what Christ has offered to me?

You can't get inside of Paul's mind but you can hear him think when he says, "For one says 'I am of Paul' and another says 'I am of Apollos.'" You know who Apollos was, don't you? He was the preacher who followed Paul. You can almost hear him speak to the exact scenario I gave you a moment ago. "Some of you are walking around saying, 'I like Paul because he is so easy to understand. I mean, he just challenges my mind. I don't like Apollos. He is not anything like the Apostle Paul.'" Then some of them weren't benefited by Paul's ministry and when Apollos came along they loved him. Maybe he was more simpleminded. Maybe he was more practical. "I like Apollos, boy. I just really like Apollos. I am of him. I am of him. I am of him."

Paul is saying, "Good grief, man, wake up. Stop attaching yourself to preachers and grow up. Come out of the nursery and live in the fullness of what God offers to you and the sufficiency of what He wants to be in your life."

I guess over the door of Corinth you could put that sign, "Quiet, Spiritual Nursery," especially for the adults in that church. He is not going to finish with them here. He has got some more things to say to them. But the first thing he shows them is the very symptom of attaching yourselves to men.

Isn't that the day we are living in, folks? Isn't that the day we are living in? They will fight you, but not because of what the Scripture says. Think about the book of Revelation. You really can't preach the book of Revelation to people in today's time. And I want to tell you why. Because they have already got their minds made up as to what they think it says. And if you cross that, they have just shut you off. They don't care what the Scriptures say because the tapes they listened to didn't put it that way, and they are just not going to agree with you.

So Paul says to the church of Corinth, "Grow up. You can't stay spiritual babies. Have you own faith. Stand on your own two feet." Don't believe it because Wayne says it. Check it out and make sure it is what God says. Train your senses in the word of righteousness and walk in the sufficiency of Christ. That is what growing in Christ is all about. Then you can know what the solid food is compared to the milk.

## 1 Corinthians 3:3-9 Vessels through Which God Works

God's plan to use surrendered vessels; the prerequisite for men to be used as vessels; the partnership of God's surrendered vessel; the proof of God using surrendered vessels; and the parity [equality] of God's surrendered vessel.

When immaturity characterizes a church, no matter where it is, the symptoms are going to be very similar to what we found at the church of Corinth in 1 Corinthians 3. I told you back in the introduction of the book that 1Cor 3:2-9 were critical and would come up from time to time as we studied 1 Corinthians. Well, here it is. Let's go back to chapter 1. I want to just make sure you are remembering this. This is the grid. If you want to see a Christian who is growing up, a Christian who has walked out of the nursery and said, "Listen, I am not going to be a baby anymore. I am going to grow up in my faith," well, 1Cor 3:2-9 will show you what he looks like.

Now the Corinthians were not looking like this because they refused to do it, but it is good for us to go back. In verse 2 of chapter 1, look what he says to begin with. He says that the church is God's possession. He says in 1Cor 1:2, "To the church of God which is at Corinth." He didn't say to the church of man. He said to the church of God. "Now what in the world are you doing attaching yourself to man?," Paul is saying here. He has already shown them who they are supposed to be attached to, what they are supposed to be about.

Also in 1Cor 1:2, he shows them that they have one eternal purpose, just one, and that purpose is to live according to God's will. He says, "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling." If you are a saint, you have been sanctified. Now what does that mean? Well, the raw meaning of it means that you have been taken out of sin, out of Adam. You have been placed over here into Christ and you have but one supreme purpose to live by. As long as your heart is beating, you have just one purpose.

What is that one purpose? To live as a vessel through which God can do His work. That is the whole key. So what are you doing attaching yourself to men? Attach yourself to Christ. Attach yourself to God. You are set apart for Him to use as His own vessel on this earth through which He can do His work. But he also shows them that they were to depend totally upon God and not at all upon man in everything.

In 1Cor 1:2 he says, "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling [here is the key], with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours." That "call upon" is present tense. It is a lifestyle. To call upon out of desperation. Paul is saying, "A baby in the nursery calls upon man, but somebody who is growing up has learned to call upon God for everything in his life. You don't attach yourself to a preacher. Attach yourself to Christ. Call upon Him for everything. Live according to His purposes. Understand that you are His possession."

Paul goes on to show them that in Christ and in the grace that He has given them, they have been enriched in everything. They don't lack anything. So why do you need to attach yourself to man?

Then in 1Cor 1:8 he reminds them of their future promise that Christ one day is coming for them. They will be kept blameless until that day. In 1Cor 1:9 he shows them that they are partakers of Christ. Now, if a person lives this way, if he will grow up and come out of the nursery, there would be no division, jealousy or strife in the church of Jesus Christ. There is a time to be a baby, but there is a time to grow up. It is individuals who are living that way. It is not just me. It is not just you. It is everybody. If we would each choose to live that way, growing up, turning loose from man and attaching ourselves to Christ, living in the sufficiency that He has given to us, then we would erase division and immaturity in the church.

Sad to say, Corinth is not much unlike many of the churches in our time, and many believers who refuse to grow up, who attach themselves emotionally to a man, to a gift, or whatever else, instead of living in the sufficiency of Jesus Christ. The immature do not live in who and whose they are. They live attached to men. The mature stand on their own two feet, even if alone, but filled to the fulness of God and living in the purposes that God has given to them.

It is sad to say that the church today is split in a thousand different ways just like the church of Corinth. So we continue with Paul's argument of why not to attach yourselves to men. Don't do it. Attach yourselves to Christ.

### God's plan to use surrendered vessels

There are five things that I want us to see concerning this. Some of them sound like a broken record. How many times have I said this in the Word of God? I don't know how many times you have to preach it? I guess you just preach it until Jesus comes because it is all through the Word of God, folks. First of all, this is the one that is going to be more familiar to you. God's plan is to use men as vessels through which He does His work.



Look at 1 Corinthians 3:5. There is a little word there that is so key: "What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one." Now, "through whom" is very important. It is a great translation. The little word *dia*. You can translate it "by the means of," but it is the same meaning. It is through, through whom. That is the way God uses people who are surrendered to Him. When you come out of the nursery, you get surrendered to Him, you live separate unto Him, then you become a candidate through which God can do His work in your life. It is like a line that is filled with electricity, coming from a power source somewhere. It is like a conduit or a pipe through which water can flow coming from a reservoir. That is what He wants us to be, a conduit. He wants us to be that vessel that is cleansed of selfish desires and agenda through which He can do His work.

Paul said, "It is through us that you believed. It wasn't because of us but through us. God gave us a message and He allowed us to preach it. It was through us that you came to know Him."

Paul says the same thing about this vessel that God wants us to be in Romans 15:17-18. That is a very familiar passage. This is what Paul had to learn about being a Christian, the difference in religion and relationship, the difference of being immature and being mature. When you are mature, you are useable. When you are immature, you are not useable. Understand that. As long as you are attaching yourself to anything other than Christ, then God is not able to do His work through you. That is what you are set apart for, to be that vessel.

In Romans 15:17 he says, "Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God." Now, what has changed about the apostle Paul? Ro 15:18 reads, "For I will not presume, I will not dare, to speak of anything." If I was in a room it was quiet. I wouldn't break the silence with a noise other than "except what Christ has accomplished." Now look at the wording, "through me [*dia*, the same little word there], resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles." Now we know from Scriptures that when God has a vessel that has matured, a vessel that has come out of the nursery, a vessel that has surrendered to God and letting God do what He wants to do through His life, then when God chooses to do something through that individual, nothing is going to stop as long as that individual remains surrendered to God.

Look over in 2 Timothy 4 and I will show you this. God had something to do through Paul. Paul was not dead yet. He was about to be martyred for the faith. Look at what he says in 2 Timothy 4:16. He is in his last imprisonment. I want you to see this. 2 Timothy 4:16 says, "At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, in order that," and look at the next two words, "through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion's mouth."

You see, when he was first imprisoned there during his second imprisonment, the believers knew how difficult it was and they were afraid to come and take their defense along side him for whatever reason. So he stood alone. But God wanted to accomplish that message of the gospel getting out to his accusers. Therefore, God strengthened him and used him mightily as a grownup, mature believer who was about the purposes of God, you see. God accomplished what He wanted to accomplish through the apostle Paul.

It is important that we understand the fallacy of putting your trust into men. Why would you want to put your trust into a conduit? Why would you want to put your trust into something that is only a vessel through which the power and the person of Christ can be made manifest? Why would you not put your faith into the One who is empowering them? Why not get plugged in to the right source? You see, that is what Paul is saying. Don't attach yourself to men. They are just vessels. But God is the one you attach yourself to. He is the one who gives them the power to do what they do.

Now these men are just vessels. We saw this in the book of Judges. When it said, "The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon and Jephthah and Samson." What did that mean in the Hebrew? It meant that he put them on like a set of clothes. God said, "I want some skin through which I can do my work." And so they became the vessels through which God could do His work. This has always been God's way.

So, I want you to know that just as with Paul and Apollos and what He wanted the church of Corinth to know, if we will just grow up and start living in light of our faith, pledging allegiance to the Lamb, living surrendered unto Him, then God can do His works through us the same way. That is exactly the message. But if you attach yourself to a man, you have just shut the process down. A person who is attaching themselves to anyone or anything other than Jesus is not a vessel through which God can do His works. That is the whole point of what the Christian life is all about. So the plan is that God wants to use men as vessels through which He accomplishes His work.

### **The prerequisite for men to be used as vessels**

The second thing is the prerequisite for men to be those vessels that God can use. To qualify for God's using, they had to make a choice. They had to grow up. They had to come out of the nursery. Look at Verse 5 again: "What then is Apollos? And what is Paul?" What is the next word? "Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one." The word for

“servant” is diakonos. It is the word that means, “your glass is empty. Can I get you another glass of water? Is there anything else I can do for you?” This is the word that we get the word “deacon” from.

You know, that word was never properly translated. It was transliterated. It was made into a word, and a lot of people do not even know today what a deacon is. The word means to serve, to minister. It is not a position of honor. It is a position of service. But it is also the calling of every believer. When you come out of the nursery, you come out serving. “Lord, what would you have me to do?” That is the attitude. Not, “What can you do for me,” but “What can I do for you?” They were servants.

There is a synonym of this word that has a harsher understanding of it. It is the word *doulos*, which means slave. Now that is the word in Romans 1:1 where Paul doesn’t call himself a servant. He calls himself a bondservant, a slave. He means it that I am a love slave. I get to do, not that I have to do. I am privileged to get to do the things that God wants me to do. That is the attitude of a mature believer, one who is maturing, not matured in the sense of he has arrived, but one who is growing up, one who is coming out of the nursery. It is not, me, me, mine, mine anymore. It is you and Him and whatever He wants. It changes the whole attitude of the individual.

He uses this word *doulos* not only in Romans 1:1 but in Galatians 1:10 and Titus 1:1 to speak of himself. It is synonymous with servant, but it has that deeper understanding that he has laid his will down, that he has laid his agenda down, that his attitude has been dealt with and he just wants to live his life as a vessel to be whatever God wants him to be.

Now understand, babies have to attach themselves to a person. They have to. They have got to have a preacher by their side. They have to have somebody right there all the time. They can’t live standing on their own two feet. Eric, my son-in-law, and I kept his daughter, my granddaughter, recently on a Saturday. I think men ought to keep a granddaughter from time to time to help the granddaughter really grow up right. I mean, we had her for three hours and did we ever have the best time in the world. But she is not quite used to me yet. She is used to her grandmother, Nana. She says that real well. She is not doing too good with Poppy, but she is working on it.

When I first walked towards her she was in the kitchen. Diana and Stephanie had snuck out the door. It was really, really slick the way they did that. She was standing in the kitchen and didn’t even know they have left. I walked over towards her to pick her up and she backed up and said, “Mama, Mama, Mama.” That is what she always says when she is in a jam and she is backed up against the wall. After about an hour, she finally came around and boy, we just had a blast. It will take them weeks to retrain her. I am fulfilling my role, I think, with vigor. But you know, it was so precious.

It dawned on me how a baby has got to have somebody right beside them all the time. “That preacher doesn’t love me; I was in the hospital and he didn’t even call me. That person in my Sunday School class didn’t even say hi to me when I came this morning.” That’s the whining of little babies who just won’t grow up. The Scripture says that the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, diakonos, but He came to minister. When you come out of the nursery, you are not worried about what somebody is or isn’t doing to you. It is “Lord, what would you have me to do?” That is maturity. But it is not in Corinth and that is why Paul is saying, “You are attaching yourselves to men. Don’t you do that.”

The prerequisite for attaching yourself to God and for God to use you as a vessel is that you be that bondservant. God gave Paul and Apollos the opportunity to be drawn into what He was doing in Corinth. Look at 1Cor 3:5 again. He says, “What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one.” Now some people take that last phrase and say that means to the people who believed in Corinth. I have no problem with that, but I don’t think that is what he is saying. I think he is speaking of Paul and Apollos. At a certain time and point, God drew Paul into what He was doing and at a certain time and point, He drew Apollos into what He was doing. The two were useable conduits because they were surrendered to Christ. Therefore, God could do His work through them. Why? Because they were servants. That is the key. The prerequisite is a surrendered will unto Him, attaching yourself to Him, never attaching yourself to people, but attaching yourself to Him. Letting Jesus be Jesus in and through your life.

### **The partnership of God’s surrendered vessel**

So we see the plan is to use men as vessels, and He can use us all. But the prerequisite is that we be surrendered to Him. Thirdly, there is the partnership of God’s surrendered vessel. It is incredible to me, when you start becoming a part of what God is doing, God opens your eyes to the fact that there are others also involved. A little baby only thinks of his own little world. Everything revolves around him or her. But when you start growing up, you realize that it doesn’t just revolve around you. There are other people out there God is using. It is God’s work and God’s design, therefore, He uses certain ones to accomplish it. Some are seen, and others are unseen. But they are all equally used. It is a partnership. They need one another.

Now Paul and Apollos had different callings, but there was a partnership that Paul brings out so clearly. You have got to see it. When you start growing up and God starts using you, you begin to realize the importance of other people who are around you. In 1Cor 3:6 he says, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.” Paul’s role was to plant the seed of God’s gospel where it

had not been planted before.

Look over in Romans 15:20. This is so clear. Paul went to where seed had not been sown. Paul went to where people had not heard about Jesus before. That was his calling. That was different than Apollos' calling. Paul says in verse 20, "And thus I aspired to preach the gospel [now watch], not where Christ was already named, that I might not build upon another man's foundation." He is using these agricultural terms here like, "I planted," when he talks about it in Corinth. He is talking about a farmer who goes out to a field that has never been worked before. He has a brand new field with brand new seed and puts it in that field. Paul said, "That is my calling."

That is why he took the gospel from Jerusalem to Eliricum which is modern-day Bosnia, 1400 miles. He said, "I fully preached the gospel of Christ." That was his calling. Even though the calling of Apollos was not the same they needed one another. Apollos was the second pastor of the church of Corinth. He is the one who followed the apostle Paul. He watered what Paul had planted.

The word for "watered" there has the meaning metaphorically of instruction in the Word of God. So Paul took the Word of God and saw people saved as a result of it and he gave them the milk. But here comes Apollos. The crops were up, you see. It wasn't a new field. It wasn't a place where Christ hadn't been named. Paul had already been there. He built upon the foundation that Paul had already laid. But the two were working hand in hand. Both were surrendered vessels through which Christ could work and both understood how much they needed one another. One plants and another waters, Paul says. Now, they needed both.

I want to see if I can explain this. In a typical service we have got the sound guys up in the booth. We have folks up in the lighting booth. We have them over in the TV area. We have TV cameramen all around. We have the choir. We have our pianist and organist. We have the ushers. We have parking lot guys. We have the counters when the money is given. We have Sunday School teachers and nursery workers. I know I am leaving somebody out. But everyone is important because each one is a part of the work that God is doing. That is the way it works.

But what they were doing, since Paul and Apollos, was clearly seen. They would attach themselves to those men. And the apostle Paul is saying, "No, that is immature. That is childish. Man, be a part of the work God wants to do in your own life. Attach yourself to Him and then you can get in on the bigger picture of what God is doing."

A team is important. Just because someone is not as seen as another one, they need another. There is no such thing as a healthy team with a selfish player. When one person stops being that vessel through which God can work, it is somehow inhibiting the work that God is seeking to do through His people. Corinth was a vivid picture of this. They said, "We are not going to grow. We are sinning against the very life and principle of growth. Because God lives in us, the seed of life is in us, but we refuse to grow. I want this church to do something for me! I want that preacher to do something for me!" Whine, whine, whine. We ought to have about a thousand little baby bottles and when somebody starts whining like that, we need to put one in their mouth. Go find a corner and sulk for a while, while the rest of us go on and get a part of what God is doing! Growing up in the faith.

### **The proof of God using surrendered vessels**

Well, we have the plan, the prerequisite and the partnership. Fourth, there is the proof of God's using surrendered vessels. How do you know God is using a surrendered vessel? Look at the verb tense in 1Cor 3:6 carefully. "I planted, Apollos watered [watch this], but God was causing the growth." That is imperfect tense. I love that because imperfect tense means no beginning and no end. He is pointing back to a continuous action in the past. Now listen to me. When Paul was there and when Apollos was there, there was growth. They have both been long gone now and the church has stopped growing. It is a problem. When they were there, there was growth. God was causing growth while they were there. I planted, and God was causing the growth. God gave the seed of His Word to Paul. God gave the water of His Word to Apollos and the two were just simply using that which God had given them and in the midst of it, God was causing the growth.

Now the word for growth is a word we have to understand because we are living in a day when people say, "This is how you grow a church." The word growth also means to increase a church. If you don't realize the meaning of this word, then you have missed the whole principle of God using men only as vessels. God accomplishes his work. The word is *auxano*. The word means that which only God can do.

I was in a conference, and they asked us to tell how our churches grew. One man got up in front of me and for 30 minutes talked about how they instructed the ushers, how they had visitation, how they had letters that went out and how they called everybody and how they did this, did that and he said, "That is what grew our church." I was standing there praying, "God, please don't let them ask me." They said, "Wayne, how did you grow your church?" I said, "Well, first of all that is a misnomer. I have absolutely grown nothing, for I cannot grow anything. However, I have seen God do some marvelous things." I began to walk through the prayer meetings that we had for one whole year in 1982 when the men came on Friday night. We walked the property and we got on the pews. We went into Sunday School classes and prayed, "God, would you do a work on this property that only Jesus could get the glory and the

credit for.” Then we began to teach the Word of God. This is why when somebody asks me, “How is the church doing?” I say, “We are doing the same thing we did 10 years ago. We are equipping the saints for the work of the ministry with no flare and no fluff.” There is real excitement in going to the cross. That is what we are doing.

We are going to lose people down the road, folks. Paul says in the last days men will not endure sound doctrine. As I began to share with them what we did as God led us to do it, and what God has done as a result of it, there was a hush in the room. I really felt embarrassed to even share it because it was so diametrically opposed to what I had just heard. When I finished they looked at the other man and said, “What would you say about that?” He said these words, “I wouldn’t touch that with a 30 foot pole. What you have just heard is what only God can do.” Now folks, that is growth.

Let me explain the word *auxano* again. It means that which must be acted upon by an outside power or have the element of life within him, just like a seed has to have life within it. Life is inside that seed and you plant it and the life comes out of it. If the principle of life is not there, there is no growth. God doesn’t just give life, He is our life. So until a person responds to the gospel, until a person responds to Christ who is our life, there is no growth. You can have increase in numbers but you cannot have growth internally and eternally unless God is doing that work in the individual’s life.

It says in 1 John 5:11, “And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son.” That is where the principle of life is. Unless He is dominant in my life, unless He is being surrendered to and bowed to, there is no growth. You can have numbers but you cannot have growth unless God Himself perfects that growth. We do not grow churches. We just simply surrender to His will and then He can use us as a vessel through which He can build and grow His own church.

This leads Paul to say in 1Cor 3:7, “So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything.” The word “anything” there is a little pronoun, *tis* in the Greek, and it means we are not somebodies. Don’t look at us as if we are somebody. Don’t attach yourself to us in the context. Man, we are not anybody. We are just those vessels.

“But God who causes the growth.” Now look at the tense change here. In 1Cor 3:6 it is imperfect tense. He points back to when and Apollos were there. But in 1Cor 3:7 he said, “God is causing the growth.” The idea I get from it is, hey, you are not growing right now. You are still babies. You haven’t grown up. But God is constantly the one who is causing the growth. Now, come and attach yourself to Him and get in on the growth because the growth is obvious when you surrender to Him. The growth will not be there unless you are surrendered to Him. The proof that God is using them is in the fact that God was causing the growth. The imperfect tense was used very clearly in 1Cor 3:6. The proof that God is the one who initiates that growth is in the present tense. He continuously is the one who is affecting growth. There is no growth unless God is the initiator, for only in Him is life. Man can build crowds. Only God can grow and build His church. And it will be to the degree that His people are willing to surrender to His will, come out of the nursery and get a part of that which God wants to do through their lives.

### **The parity of God’s surrendered vessel**

The final thing is the parity of God’s surrendered vessel. You know what the word parity means? It means equality. We have got to understand this. Apollos and Paul are equal in the sight of God. There is no big “I’s” and little “you’s.” There is in our world, but not in God’s world. God sees it as a huge work that He is doing and each person plays a role. No matter how big or how small, every person is equal in the sight of God.

1Cor 3:8 reads, “Now he who plants and he who waters are one.” Now that word for “one” is not numerical one. It is the same word that Jesus used in John 10:30, “I and the Father are one.” It means in quality and in essence. So Apollos and Paul stood side by side, two different callings, diametrically different. Apollos, was the teacher who came in and built upon what Paul had planted. Both of them were different, but both of them were equal as far as God was concerned. They were just vessels that He could use. Though the work of Paul was different than the work of Apollos, both were of essence and quality, the same essence and quality because they were surrendered to Him and it was God’s work being done through them. Compared to what God accomplished, both were essential. They were married in now to what God was doing. And God was using them in that way.

You can illustrate this easily by the story of Dwight L. Moody. Mr. Kimball was an 80year old man who wondered if God could ever use him. He got burdened for this little shoe store worker and so he went down to the shoe store and God used him as a vessel through which he shared the gospel with Dwight L. Moody. D.L. Moody, at that time, had a speech impediment and a fourth grade education. They wouldn’t let him in the great church there in the city, and so he had to go out and start his own class in teaching people and winning people to Christ. He led so many people to Christ that the church was embarrassed not to let him in. Word spread of how God was using this simple man, surrendered to Christ. F.B. Meyer called him over to England to come and speak. He went over to England, butchered the King’s English, told deathbed stories and was totally emotional. F.B. Meyer said, “I am so glad to get rid of this guy.”

After Moody left, F.B. Meyer was walking down the street one day and saw one of his Sunday School teachers. He said, “Aren’t you glad that man from America is gone?” The teacher looked him, began to weep and said, “Oh, sir. When he shared of how he led all

of his members of his Sunday School class to Christ, I realized that I had never even cared enough to share with these people one on one." She said, "I went out and God led me to go to each one of my class members and as far as I know, every one of them now has come to know Christ." F.B. Meyer got down on his knees right there on the sidewalk and said, "It is not by might, it is not by power, but it is by My Spirit says the Lord." It radically changed his life.

He came to America and began to preach. And out of his preaching came Wilbur Chapman, one of the great revivalists of the latter years. Wilbur Chapman one day was preaching and as a result came to know Billy Sunday. Billy Sunday was led to go into evangelism and to preach the message of the gospel. He even preached Wilbur Chapman's sermons half the time, read them word for word. Billy Sunday was the most unlikely man you could ever think of that God could use. He was a former baseball player. He would slide across as if he was sliding into home plate, of a person barely making it into heaven. One man walked down the aisle one day, and he grabbed his beard and went, "Honk, honk." One man came down and said, "I don't believe what you are teaching. I don't believe the Word of God is true." He said, "Yes, it is." He grabbed his nose and twisted it until blood shot out of his nose and he quoted the verse in Proverbs, "The twisting of the nose bringeth forth blood." That was Billy Sunday.

Out of Billy Sunday's preaching came Mordecai Ham. Mordecai Ham was the one who went to Charlotte, North Carolina. For five years several men had been getting in an old barn and praying for revival in Charlotte. He went there and preached. On the third night a man kept trying to get away from him because he was so under conviction, but they had prayed that God would bring a revival to Charlotte, North Carolina that would shake the world for Jesus Christ. Finally on Wednesday night, under the preaching of Mordecai Ham, Billy Graham came forward and gave his heart to Jesus Christ.

Now listen, all of these people played a role in that. You can't take it away. That 80 year old man who went down and witnessed to Dwight L. Moody is just as important as Mordecai Ham or F. B. Meyer or anybody else. He did what God told him to do and he was equal. He was one in quality and essence with any of the others that you mention. And when you stand before God one day, you will see that.

So what Paul is saying is, "Don't attach yourself to men. Are you kidding? You are just as much worth to God as I am. Why would you attach yourself to me? You be the person God wants you to be. Grow up and get out of the nursery and start believing God and be a vessel through which God can use. Don't put an agenda on God because He doesn't accept human agendas. You may never be known except to Him. That is all that is important. That is the key. He who plants and he who waters are one."

Then Paul brings out the fact, "But each will receive his own reward according to his own labor." This is powerful. Each will receive his own is the word *idios*. It means each individual. Even though we are equal as vessels in God's sight, God doesn't look at one as the big guy and one as the little guy. No, no. Equal. But proportionately to the way Paul surrendered to what God had gifted him to do, proportionately. Paul is going to be rewarded one day for that labor. And proportionately, Apollos is going to be rewarded. Even though they are both equal, they had different assignments. Apollos is not going to be judged for what Paul was asked to do. "To him that is given much, much is required." He is only going to be judged by what was given him to do.

Down here in this world, we attach ourselves to men. We parade men in front of folks as if they are really somebody. But we are going to stand before God one day and we are going to be surprised at the people in the front of the line God rewards. There is a little pastor who is probably in the middle of Zimbabwe right now who nobody will ever know. He has not been educated, but he is a vessel surrendered to God. You are going to see him standing right there in the front line of the people God exalts because they were willing to die to themselves and just be what God wanted them to be.

Paul is saying, "Why is the world would you attach yourself to a person? Man, we are only vessels. Each of us is going to be judged according to the work that God has assigned to us by his own labor." The word "labor" by the way, in case you think that living this life is easy, is the word that means to sweat and to be weary and to be worn out. But it is a good kind of being worn out. Not a fleshly worn out. Boy, when God gets hold of you, He will wear you out, but it is the best worn out you have ever been because it is in His strength and it is in His power that He has asked you to do what He has asked you to do.

Matthew 16:27 says, "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels and will then recompense every man according to his deeds." You know, almost every person who hears this thinks of that in a negative way. Isn't that interesting? Our sins were judged at the cross. We are not talking about that. We are talking about rewards, recompense. You say, "Well, that scares me." Well, the only reason it should scare you is if you are still in that nursery and you haven't come out yet. But if you will get out of there and wake up and surrender and be the vessel God wants to use you for, you are not going to be afraid of that. You are going to look forward to that because it is a reward not to penalize, but to reward men according to their labor.

Paul is saying, "Don't attach yourself to men, vessels, conduits. They are only important if they are plugged into the right thing."

Paul is saying, "Why in the world would you attach yourself to men? Attach yourself to the right thing. Attach yourself to Christ. You become worth something when you are attached to the right source and can be a vessel through which God can do His work. Don't

live attached to men. Grow up. Attach yourself to Christ and be what God wants you to be.”

## 1 Corinthians 3:9 The Work of God - Part 1

There are three things about the works of God that I want you to see. First of all is the grace that enables the work; second, the warning that accompanies the work; and third, the test that will determine the work.

No man can do the works of the Father. We have seen this very clearly in 1 Corinthians 3. Whether it be the increase in people who get saved or whether it be the spiritual development of those who are saved, only God can do this.

Now there was growth when Paul was in Corinth and later on when Apollos followed him as the pastor of that church. Look again at 1 Corinthians 3:6. Paul says, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.” Now that is in the imperfect tense. During that period of time there was growth going on and God was causing the growth. Not only when Paul was there, but when Apollos was there.

But then he goes on to show that God is always affecting growth. That is who He is. Look in 1Cor 3:7: “So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.” He puts that in the present tense. It is almost as if the apostle Paul is saying, “Listen, God is always affecting growth.”

Corinth is not growing at that point. But if they will come back to 1Cor 1:29 and begin to live what the Christian life really is and get attached to God, attach themselves to His purposes and to His will, then God is the one who is always causing growth, always affecting increase in a person’s life and through a person’s life. But when an individual chooses not to live that way, he keeps himself out of everything God wants to do to grow him and to work through him. God and God alone does His works.

You know, that principle is found all through Scripture, particularly with Jesus as our example. He says in the 5th chapter of John, “I can do nothing of my own initiative, only of my Father.” He put himself into that situation, totally subjective to His Father’s will. Then in John 14:10, Jesus says it so clearly that I don’t see how we can miss it. He is our example at this point of how we are to live. As He was to the Father, we are to Him. As the Father was to Him, He is to us. Look in John 14:10. It is a tremendous passage here. He says, “Do you believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me?” “Do you believe that?” He asks. “The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative.” Now look. “But the Father abiding in Me does His works.” Jn 14:11 continues, “Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me; otherwise believe on account of the works themselves.”

You may say, “Well, how are these works accomplished? If God and God alone can do His works and He wants men to be vessels through which He does His works, how is this accomplished?” Look in John 6:28. Now to me again, it is so clear you don’t even need to add anything or take anything away from it. It just says it. This takes away our arrogance. This takes away our boasting in ourselves. We know what we are not as we get into Scripture, as we see who He is and what He is. In John 6:28 it says, “They said therefore to Him, ‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’” He answers them in Jn 6:29, “Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.’”

That word “believe” is the word *pisteuo*. The word has the idea of obedience in it. It comes from *peitho*, which is found over in Hebrews 13:17 when it talks about obeying your leaders. It is translated obedience. It means to be so persuaded by who He is that you are willing to demonstrate that by doing what He tells you to do. It is in the aorist active subjunctive. Aorist tense means do it, like that Nike commercial, just do it. Make up your mind and do it. Active voice carries with it the idea of do it on your own will, your own volition. Don’t let some preacher have to come in and cause you to do it. Make this your own choice. But then also subjunctive, it is a little iffy that everybody will do that.

Again I want to say, immature believers like we have in Corinth are people who choose not to do that. They would rather attach themselves to a preacher than to bow in absolute submission to Christ. And they just deceive themselves and cheat themselves out of being a vessel through which God Himself could work. This was the church of Corinth. You must understand that because that is the whole background of the study in 1 Corinthians. When Paul first went there, they were babies. They should have been babies because they were just born into the kingdom. That is 1Cor 3:1. It says, “I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men,” back then, “but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ.” They were thirsty and he gave them milk. But the problem was that later on, they continued to be babes in Christ. They continued to live in that immaturity. And to demonstrate that and to prove it, they attached themselves to the preachers who had taught them rather than to the one who the preachers had taught them about. Therefore, they had missed it.

In 1Cor 3:5-8, Paul still in his argument that you should never attach yourself to preachers, tries to show them that preachers are just vessels through which God does His work. That is all they are, conduits, like a pipe that water flows through, like a line that

electricity flows through. They are just a conduit through which God can do His work. They are servants to Him, so they are a part of what God is doing.

Paul has been addressing the works of God and trying to show them that what a man does apart from God never qualifies. When God does His works through men, it is easily seen. So don't attach yourself to man, attach yourself to God.

Now, in 1Cor 3:9, he is still talking about himself and Apollos and the fact that they are equal in quality and essence but different in their assignments. Look at what Paul says in verse 9 of chapter 3: "For we are God's fellow workers." Remember some were of Cephas, some were of Paul, some were of Apollos. He says, "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building."

That little term, "fellow workers" is an interesting word. We get the word synergy from it. It has the idea of something intimately entwined together. It describes a divine partnership that Paul and Apollos had with God. The word "with" that is used in that word is the little word *sun* which gives us the idea that what Paul and Apollos did, though separate from each other, could not have been accomplished if God had not been in the mix. But just as they were God's fellow workers, they were God's workers together with Him. It was God's work and they were the vessel through which He worked. They simply were servants who were surrendered and cooperating with Him.

As they were God's workers, the church at Corinth was God's field, God's building. Not man's but God's field and God's building. There were other fields and other buildings. There was one at Ephesus and in Philippi when you talk about the believers here.

He says, "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building." The word for field is the word that means a tilled field. Metaphorically it means here, of course, the church. That is what he is talking about. He is writing to them. He says, "You are God's field. God has appointed His workers through which He does His work in this field here that is the church of Corinth." But he also calls them God's building.

The word for building there is the word that means a building that is under construction. This is a beautiful picture he is drawing here. God is using His workers to work in His field and to construct His house. Now, in this analogy, you see the work of Paul and you see the work of Apollos. Paul was the one who had the commission to go and plant the seed in the field which they are. But then Apollos came along to help construct the building upon the foundation that Paul had left.

So his context has been and continues to be not attaching yourselves to men. Just vessels, that is all they are, equal in essence and quality before God. Different assignments but just vessels through which God has been doing His work. Paul, working in the field; Apollos building the building on the foundation that Paul had left. The work of God here seems to be paramount. It seems to come to the surface as to what Paul is talking about. Why would you want to hook yourself up to a man when all he is is a conduit? Why don't you just become a conduit yourself, attach yourself to God and let God use you to be a part of His works?

### **The grace that enables the work**

There are three things about the works of God that I want you to see. First of all is the grace that enables the work. Now understand, man cannot do the works of God. God enables man, but God does His own work through the man. God's work is a work of grace. Grace is not just the undeserved favor of God. Certainly it is. We don't deserve it and can never earn it or merit it. But God's grace is also the enabling power of God. Romans 6:14 says we are no longer under law, we are under grace.

Paul shows you that being under grace is being a brand new creature in Christ in Romans 6:15. He shows that we have brand new potential but also a brand new problem. We still live in bodies of sin. But the grace that God now has for us is His enabling power. Any demand that He puts upon me is not a demand upon me but a demand upon the life that He has given to me. Jesus living in me is the embodiment of that grace, and He enables me to be everything that He commands me to be.

Look how Paul describes His work in 1Cor 3:10. He starts the verse off and says, "According [that is a key word, *kata*] to the grace of God which was given to me." If you want to talk about where the work came from, it is according to the grace of God. When you use the word *kata*, according to, it is so powerful. It means that what happens must reflect the measure of where it comes from.

Let me give it to you this way. If I was a rich man and wanted to give you some money, would you rather me give it to you out of my wealth or according to my wealth? If I gave you according to, it has got to reflect the measure of what I have. Now, this immediately shows you the tremendous eternal quality of this work. Paul says, "It is according to the grace that is given to me that all of this is taking place." So it is always enabled by the grace of God. Paul didn't do according to his own ability. He did it according to the grace of God, to his availability to God. It was God in him and through him that affected what Paul was about to do. It was a gift to Paul. He says, "According to the grace of God which was given to me."

Something hit me as I saw that phrase. It was given to Paul, and some of us say, "Oh, I wish God would have given me that kind of grace." He did! Look back in 1 Corinthians 1:4. He gave it to all believers. All of us have access to this grace, the enabling power of God. That is why we never have an excuse. If we sin, we sin and we might as well own up to it. Our flesh is there and many times it

overpowers us. And when it does, it does. But as we are willing to surrender to Him, His grace takes over and growth takes place. His works are now enabled in our life.

It says in 1 Corinthians 1:4, "I thank my God always concerning you [he is talking about the believers in Corinth], for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus." There is the embodiment of grace. You have Christ in your life. You have access to His grace.

Look in 2 Timothy 2:1. Paul says essentially the very same thing to Timothy. It is not as if Paul got something we didn't get, or Peter got something we didn't get. All believers who have received Christ have received the enablement of that grace. It is there potentially within us. In 2 Timothy Paul is in prison, but he is writing to Timothy passing the baton. He says in 2 Timothy 2:1, "You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." If you want grace, you have grace. You have the embodiment of that grace which is Christ Himself. And if He lives in you, then as you partake of Him, He enables you to do what He commands you to do. That is the way it works. It is a wonderful message.

So many people think the good news is just for the lost. No, no. It is for the saved. To realize that Christ not only saved us and gave us life, but Christ is our life. He enables us to do whatever His Word commands us to do.

Now Paul goes on. Look in 1 Corinthians 3:10. He says, "According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder, I laid a foundation." Now, he laid a foundation, according to the grace that God had given him. Planting the seed of the gospel was what God had enabled him to do and assigned him to do and God had done that through him in Corinth. The word for "wise" is *sophos*. We have seen this so many times, especially in 1 Corinthians. It means the ability to rightly use truth. Paul had that ability to take the Word and to practically apply it in his life.

But the word "master builder" is the word we get the word architect from. As a matter of fact, the first part of the word, *arche*, denotes a rank or degree. The second part of the word, *tekton*, is the word which means workman, or a master builder. Isn't it interesting how many architects sometimes like to come up with their own design apart from what their clients have demanded? You can tell them what you want, but sometimes you get an architect who is thinking his own way and he wants to draw it his own way. If you have a good architect, all he is going to do is make visible what the design is of the client that he is working for.

The apostle Paul didn't have the design, he didn't have it all. Jesus had that. He just became as an architect. Through him the works of God worked in such a way to make it visible so that people could clearly see what God wanted to do through his life. Paul had laid a foundation. That is so key to understand.

In 1Cor 3:11 he tells us what that foundation is, "for no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Now we saw earlier that Paul preached Christ and Him crucified. That is the foundation. There can be no other foundation but Jesus Christ. This was done among the Corinthians according to the grace of God working in the heart and life of Paul. It wasn't according to Paul's ability, but his availability, and God was using him to build a foundation, to plant that seed in the field so that a building could be built upon it. Paul now shows where Apollos came in and gives room for others. He says, "According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder, I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it." You see, Apollos came in after him.

The word for "another" is not *heteros*, which means another of a different kind, but *allos*, which means another of the same kind, of the same quality, of the same essence. Another servant God is using came along after me and is building upon the foundation that I laid of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Now, that is the foundation. There is no other foundation but that for the believers. Therefore, somebody came in to build upon it.

But the building upon it is in the present tense. Paul and Apollos had gone from Corinth. When Paul was there and Apollos was there, it was being built upon, and others came along to build upon the one foundation that Paul was assigned to lay there in Corinth. This shows to me that there is no arrival point down here. We are to be building constantly, growing constantly, increasing constantly. And others come along to build upon the one foundation which is Christ and Him crucified. Every man who followed Paul and Apollos and on down the road, had come along in a teaching position to build upon the foundation that Paul, under the grace of God, had laid there in Corinth. That foundation was Christ. So the grace enables the work.

God wanted a church in Corinth. He had a man whom He called and assigned to do it. He gave him the grace to carry it out. Paul went and preached the Word, and the foundation was laid and the building began to be constructed. Others came along behind Paul to build upon that foundation. So we have the grace that enables the work.

### **The warning that accompanies the work**

But the second thing that I want you to see is the warning that accompanies the work. He gives a warning here. Because he is the one who laid that foundation, he is seeing a problem in Corinth. He sees immaturity everywhere, and he knows that immaturity



normally somehow attaches itself to wrong teaching. So he gives a warning in 1Cor 3:10: "According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it."

Now whoever follows Paul and Apollos, who have both left Corinth, and builds upon the work that God started through Paul and Apollos continued, whoever they are, must build carefully upon that foundation. Now, the generic context would be all believers. We are all building upon a foundation. Remember the parable of building upon sand or building upon the rock. All of us are there. But the specific context here, he is talking about the teachers and the preachers who come along behind him. They should be careful how they build upon the foundation he laid for that church. It wasn't laid upon either Apollos or Paul. It was laid upon Christ. And any man who ever brings back that foundation and tries to replace it or remove it, is out of God's will. Paul gives a warning to that individual.

Now it is implied here. So far our text has not said that some people in Corinth had been so enamored by the wisdom of Corinth and the ecstatic knowledge that they had the gurus that we talked about who always went to the Temple of Apollo. Some of them evidently were trying to infiltrate the church, so Paul is giving a warning. He is saying, "I want to tell you something. Whoever comes after me had better be careful how he builds upon the foundation I have laid." Paul, in fact, is really saying, "I was only a secondary cause of laying this foundation." You have to stay with me on this one. Jesus has always been the foundation, whether I laid him or not. He is always the foundation; I was the secondary cause. I went and preached the gospel and laid that foundation, but Jesus has always been the foundation.

Look at the term there in 1Cor 3:11: "For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ," is in the present tense. It is constantly laying there. Whether anybody is preaching Him or not, He is still the foundation, He is still the cornerstone, He is still the one who must be built upon. Nobody can remove it, and nobody can replace it. No other doctrine, no other thing can replace Jesus Christ and Him crucified, being the foundation of the church. No way in any world can we do that.

Turn to Luke 20:17. There is a parable here that Jesus gives that I think is very appropriate to what we are talking about here in 1 Corinthians 3; the fact that Jesus is the foundation, whether anybody had ever been to Corinth and preached Him or not, He is still the foundation. In Luke 20 we have the parable of a farmer who plants a vineyard and then rents it out to some vine growers. He goes on a trip. He says, "I have a nice vineyard out here. I am going to rent it out to them for a certain price." And he goes on a journey. When he returns, he asks them for what is rightfully his. It is his field. They had been working in his field and he asked them for what is owed him.

Well, the slaves who went to make the request were beaten each time he sent them. Finally he says, "Well, I don't know what is going on here. I will send my beloved son. Surely they will hear from him, because he is the one who will inherit it from me." So he sent his son. But the growers beat the beloved son to death so that this man could not have any claim on the field whatsoever and they would get it when he died.

Then Jesus adds in Lk 20:17-18. Of course, the picture is Jesus and how He came and how they crucified Him. But look at what he said in verse 17: "But He looked at them and said, 'What then is this that is written, 'The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner stone'? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.'" The word for "stone" there is lithos, which can be used interchangeably with foundation.

What he is saying here is, "Upon this stone, upon this foundation, upon Jesus Christ, a man must build. And if a man seeks to reject it, if a man seeks to remove it and stumbles over it, he will be broken or the stone will fall on him and crush him. Nobody will ever remove or replace the stone, the eternal foundation that a man must build upon for all of eternity." That is what he is saying. So Paul says, "Hey, I am a secondary cause here. I came and preached Him, but if I had never come, Jesus is still the foundation. Whether I preach Him or not, He is the foundation upon which a man must build."

In Corinth Paul was able to lay the foundation by the enablement of the grace of God. Remember what Paul said in Philippians. He said, "I tell you this weeping, there are people standing among us that are enemies of the cross." That is a part of the foundation to understand that Jesus came to die for us. But if a man comes to remove or replace that foundation, he is not in the energy of grace, obviously. He is in the energy of his own flesh. What we just read in Luke 20, that kind of fleshly effort, will never survive. Nobody can remove it and nobody can replace it. There is the grace that enables the work but also the warning that accompanies the work. And the apostle Paul says, "Hey, whoever comes after me, you had better be careful how you build upon the foundation which before I ever laid it among you was already laid, which is Christ Jesus the Lord." He is the stone the builders rejected, but He is the stone, the foundation we must build our lives upon.

So there is a warning there for those who come after. He planted the field, but in building the building they not mess up the foundation that was begun.

**The test that will determine the work**

Well, we have the grace that enables it and the warning that accompanies it. But the third thing is the test that will determine the work of God. There is going to be a test one day to determine the work of God, whether God did it or God did not do it. There is a lot here to understand. Look at 1Cor 3:12: "Now if any man building upon the foundation [a man is going to seek to do this] with gold, silver, precious stones," that is one category, and then "wood, hay, and straw." That is another category.

You see, the foundation is Christ, already laid. Paul, the secondary cause, came and laid Him among the Corinthians. He laid the foundation of Jesus Christ. Paul now shows that there are basically two kinds of builders here. There is one builder who is good and there is one builder who is bad. There is going to be a test to determine whether or not they are in the enabling grace and the work of God or whether or not they are doing it out of their own flesh. God is going to test that one day. You are going to see the fleshly works of man who tried to build upon the foundation of Christ which was only enabled by the grace of God.

You have the gold, the silver and precious stones which are the good materials. The other is the bad materials, the wood, the hay and the stubble; two classes of materials. The gold, the silver and the precious stones can stand the test of fire which God is going to use one day to test these works. They can stand it, God's judgment. But the wood, the hay and the stubble cannot. One is building a mansion, the other is building a shack.

Now you have got to remember the context here. All of us are building on that foundation. Once you are saved, there is a building that is going up. He talks about that over in Ephesians very clearly, that we are a household, we are being built into the temple of God. There is something going on, a growing experience. But in the context, he is specifically pointing and warning the preachers and the teachers who come in behind him and would seek to do anything but build constructively and enabled by the grace of God upon the foundation that has already been laid.

Well, in the context, the gold, the silver, and the precious stones represent that which is enabled by the grace of God. Paul says, "According to the grace of God given to me, I laid a foundation." That is how it is all done, by the grace enabling of God. Now, what would that mean? Well, the same grace that enabled the laying of the foundation is the grace that enables the building upon the foundation. What would that be?

There are several verses that will help us. These stones would represent the righteous deeds that are produced when we walk by faith. Look over in Romans 1:17. This is righteousness. This is what comes as a result of being a servant to Jesus Christ, enabled now by His grace. I am never enabled by His grace until I am surrendered to Him. But in Romans 1:17, look what we find. He says in Ro 1:17, "For in it [the gospel, the good news of Jesus] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith." But then he clarifies it. Look at what he says. He quotes out of Habakkuk 4, "as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.'"

Now these righteous deeds come from surrender to Christ. So, as a man would come in to build upon what Paul had laid (Paul was enabled by the grace of God), this man must be enabled by the grace of God. So if he is enabled by God's grace it means that he is surrendered to Him and God is working through him. Therefore, what he does will stand the test one day because it will be true righteousness that came out of him. Righteousness is that which comes from a surrendered relationship to Christ. If you want to be righteous, bow down to Him and surrender to His Word. Admit your flesh, confess your sin, repent of that sin and let Jesus be Jesus in your life. Righteousness is the outflow of that.

Remember Isaiah 64. He said, speaking of Israel's righteousness, "Our righteousness, you stack it all up. It is filthy rags in God's eyes." No man in the energy of his flesh can produce what God commands of righteousness. But enabled by His grace this righteousness can come as we walk by faith, for without faith it is impossible to please God. So whoever comes after him, Paul would be saying to him, you had better bow down and you better be the one through whom God can do His work and honor His Word.

But the second of these things that we could look at, these are the good works predestined before the foundation of the world. Look at Ephesians 2:10. Isn't it amazing what people think are righteous acts? What did you do righteously this past week? "Oh, Brother Wayne, I read my Bible 22 times." I mean, it is like we have our own standard of what we think righteousness is. But righteousness is the character and lifestyle resulting from surrender to Christ. All of us struggle with our flesh. Nobody is exempt from that. The ones pointing their fingers are the ones you had better beware of because once you start living this life, you realize how wretched our flesh really is and how quickly we can snap back into the other way of living.

Well, these are the good works predestined before the foundation of the world. Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are His workmanship [we are not our idea, we are not a product of what we have done], created in Christ Jesus for good works [now watch this], which God prepared beforehand." In other words, you can't get a committee and come up with it. God knows what they are and God alone knows what they are. We must be in touch with Him so these righteous works can be worked through us that we should walk in them.

Now, these precious stones could also perhaps be synonymous with that which comes from surrender to the Word of God. Look

over in 2 Timothy 3:16-17. We always read verse 16, but rarely do we ever read verse 17 and the two go together. You know, it is amazing to me that you go to different parts in the world, in mission places and you find people. As soon as they get a Christian, they throw him into the work. That is crazy. We need to put him up under the Word. The Word comes before the work. We have been upside down for so long, it is not even funny in many places. 2 Timothy 3:16 reads, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable,..." That is a good phrase. A friend of mine had a business card and that is what he put on it. "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable." He didn't say anything else. He said, "That got more attention! Profitable."

But if you look up the word "profitable," it doesn't mean in a tangible, physical way. It means in a spiritual, eternal way. It is profitable. It is profitable for teaching, for clarification of what the Word of God says. It is profitable for reproof, that which exposes us as the sin that is in our life. It is profitable for correction, and the word really means to take a broken arm and set it straight. Isn't it great? God's Word not only reproves us, which we hate to deal with, but it corrects us. That is the beautiful part of it. But it is also profitable for training in righteousness. The word is *paideuo*, which means child training, not teaching. Teaching is first, but training is at the end of it.

You know, teaching can be done in ten seconds, but training takes maybe years because you must be trained, you see, in that area to where your senses will respond correctly when you are trained. My Dad used to raise English setters. Training those dogs was something else. Watching my Dad train those dogs helped me understand the Word of God and the place it has in my life and your life. It is not a onetime thing. It is over and over and over and over and over and over and over. Finally one day, your reflexes begin to respond properly to what the Word teaches and so you are not only taught, you have been trained as a child has been trained.

But look at 2Ti 3:17. It is so clear. Why is all this necessary? "That the man of God may be adequate." The word adequate has the idea of when you are packing to go on a trip and you have got everything loaded that you are going to need for the journey and now you are ready to go. You are ready for the journey. You are ready for the work once you have been trained by the Word. He says, "equipped for every good work." That which is the gold and the silver and the precious stones.

How many times do we take a brand new Christian and throw him right into the work as if that is where he needs to be? No! Put him under the Word so he can be equipped for God through His enabling grace to do His work. That is the way it is supposed to be. It is incredible to me in some of the places I go I find people who do not have any kind of understanding of even what the good news is, but they have been out working for God. Well, look out. One day every work is going to be tested by fire. If we are not going to put people up under the Word, we are putting them right into that which is going to burn one day, the wood, the hay and the straw. The wood, the hay and the straw to me would be the fleshly works, the dead works that we present back to God, that which comes apart from a surrendered relationship to Jesus Christ. That which we do and ask God to bless, which God didn't need to begin with. It is amazing how arrogant men and women are in the body of Christ, as if God really needed us. We act that way.

Have you ever made this statement? "If that man ever gets saved, God is going to be glad to have him!" Well, that is an interesting statement. Why would God be glad to have him other than the fact that He loved the whole world and gave His Son to die for him? He doesn't want anything that man can do. He wants that man to be available so that He can do something through that man. I don't know why we can't see that.

Well, the wood, the hay and the stubble. The context here are preachers and teachers who build upon the foundation that Paul has laid. Apollos came in and continued to build upon it. Paul warns them and says, "The works that you do, buddy, if they are not enabled by grace, then they are going to be wood, hay and stubble and they are not going to stand the test. You better be careful how you build upon the foundation that we have laid." It implies that there are other builders out there who are not building upon the foundation wisely. And these other builders are Christians.

That seems obvious because in 1Cor 3:15 he says, "If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire." So in other words, they are going to be people within the body of Christ, but those who are going to build carefully enabled by God's grace upon the foundation and those who choose not to, perhaps they would rather read the newspaper and give updates as to what world news and times have to say rather than preaching the Word of God. As a result of that, they are not coming alongside and help people to build upon the foundation which is Christ. The responsibility falls upon two groups. It falls upon the teacher and the listener. It falls upon the teacher who is not enabled by God's grace, but thinks he is a gift to God. "I can really help you out, God." He goes out and tries to do all these things and build these crowds and thinks that God is impressed with it.

But you also have the listener, like at Corinth, who only wants milk and doesn't want the solid food. You know, you can go to a lot of churches and find the pastors that they have and you can say they are not happy with the pastor. But if you stay around the people for a long period of time, you realize they got what they wanted. They didn't want somebody to come in and build upon the foundation. They wanted somebody to come in with milk, that which is easy to receive and that which doesn't in any way affect the flesh. But the test will come.

C. S. Lewis once said, "Human beings judge one another by their external actions. God judges them by their moral choices." God not only looks at the works, but He looks at the motives behind the works. It is going to be the secret things of a man's heart that one day will be revealed by fire. We think the works down here are wonderful. They will stand before God one day. And if those works were not enabled by His grace, which is the only way God can do His work through a person, they will not stand the test of fire. Therefore, we will be rewarded, as we saw the last time, according to our labor and some of the rewards are going to be very sparse.

1Cor 3:13 says, "Each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work." Now, each man's work will be evident. Again, the specific context is teachers and preachers, but also the whole body of Christ. Don't ever think that you can escape the context and say, "Well, he is not talking to me. He is talking about people...." No, no, no. Every man, not just teachers and not just preachers, every man's work will one day be judged by fire and the quality of it.

Look at the word "evident." The word evident is the word *phaneros*. It means to be made manifest. Literally it means to shine forth. Now, this is the same root word that we get the word "epiphany" which is the word used of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. He will come forth in brilliant light. He will shine forth.

What I get out of this is, we may hide behind what we want people to think are our good works down here. We may hide behind the motives that we don't want anybody else to know about and we may hide behind fleshly junk. But one day when He comes, in a moment, in a split second, everything that we have done will be made immediately obvious in the light of the brilliance of His presence.

You know, there is a word for sincere in the Scriptures and it means without wax. When something is sincere, it is without wax. Over in those lands it is very hot. Have you ever made pottery? Have you ever used a ceramic mold and didn't let it set up long enough and it cracked? Suddenly you realize that you have ruined the whole thing. But they wouldn't give up. They took wax and put it in those cracks. Then they painted over that to make it look like there was nothing wrong with it. The people would take it home thinking they had bought a real nice thing and sit it up in the window and the heat of that sun would melt that wax. And all of a sudden they would see that underneath that paint were these cracks. So they learned to start holding it up next to the sun. And when they put it up next to the light, all that which was broken and cracked could easily be seen. One day, we will be judged according to whether it is wood, hay and stubble or whether it is precious stones. It is going to be judged by the light.

Notice he doesn't say works, plural. He says work, singular. Every man's work will be judged. Now think about it. Every man's work. We are building a house, folks. It is one building. It not just this work or that work. It is the building that those works have put together on the foundation which is Christ Jesus. And that building will be built depending upon whether we have tried to build on it with our fleshly effort or whether or not we have walked surrendered to Christ, admitted our sin when we have sinned and failed, and we have confessed it and repented of it, not tried to have any reputation of our own, but only protected the reputation of Christ in us. And as we have lived that way, there is going to be a certain house that is built upon the foundation. But if we haven't lived that way and choose not to live that way, it is also going to be quickly evident as to how we have built our house. It doesn't have anything to do with eternal life, but I think it has everything to do with our enjoyment of that eternal life.

You see, Christianity is laughed at by many people today because it seems like it has no integrity. Oh, it has a lot of integrity. We are right now preparing to live with Him one day. And if we are not willing to let Him rule our life now, if we are not gaining our joy from just obeying Him now, what makes us think it is going to be that different when we see Him one day? Somehow there is a degree here of rewards that he is talking about, of enjoyment of the life that has given to us. And you may never see it down here. You probably won't because we have watered it down so much in America that nobody knows the difference anyway. But one day we will stand before Him and in the brilliance of His light, we will be seen immediately as to whether or not we are products of grace or products of the flesh added to grace. It will be quickly seen. Anything that man does apart from his relationship with Christ will not stand the test of fire.

But you are going to stand before God one day. And only that which is enabled by His grace out of a surrendered servant heart to Him is going to stand the test of fire. It is a house that we are building upon the foundation, not just the teachers that Paul is warning. Every one of us are building on that foundation. How are you building upon it?

## 1 Corinthians 3:13 The Work of God - Part 2

There are three things about the works of God that I want you to see. First of all is the grace that enables the work; second, the warning that accompanies the work; and third, the test that will determine the work.

There are three things that I want us to see about this test mentioned here in 1Cor 3:13. To me, this is one of the most sobering messages that Paul has brought up. Remember, this is an infant church. They will not grow up. They have chosen to be babies in Christ. They have evidenced this by attaching themselves to men and later on attaching themselves to gifts, anything that pampers and pleases the flesh. Paul is trying to pull them back to dead center.

### **An Individual Test**

The first thing about this test is, it is an individual test. Look at 1 Cor 3:13 one more time. Paul says, "Each man's work will become evident." It is amazing how we believe the lie that we are not going to be held accountable for what we do.

When I moved to Chattanooga, I went down to the telephone company and signed up for a telephone. I went down to the gas company and signed up for the gas. I went over to the electric company and signed up there. You know, I have enjoyed the privileges of using the telephone and the gas and the electricity all this time. But there is a strange thing. Every month I get this little thing in the mail that holds me accountable for the privilege that I am enjoying. It is a little bill that says I must pay it. Now, that is not exactly the way it is in the spiritual world, but there is the idea of accountability. You are accountable in everything in human life, but when it comes to the church, we seem to think, "Oh, great, we can do what we want and be a Christian." No, you can't! There is going to be an individual accounting one day before God.

The term "each man" in 1Cor 3:13 should cause every believer to pay attention. It is the word hekastos. It comes from the word hekas, which means separate, an individual, each one separately from another. Paul is not going to stand there with us. Apollos is not going to stand there with us. Chuck Swindoll is not going to stand there with us. John MacArthur is not going to stand there with us. We are going to stand on our own one day before God. What Paul did as a vessel while he was there in Corinth, God working through him, is not going to help the Corinthians at all. They need now, having received the message that he brought to them, having had the foundation laid which is Christ Jesus, to be vessels through which God can do His work and so that the building in their life can be built. What Paul did, what Apollos did, what Cephas did, will not count for them.

That is why you never attach yourself to man. People are following men around as if they have something we don't have. That is crazy. Peter himself said, "To those who have received a like faith such as ours." We didn't receive anything less or anything more than they did. God wants to do His work through us just like He did in them. Each man's work will become evident.

The word for work there is ergon which, in the secular sense, is used as an employment word. If you work for somebody, it is the work you do out of necessity for that person, and at the end of the week you get a pay check. That is kind of the secular idea of the word "work." You may be one of the most successful businessmen Chattanooga has ever known and God has blessed you. You have worked up the ladder. You are the president of your company. You have made millions. That is wonderful and there is nothing wrong with that. The world rewards you for that. However, if you are a believer, when you stand before God all that you did, all the success, will mean nothing if it has not been in response to your obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a different set of scales when God puts us to the test.

"Every man's work" is spiritual work, that work which Paul says that grace has to enable. Every man has the same opportunity to let God work through his or her life. We have an employer, so to speak, if you want to put it in secular terms. That is the Lord Jesus. He is Lord of our life. That is not an option. He is Lord of our life.

Go back to 1 Cor 1:2 . I told you this is the grid that you have to look at 1 Corinthians through. In 1:2 he tells us very clearly that we are owned, that we are God's possession. We work for Him. It says, "To the church of God which is at Corinth, those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours." Now, in that verse he says we have been sanctified. Sanctified means to be put in a class all by itself. It means to be separated apart unto God. It has the idea of someone who is unclean and has been washed now in the blood and has been taken out of Adam. He has been put over into Christ and has a brand new purpose. Among humanity, he has one supreme purpose, because God lives in him. He has sanctified him. He has set him apart unto Himself, and that one supreme purpose is now to live set apart unto the One who has set you apart. That is what it means to be sanctified.

What are the people called who are sanctified? Saints. The next time you look in a mirror just say, "Good morning, Saint. I have but one purpose today. Oh, yes, I have many purposes, but one purpose should dominate all the others and that is, I am a bondservant of Jesus Christ. I am a vessel today through which God wants to do His work." That is so clear in here.

You see, that building is being built by the choices that we make every day in our life. A believer who won't get serious about his calling wants to live like the Corinthian, not depending upon the Lord Jesus Christ, who would rather attach himself to man, even to the exclusion of others, will one day stand before Jesus Christ. And suddenly this truth will come back to haunt him, because he can't go back and relive it. When salvation occurs in a person's life, something starts and it continues, and then one day Jesus brings us up to be with Himself. Then the building that we have built, the choices that we have made, will be put to His test, not our

test. It will be made manifest. That which He allowed Christ to do through us will stand the test. It will make it. But that which we have done for ourselves will not make it. So it is an individual test. No one will stand with you. It will be your work.

I like to watch Tiger Woods play golf. But you know what? I was watching one tournament that he was in and on the second day, he was like eight strokes behind. I am thinking to myself, everybody in the world sees everybody else's scores, but everybody also sees Tiger Woods' score. There is nothing you can do to change any of it. He has played that game. It is an individual sport. At the end of it, he is going to be rewarded, not according to how others have done, but how did he do.

Now in a similar way, in the spiritual walk every one of us, individually, will stand there and be tested according to our works. Actually it is our work. It is in the singular, not in the plural, which means that it is a house that is being built. It is all one house. Whatever is left standing at that time will see whether or not it will stand the test that God has. So, it will be an individual test.

### **A Revealing Test**

But then secondly, it will be a revealing test. You see this in 1Cor 3:13: "Each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work." Now, when it says "each man's work will become evident," that is a deponent verb. It is always used in an active sense. In other words, of its own it will be made evident.

What that says to me is, you are not going to change this. Whether you like it or not, whatever, sad, mad or glad, it is going to be tested. That is what he is saying. Of its own caliber, of its own value, it will of necessity be tested one day. The word "evident" is the word phaneros. It means to make something apparent, to make it evident. It has the idea of shining a light on something so that it might be clearly seen. It is the idea of bringing every detail out in the presence of the light.

On one fishing program on a sports network they have cartoon characters named "Tight Line" and "Sinker." "Tight Line" and "Sinker" are out one night fishing. Now, a nightlight is something you put in your boat, a fluorescent light, and it will help you see your line, because that is the main thing you want to see. You don't have to see everything else in the boat. It is kind of a black light, a dark light. You can see that line when a fish is hitting your worm. You can see the line twitch and know what is happening. "Tight Line" and "Sinker" were out one night and "Tight Line" said, "Did you bring that brand new light that I got the other day?" He said, "Yeah, I got it." He says, "How 'bout testing it out?" And so, "Sinker" gets hold of this thing and says, "Are you ready?" And he says, "I am ready." Now it is pitch dark and he flips the switch and all of a sudden, the birds are flying and the sun is out. It is day time. Everything is evident. They say, "Wow, what a light!"

That is the idea of phaneros. You can't see. But one day the light is going to be brought up and you won't have any question as to what is really real. That is what he is talking about. It will be made manifest. It will be brought to light. Nothing will be left out. You will be able to see. God says, "Each man will stand this test of his works."

1Cor 3:13 says, "Each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it." Now what day is he talking about? The day of Christ. Do you understand the difference in the day of Christ and the day of the Lord? First of all, the technical term is not the day of the Lord. The great day of the Lord is a technical term, the last three and a half years of the 70th Week of Daniel. The seven years, I believe, that will be that period of time when God deals with Israel specifically.

I personally think that the day of the Lord is the whole seven years, because it is the Lord Jesus Christ who takes the sealed book to start with. So why have any trouble calling the whole period the day of the Lord? Then the great day of Lord will be the last three and a half years. I just have never seen the struggle people have with those terminologies that are used.

So, what is the day of Christ then? The day of Christ is the flip side of that. The day of Christ is what we are looking forward to. You know, you dread the day of the Lord if you are not saved. It is when Jesus takes the church out of here and when tribulation comes on this earth and when He puts an end to sin down here on this earth. It takes seven years. But during the time He will bring Israel to their day of Atonement and bring them to repentance. A lot of people say, "Hey, we are spiritual Israel." Well, I don't agree with that.

But during that period of time, the day of Christ is the other side of that. In other words, we look forward to the day of Christ. The flip side, the day of the Lord, that seven year period of time, the 70th Week of Daniel, involved in which will be the great day of the Lord, Jacob's distress.

Let's look at this in Scripture and see if we can see it. Sometimes it says the day of our Lord Jesus. Sometimes it says the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. And then other places, the day of Christ. But the context will show you whether it is something to look forward to or something to dread. You can tell the difference. We look forward to the day of Christ.

Look over in 1 Corinthians 5:5 and we will just walk through some scriptures here. "I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." May be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

You can tell immediately which one you are talking about. Look at 2 Corinthians 1:14: "Just as you also partially did understand us, that we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus." You are going to be proud in the day of the Lord Jesus. Obviously, that is not talking about the other day that has to deal with the wrath of God.

Look in Philippians 1:6. He speaks of it. It is something to look forward to. You don't look forward to the day of the Lord. You do look forward to the day of Christ. He says, "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." Drop down to Philippians 1:10: "So that you may approve the things are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ." Look in Philippians 2:16. He says, "Holding fast the word of life so that in the day of Christ I may have cause to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain." So the day of Christ could be one day, it could be a time period, we are not worried about that, but it is an event that is going to take place, I believe, when Christ comes for His church.

Look over in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18. We read these from time to time, but just to help remember that there is such a thing as a rapture to the church. People say, "No, that word is never used." Well, the word *harpazo* is, and it is not a noun, it is a verb. Which would you rather it be? I would rather it be a verb because it is action. It means to snatch up, imminently, suddenly snatch up. In secular Greek it was used of a wolf that would go into a flock of sheep and suddenly, out of nowhere, snatch up a lamb and go out. It is the same word. It is a catching up. Rapture is a good way to translate it, but the word *harpazo* simply means a catching up. It is imminent, sudden.

Look at 1Th 4:16: "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first." Those are the dead bodies. That was the problem in writing 1 Thessalonians. They thought the day of the Lord had come. The other thing was that they were worried about the dead, the righteous dead. What happened to their bodies?

1Th 4:17 continues, "Then we who are alive [there will be those alive at that time] and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord." And look at 1Th 4:18: "Therefore comfort one another with these words." You don't comfort somebody with the day of the Lord. You comfort them with the day of Christ. We look forward to the day of Christ. And when Christ takes us up to be with Him, immediately there is no more building on that house that we started building when we received Jesus in our life. There is no more way to go back and change a wall here and a board there. There is no more time to change anything. The house that we have built by faith or by flesh, whatever it is, will have to stand the test that God has for it one day.

Now Paul continues to explain. Look back at 1 Corinthians 3:13. He says it will be made evident. Now he chooses to use another word that says basically the same thing. "Each man's work will become evident; for the day [the day of Christ] will show it." The word "show it" is the word *deloo*, which means to make something plain for all to see. The same word is translated in 1 Corinthians 1:11 as "informed." "For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you."

In Colossians 1:8 we have the same word: "And he also informed us of your love in the spirit." There is going to be information given on the day when we stand before Christ sometime in the future that nobody down here possibly had. Have you ever wondered if the people you think are doing so much for God are doing it according to the flesh or according to the Spirit? We don't know down here. Down here it is hard to know. But when you stand before God one day, buddy, you will know. It will be made manifest and evident to everyone. Now that doesn't make me your judge. That makes me my own judge. I examine my own self. I get in my closet and work it out in my own self. I walk with God so that my building will stand the test. It may surprise some of us what is going to stand and what is going to burn one day at the testing of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the light of His presence on that day when we see Him face to face, what we have done down here will be shown and everyone will see.

Paul goes on to say "because it is to be revealed with fire." Now the actual test is fire, not the light. The light will show up things. But the test of fire will prove it out. So actually, I think the light is the secondary cause. The fire tests, then the light comes on as to what was and what really wasn't. He said, "It will be revealed by fire."

The word "fire" in the Old Testament so often is used of the revealed presence of God. When we stand in His presence, there is going to be a revealing of things, but it is going to be tested by fire. Now, why does God use the term "fire?" Well, it consumes. You have seen earlier that the three things on one side are the gold, silver and precious stones. And on the other side are the wood, hay and straw. One is consumable, the other is not. One is of the Spirit, the other is of the flesh.

How have we built our house? Are we living by faith? Down here, like I say, we can't always tell. Up there, everybody will know. Look over in Exodus 3:2. These are passages where God revealed Himself in fire or as fire. God is appearing to Moses here. Exodus 3:2 says, "And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed." We see the fire of God's presence.

When Moses brought forth the Israelites out of the camp to meet with God at the foot of Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19:18, again, God is revealed as fire. Exodus 19:18 says, "Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and its smoke

ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently.”

Then I want you to go to the New Testament, to Revelation 1:14. John is on the island of Patmos. I have been there. It is a desolate place. But God chose to speak to him. It had been 65 years since John had heard Jesus’ voice, and that was back during the time He was on this earth. He heard His voice and recognized His voice, but when he turned, what he saw caused him to faint dead away. I want you to see what he saw there. Jesus, in His glorified state, appeared to John on the island of Patmos. In Rev 1:14 it says, “And His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire.”

In Hebrews 12:29 it says, “For our God is a consuming fire.” When you think of something being tested and you realize that there are two kinds of materials, one is consumable and the other is not, then it makes all the sense in the world that only fire could be that test. It may be instantaneous. It may be that when we see Him and we stand in His presence, that everything about us that was the flesh falls away and all that remains is that which God has been able to do through us as a result of our willingness to trust Him and walk by faith.

Fire puts things to the truest test. I have been quoting from 1 Corinthians 3:12 about different kind of materials. He says, “Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw.” That is the verse that we are building off of. Now, fire is going to reveal the most intimate secrets of man, the things that we hide down here and don’t want anybody to know about.

In Luke 8:17 it says, “For nothing is hidden that shall not become evident nor anything secret that shall not be known and come to light.” You know, it is the fire of God’s presence that reveals this.

Years ago, I was working in the gift shop at a summer camp. Right behind the gift shop was a cliff and there was a road down at the bottom of that cliff, maybe 60 feet down. There was a drop off on the other side with a foot bridge that connected the two sides of those banks over that road. On the other side of that foot bridge was some trails that our kids could hike on.

There was a house, precious people, who lived right there in the corner, right there as you go across the foot bridge. It was a beautiful old house. It had a balcony above the front porch. It was one of those houses that you drive by and say, “Boy, that is really nice.” It was a darker wood, you know, and it was in just a beautiful mountain setting there.

One day the lady who lived there came over and she was just weeping and distraught. She said, “Hurry, help me.” I said, “What is wrong?” She said, “My house is on fire and my two children are in the house.” Well, I told the lady that was working with me, “Go get all the other guys and call the fire department.” I went running across the bridge. It had just started. When I got up the house, the smoke was billowing out. My uncle was a captain of the fire department in Roanoke, Virginia, and he told me some things about being in a fire. One of the things he always told me was, “Wayne, if you are ever in a fire, get on the floor. Stay on the floor because there is a pocket of air that runs along the floor if it hadn’t been burning too long.” Another thing he told me was, “If you hit a door and the handle is hot, don’t open it because if you do that oxygen will blow that whole thing.” So there were a few things I knew, but not much.

I went running in the house. They said the bedrooms were upstairs. I got up the steps but the smoke was so heavy. The smoke is what is the problem. You can’t breathe, you can’t see, your eyes are watering. I got down on the floor like I was supposed to. I could barely see. I got to one door and pushed it open. I crawled over and there was a bed there and there was nobody in the bed. I went to the next room, the next room. There were four bedrooms. I got to the fourth one but it was so hot, my hands almost burned as I tried to touch the door. I remembered, “Don’t go in that door because if you open it, it is going to blow.” So I said to myself, “Maybe I can go around the back and kick a window in, which wasn’t real smart. I got out the window on the roof and as I worked my way around, I was just getting ready to kick in a window when somebody down on the bottom said, “Get off the roof, Wayne! Get off the roof, quick, quick, get off the roof! It is about to blow!”

Well, I remember cutting myself up trying to get off that roof. I got down and sure enough, it blew. I mean, it almost took the whole upstairs off. I don’t know what caused that, but something just erupted inside. I stood there and waited and waited for hours because I was so distraught that I couldn’t find those two little boys. Well, we found one of them. He was down the street. He had set the fire. He was only five years old and he had been playing with matches in the bed. His little two year old brother burned to death in that fire. I never will forget when we found that little body.

You know, inside that fire, something overwhelmed me. That beautiful house that I had always looked at and thought to myself I would love to have one like that someday, had so burned down that the only thing that was left standing was a stone fireplace and the places where they had built up around the hearth there. Everything else was ashes. That beautiful house and that is all that was left. That is exactly the picture that Paul is trying to draw. It is the fire that consumes. You see, you may build a house for somebody and say, “This is a stone house.” Is there any wood in it? “No sir, buddy. Everything is made of stone.” But maybe you lied. Maybe some of the stone was really veneer and there were wooden beams but you didn’t tell anybody about it. One day that house catches



on fire and immediately everybody knows that you had lied. What you had hidden and thought nobody else saw, the fire consumed. And the only thing that is left are those things which are not consumable. That is the test.

We are going to stand before God one day. You say, "What is it going to be like?" I don't know. All I know is what is in here. It may be instantaneous. We will probably be so overwhelmed at the glory of God as we stand in His presence and the fire and the light. Everything about us that we didn't trust God in, that we didn't come to the altar and repent of and confess and rebuild under the grace of God, all of a sudden just disappears. And what is left is that which only was done as a result of faith and trusting the grace of God.

Let me throw something in here. When you die, you can't do anything about the house. As long as you are living, you can. Where does confession and repentance down here in this life come in? If you are building a house and you have a wall that is crooked and the architect tells you that wall is crooked, you repent, which means you change your mind, and tear that wall out and build it the way it ought to be built. You have time to do those things now, folks. But one day, that time is going to be taken away. No way are you going to go back and correct anything. The fire is going to consume everything the flesh did down here.

Men on this earth may have rewarded you and applauded you, but it was flesh. And standing before God, you may feel very embarrassed if you are not living a life that Paul was trying to get the Corinthians to live. That is his whole point. Why attach yourself to men? You are going to stand. He is going to stand. You better just attach yourself to Christ and trust Him and walk in His Word and be what He wants you to be. It is an individual test. It is a revealing test. The fire will reveal it. It is a consuming fire.

### **A Quality Test**

The third thing is a quality test. And oh, this just hit me right between the eyes. Look again at 1Cor 3:13: "Each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire." This is interesting. It will become evident. It will show it. It will be revealed. So we know that. The fire itself will test the quality of each man's work, not the quantity, but the quality of each man's work.

Billy Graham was on one of these talk show programs one time. They asked him, "What would you do if you could go back and do it all over again?" He said, "Less." They asked him, "What limitations did you have?" He said, "My own self, my own flesh all those years." The humility of the man just blesses me.

You see, it is going to be the quality, not the quantity. Now, it doesn't mean there is not going to be any quantity, no, no, no. But that quantity has the quality of trusting God. They will be works of faith, believing God. "God, I can't; you never said I could. You can, and you always said you would." You need to be living as a surrendered vessel so that God through you can do those works. That is quality works. That is those works that no man could reproduce, only God could do. The quality of that work, not the quantity. Quality is a good translation.

James uses that word in James 1. You know the passage there in James 1:21-25 it talks about how you are supposed to be a doer of the word and not just a hearer. In James 1:24 he says, "For once he has looked at himself and gone away [he has looked in the mirror and God has shown him what He wants to show him], he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was." It is the same word. What the makeup of his life really is, whether it is flesh or whether it is of the Spirit. The same exact word.

I don't know how many times you preach on this, and people just sit there and squirm: "Oh, good grief. Why does he have to preach on this? I am scared to death. I don't want to hear this." Now, folks, I want to tell you something. That is a shame if you have that thought in your mind, because this test is not to prove what is wrong about you, it is to prove what is right about you. Now why in the world would that scare you? I will tell you why it would scare you. If you are living like the Corinthians, that ought to scare you half to death, because you are not living like God wants you to live and you know that and you know God knows that. That ought to put the fear of God in your heart. But it is for you, not against you.

The word dokimazo is the word used there for test. What does that mean? Dokimazo is a different word than peirazo, which is another word for test. Peirazo can be used in a good sense, but it is always to bring about a negative quality. In John 6 when Jesus was sitting there and all these people were there that were hungry, He says, "What are you going to do to feed them? You feed them." He says He did this to test them, peirazo. He is doing something there to point out something that is unworthy about them that they couldn't do, but it was a good thing. They needed to know this.

Well, let me explain it this way. Let's say I walk up to you one day and say, "I was digging the other day for worms in my backyard and found some pure gold. I want you to have it. I just want to give it to you. God put it on my heart to give it to you." I walk away and you are sitting there thinking, "He doesn't know gold from dirt. I am going to prove to him that this isn't gold." You put it to the test, not to prove that it is good but to prove that it is bad.

That is exactly what Jesus was doing in John 6. He did this to test them, to show them what their flesh was incapable of doing and

the evil of their flesh, to show them the difference of what He could do. So peirazo has the idea of proving something, to show you what is wrong with it.

Dokimazo is a totally different word. It is never used except in the following way. I go to you and say, "I found some metal in my backyard while I was digging for worms. I don't know what is in it, but I will give it to you." I walk away and you say, "Gracious sakes, I think there is gold in there." So you put it to the test to prove what is right about it, what is good and pure about it. Lo and behold, it is gold.

Any time God is testing you and me, in trials or whatever, it is dokimazo. He is not just making us genuine. In a sense that is correct, because He burns off the dross, but in a bigger sense, He is proving us to be genuine. We were genuine when we entered the trial, we will be genuine when we come out of the trial. We will be particularly seen to be that because all the dross has been burned off, and people can see the pure gold of His presence that is in our life. That is why trials come our way, never to hurt us. It is always a word that is for us, not against us.

So this test that we are going to have by fire one day when we stand before God; it is not going to be a test to prove what is wrong about us, but a test to reveal what is right about what we have done while we have lived on this earth.

I am going to stand, and you are going to stand. Go on and have that attitude of doubt. You can get by with it in America. Why, you can go to church and tell everybody you are a Christian and live like you want to, like the devil during the week, and they will still think that you are okay. But you can't get by with it with God one day. You will stand in His presence. I mean, that is absolute, folks. There is no if's, and's or but's about it.

Paul goes on to say, if, after tested by fire, your works remains, there will be a reward. But if it doesn't remain after being tested by fire, you will suffer loss. Let me explain that to you. Remember a while ago, it said saved so as by fire. That is all. We talked about that passage. Let me just explain it this way.

If there were a group of sailors and a man hired them and said, "Listen, I have a cargo ship, and there is a reward if you can get that ship with its cargo from here to there, but you must bring that cargo with you. If you don't, there will be no reward." Let's just say some of the sailors decided to bring a few things on board that weren't supposed to be brought on. Some of them bring whiskey or something and they all get drunk on the ship one night, just having a great time and their perception is clouded and they get into a storm. Because they were in a storm and because they had been subjecting themselves to things that clouded their mind, they wrecked that cargo ship on rocks. Helicopters were flown in and all of them were rescued. But the cargo was lost. But with the loss of the cargo goes the loss of the reward. They are saved, but they suffered loss.

Christ said, "Hey, I put My Spirit within you, in Paul, in Cephas and Apollos. I put My Spirit within you." Peter says, "I have given you everything for life and godliness and I have set you on a trip and you are building a house. Now when you get there, we will find out how you did it because I want to brag to everybody and show them what is right about you." The only reason you would be ashamed is if you had never taken your Christianity seriously. That ought to scare you half to death, to stand there amongst others with nothing to show for what God has done. That would be the epitome of agony. In heaven it has nothing to do with our salvation. It has everything to do with our reward in heaven. Not proving the man, but proving the work.

## 1 Corinthians 3:14-15 The Preparation for the Test

One day we are going to stand before God and everything of our life that has been built will stand before Him. There is a house that is being built the moment we get saved. The moment you receive Jesus Christ into your life, the foundation is laid. And that foundation is Jesus Christ. Paul says to be careful how you build upon it.

When I was in college, I remember when they would assign a test. That didn't threaten me at all. Everybody in the classroom would get all nervous. Not me. I knew I could wait until the last minute. I am grateful that I have a mind that can grasp most things. I knew most of the teachers and how they would give the test.

I remember one night in a World Literature class, I was 84,000 pages behind in my reading. The night before the final exam a friend of mine and I went down to the library and got into the master plot books and began to develop funny stories about each one of these things so we could remember them. We laughed until I cried. I mean, we would make up the funniest things, just anything to help us remember the main tenets of the different books we were supposed to have read.

The next day in the classroom they separated us. He was on one side and I was on the other side, for obvious reasons. When we started taking the test, I began to laugh. He began to laugh. We had taken right out of the files a test from this particular professor and we had pinpointed him on every single question, even though we were 84,000 pages behind. I got an A and my friend got an A

in the class.

Now, you can do that in school down here on this earth, sometimes. But when it comes to the test we are talking about in Scripture, you don't wait until the last day and cram so you can pass, because we don't know the day and we don't know the hour. One day we are going to stand before God and everything of our life that has been built will stand before Him. There is a house that is being built the moment we get saved. The moment you receive Jesus Christ into your life, the foundation is laid. And that foundation is Jesus Christ.

Paul says to be careful how you build upon it. Look at 1Cor 3:10. He says, "According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it." But then he says, "But let each man be careful how he builds upon it." The narrow context of 1 Corinthians 3 is referring to the teachers and the preachers who follow Him, but all of us are included here, because once the foundation is laid by faith in Christ Jesus, that foundation begins to be built upon and every choice we make, everything we do in life builds upon that foundation. One day, standing before God, it will be tested as to the materials we have used to build that foundation, that house.

You know, we have had people leave the church because we emphasize obedience and surrender. They told me to my face, "Tell me all that I am in Jesus. Tell me who I am and whose I am. [That is so important to understand.] But don't tell me what I am responsible for." You see, we don't want any accountability. But the reason we preach it and preach it and preach it is because one day we will be held accountable as we stand before the Lord Jesus.

In 1Cor 3:14 Paul says, "If any man's work which he has built upon it remains [in other words, after the fire has tested it], he shall receive a reward." But then he says in 1Cor 3:15, "If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire." There is going to be a test that is going to come one day. Now again, I want to point out the fact that this test is not a bad test. God wants to reward you. He wants to reward me. That is something we should be looking forward to. The only reason we would not look forward to it is if we are not willing to live the surrendered life He has asked us to live, enabled by His grace. If that is the case, get on your face before God and say, "God, I am sorry. I repent." The blood cleanses, and the Spirit of God immediately enables and you are right back into building like you ought to be building. But when you live rebellious to those things of God, obviously that house is not going to be what God wants it to be.

Let's talk about this reward a little bit. Take the word "reward" and run it through the Old Testament and the New Testament, particularly the New Testament. If you go into the New Testament, it gives you some clues about how you can know that you are putting the right materials into this building. There are some attitudes. There are some things God creates within you that are automatically clear as to the fact that these are the right materials. Let me just share a few things with you and you might grab on to some of them.

## **Persecution**

First of all, when you are living by faith, surrendered to Him, one of the things you can expect at different times in your life is persecution. Now that word "persecution" means people pursuing after you. They never seem to go away. They don't like you. They don't like what you stand for. They don't like the God you serve. Therefore, they are constantly on your trail. The picture is of an old coon dog on a trail at night. You can hear him off in the distance, and it just won't go away. Everywhere you go, they are always on your trail. That is the word for persecution.

Look in Matthew 5:11-12 and let's just see if there is a reward for people who are persecuted for living the faith life, for surrendering to Christ, for letting Jesus be Jesus in you, depending on His divine enablement within you. Matthew 5:11-12 is very clear as to what God says. He speaks there to His disciples and says, "Blessed are you [the word "blessed" is makarios; it means completely, inwardly, spiritually satisfied] when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

The next time you seek to live the godly life and seek for the right materials to be put into this house that will one day be tested and you are persecuted as a result of it, say, "Praise you Lord. I am in good company and there is going to be a reward for this." Persecution is a signal that you are doing it right, not that you are doing it wrong. Light and darkness never get along very well.

The kind of obedience that God requires out of us is not the obedience so that men around you can see it. Obviously they will see it. But it is not for their benefit, it is for His benefit and for your benefit. Therefore, when you do what you do, you do it in the privacy of that life that is hidden with Him and you obey Him. You don't go out and announce it to everybody. This is something between you and God. It is out of our love relationship.

You know, there are so many things that I would love to share with you about the friendship and the relationship my wife and I have. But it is something that is very private and very precious to us. That is the way it is with your walk with God. You don't come out and say, "Oh, guess what? I did this. Guess what? I did that." No, no. It is not that kind of thing. You are obeying out of love. You are

honoring a relationship.

Now, I say this because Jesus brought this out. He warned the people of His day, "Watch out that you don't parade your acts of obedience." Look in Matthew 6:1. Now you know that the right materials are going in here when you don't have this overwhelming desire to go out and flaunt your obedience unto God. There are many people who do this. Now obviously people will know that you are obedient, but it is not because of your flaunting it and wanting their approval for it.

In Matthew 6:1 we read, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men [then He gives the motive] to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven." Be real careful about the whole motive of everything that you are doing.

Then He lists several things there in Matthew. First of all is in giving of alms. In Mt 6:2 He says, "When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full." "Alms" there means to do a benevolent work for somebody, to do a good deed for someone, to give money to somebody who is poor or whatever. It always has a benevolent sense to it. He says, "When you do that, don't announce it. If you do, the applause that men will give to you is your reward." So what you do, you do out of obedience but not to flaunt it in front of man. That is what He warns the Pharisees about in that day.

Then He talks about prayer in Matthew 6:5: "And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full." People walk by and say, "Aren't they spiritual? Look at those people pray." They have their reward. That was their reward right there.

You see, when you pray in that closet, that is your time alone with God, when you wrestle with the things that you are wrestling with and when you rediscover your peace with Him and when you walk with Him. Not that man can see it. They will see the result of it, only so that God might be loved and honored in your life.

Then He mentions fasting in Matthew 6:16. He says, "And whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance in order to be seen fasting by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full." Basically, what Jesus is trying to show us is that when we obey Him, this is something between us and Him and we are doing it because we love Him, knowing that we are building a house that will one day be tested. We don't do it to flaunt it in front of men.

This is something that has really blessed me. Do you realize that all those secret things that you have done out of obedience to the Lord that nobody ever knew about, that He keeps and knows about, one day will cause that house that you are building to stand like you couldn't have caused it to stand before, because God knows those things? That is so encouraging to me. Many, many, many are the times that we have said yes to the Lord but nobody ever knew about it. That is alright. He did, you see. That is the way our walk with Him ought to be. When walking by faith, your heart is turned to acts of benevolence, as we said earlier, towards others, particularly those of the family of God.

Look over in Mark 9:41 and you begin to see that God creates within you a compassion for others and a love for others. This is not what you are doing as much as what He is doing in you. It is a good way of knowing that the house is being built correctly. If you have a cold heart toward the needs of others, look out. The house you are building is not one that will stand. Mark 9:41 says, "For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward." In another gospel it says a cup of cold water. They are talking about when you go out of your way to minister to the needs of somebody, particularly in the family of God, particularly those that are righteous and in God's kingdom.

In that day the woman of the house would go down to the well early in the morning. The water was cold and she would put it into a pitcher. She would bring it back and set it up and then all day long they would drink out of that water. Well, to give a cup of warm water was easy, because the climate would warm that water up as the day would go by. But to get a cup of cold water meant somebody had to go all the way back down to where the well was and draw that water and bring it back. The idea is not just giving a cup of cold water, but going out of your way to minister to the saints of God, to minister to those that are around you.

I tell you, this isn't something that you do resulting from the flesh. This is something God creates within you as you are walking submissive to Him. When you have this desire to minister to the family, to minister to those that you become aware of that have needs, this is God working in your life. Evidently, the house is being built correctly. Living by faith causes love to be produced by the Holy Spirit. I guess that is the greatest thing in the world that you can see. That love is going to be tested. And one of the greatest ways it is tested is when you are able, enabled by the grace of God, to love even your enemies.

Look over in Matthew 5:46. The bottom line here of loving others is brought out. By the way, loving your enemies does not mean adopting their ways or going along with what they do, but it is being so committed in your heart to do what is spiritually necessary for them. You are willing to pay whatever price that is necessary. In Matthew 5:46 He says, "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the taxgatherers do the same?" In other words, that is nothing to that. God's love is beyond just

loving people who are good to you.

Go over to Luke 6:35 where again He brings this out so clearly. Love is there, even for people who treat you wrongly. That love is not mushymushy. No, that is not it. But it is a commitment in your heart to do what is necessary spiritually for their best benefit. In Luke 6:35 He says, "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. And your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men."

That is one of the tests of whether or not you are building the right kind of building is when you can love even the enemies who come at you. Living by faith causes our attitude to be affected. Over in 1 Corinthians 9:17, Paul has something specific to say about that. He speaks of an attitude that he has. This attitude plays a huge role in determining what kind of materials are going into this building. He says, "For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward." If I do it without any pressure on me to do it, I do it because I choose to do it. That is telling me something. Evidently this is the Spirit of God. This is a result of putting my faith in Him and God has caused this in my life.

Again in Colossians 3:23<sup>24</sup> he brings out that same understanding of attitude of how God even changes an attitude towards what you do. He says, "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of your inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve." So when you go to work, you are not working for men, you are working as unto the Lord. And you do your work heartily as unto Him. That is a sign that the right materials are going into this building. That is the Spirit of God working in your heart. When you are filled with the Spirit of God, there is a boldness that you have that you didn't have before, a boldness to speak forth the things of God.

In Hebrews 10:35 we read, "Therefore, do not throw away your confidence which has great reward." The word "confidence" means that willingness to step forward and to speak out and be bold in what you say. Living by faith, you see, is the norm of the Christians who believe in Jesus Christ. Now, you don't have to be a fulltime minister to have a reward. You have to be fulltime as far as your Christian walk is concerned. We have made up these terms laity and clergy which have messed everybody's mind up. Are you in the ministry? Well, yeah, but so are you. We are all in the ministry. The moment you receive Jesus Christ and start living a surrendered life, you are in the ministry. You are a missionary, whether it is across the street or around the world.

So everybody gets in on this reward. Everybody is building this house. This is not just for preachers. This is for every believer. He says that very clearly in Colossians 3:22. Look over there. Look who he is talking to, slaves. Actually, that was 80% of their work force. So he is talking to those who go to work. I mean, that would be a good application of it. Colossians 3:22 says, "Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance." He is not talking to preachers. He is talking there to the workplace. He is talking to the slaves.

Again in Ephesians 6:8 we see this is all encompassing. There is a reward for the believer if he will build a house by faith while he is living here on earth. Ephesians 6:8 says, "Knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free." He just opens it wide open, to anyone who is a believer. We are all building a house and we are to build it by faith. When we live obedient lives in the circumstances God has allowed for us, there will be a reward. We not be called upon to do great things as others are called on to do, but whenever you obey Him, surrendered to Him saying Jesus be Jesus in me, for that will be a reward because you are building the right kind of house that will stand the test of His fire of judgment.

Well, back in 1 Corinthians 3:15 you see the reverse of this. How do you know that you are building the right kind of building? God gives you a heart to be benevolent towards others, a love towards your enemies. All these things are involved. And you begin to get an understanding you are going in the right direction because this doesn't come from the flesh. This comes from God. But in 1 Corinthians 3:15 here is the other side of that: "If any man's work is burned up, he shall also suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire."

In other words, Paul is saying to the Corinthian church, "If you are going to keep on living like you are living, friend, I am warning you, you are going to stand before God one day. Yes, you will be saved. This is not to judge you, but it is to judge your works. And you are going to be very ashamed. There is not going to be anything left, you see, that God has done through you."

You know, when you drive through the Shenandoah Valley you see those old plantation homes, many of which have burned, and all you see standing is just a chimney. All of that which was so beautiful to everybody who drove by has been consumed. Only the chimney is left standing. I think of that every time I think of this passage. Standing before God one day, all that is of the flesh, all that I was unwilling to repent of and unwilling to seek God's forgiveness and walk in His grace, is just going to burn immediately in His presence. The only thing left standing is that which I was willing to commit by faith, that which came out of a surrendered life towards Him. Now that is a sobering thought. It ought not be a scary thought, but it is a sobering thought. We need to remember there is integrity in the Christian life.

I want to go back to chapter 1 and show you the steps that we can take to assure that our building will not burn when it is tested by fire. What steps can we take? If you will go back and live this way, you can be assured that you don't have to fear the coming of the Lord and you don't have to fear standing before Him because you know that you have sought to live a life by faith.

### **Live According To Your Eternal Purpose**

Alright, first of all, you begin by living according to your eternal purpose. That is step one. There is one eternal purpose for us and that is to live separated unto Him, as a vessel which God can use. Remember back in 1 Corinthians 1:2, "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling." A man or woman, boy or girl, who is a Christian, should start right there. "I am separated unto God. I didn't separate myself unto Him. He separated me unto Himself. I am His. He owns me. I am His possession. God, what do you want me to do today? How do you want me to live today so that you through me can be seen to others?" That is the key. That is step one. Every day that you live, every morning that you wake up say, "God, I have but one purpose in my life.

The word "sanctified" means to be set apart, put in a class all by itself. The thing that distinguishes us between other human beings in this world is that we love this Book. We love the Lord of this Book. And as we love Him and we obey Him, then people see that we are different. We are human beings, yes; and we have faults, yes; and we have a body of sin, yes. But somebody lives in us and we have purpose in our life. This begins to set up our witness to others and it begins to start the process of making sure you are putting the right materials in the house that we are building.

We must get very practical with this. Look over in Colossians 1. This is a very precious verse. In everything in your life, give Christ first place. Colossians 1:18 says, "He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything." He wants first place in everything. He is the head of the body. And we have been separated unto Him.

Go over to Ephesians 5:16 and it begins to show you how you work this thing out. I mean, let's be real practical with it. If I want to make sure my house will not be consumed by fire when I get to heaven one day and I look at the Lord Jesus Christ and I stand in His presence, then I have got to understand my purpose in life. I have got to separate myself unto Him. I have got to learn this and give Him first place in everything. In Ephesians 5:16 it says, "Making the most of your time, because the days are evil." That "making the most of" is a Greek phrase that means to purchase. It is made up of two words, ek, out of, and agorazo, which means to buy or purchase. Put together they mean to purchase out of, redeem the time.

Now let me ask you a question. If you are going to purchase time, which is all we all have, and if we are going to live separated unto Him, if we are going to give Him first place in everything, what collateral are you going to use to purchase time? The only collateral I know of is choice. So I have choices I can make all day long. When I get on the freeway, I have the choice to run over that lady or just pray for her. I have a choice to make. The choice that I have to make when something comes up in my life and I wanted to do something else.

One day I wanted to go with a friend of mine to a football event. I have gone to this event for years and years. But this particular Saturday was so full and demanding on my time. I had studied Saturday and had just finished the first message. I don't like to spend Saturday studying, but I knew I had another message to go and I was wrestling.

Something inside of me was saying, "Wayne, you have got to preach tomorrow and you need this time to be alone with Me and to be in My Word. Now, Wayne, you have got a choice to make." All the time I was thinking, "I know, Holy Spirit, but...!!!" I was thinking that the whole time. My flesh was raising up and I was thinking, "Wait a minute. Give Him first place in everything in your life." Finally, I came down to it. If I had to make a choice that is eternal and not temporary, to satisfy my flesh, I am going to have to stay home and stay in the Word and finish out what God has put before me. It was not easy.

Folks, you have got to make those choices in life, enabled by the grace of God. It all stimulates out of your love for Him, yes. These people who say it is so easy to do that I don't understand. My flesh rears up on me and makes me feel like an idiot sometimes because of the choices that I make to deny the flesh and do what God wants me to do.

When you are living this way what you are doing, without realizing it, is you are building a house in heaven. You are doing something that you can't see right now and you don't want to see right now because if you did, that would be your reward, as He told us. You want to see it one day when you stand before Him. And everything that goes into this house is redemptive in its nature. I want to tell you, folks, it is a blessing to be able to live that way. That is what God has called us to do. We have one purpose and that is to get involved with Him, attach ourselves to Him, put Jesus as first place in everything and learn to redeem the time. Learn to make the proper choices in life, enabled by His grace. This is not something legalistic. This is not something fleshly that you can manufacture. It is just learning to be submissive and obedient to His voice when He speaks to your heart.

If you are not in the Word of God, you don't even know what I am talking about. All these things are built into it. Separate yourself

unto God who has separated you and learn to put Him in first place and learn to make the proper choices to redeem the time. Then you won't be afraid of standing before Him one day. You will not be afraid. The most ashamed you will ever be is when you realize how wise His wisdom in leading really was in your life. That is the only thing that will make you ashamed, to see the eternal aspect of what God has for you.

### **Live In the Attachment**

Secondly, once you get involved in His purpose, attach yourself to Him. I am sanctified. I am a saint. I am not my own. I can't live like I want to live. I live the way He wants me to live. You learn to live in that attachment to Him. It says in 1 Corinthians 1:2, "with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours." "Call upon" means to depend upon, to live every day depending upon Him.

In a recent conference, God reminded me that, "Wayne, it is in me, it is in Me. It is not in the people. It is not in anybody else. It is in Me. Depend upon Me. Call upon Me, Wayne, period." That is it. From then on, you have it solved. That is your attachment to Him, those choices that you are making. It is in the present middle tense, so you call upon Him as a lifestyle and of your own choice.

Look over in Romans 10:12. I want to show you what you tap into when you call upon Him and what you don't tap into when you don't call upon Him. This is a tremendous verse. Romans 10:12 says, "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him." One of the things I think happens so often in our lives is that we move away from this. For whatever reason, we move away from that intimacy of just depending upon Him, calling upon Him. We don't tap into the riches, spiritual riches that God has for us. You can't live attached to Him if you are not going to call upon Him, if you are not going to depend upon Him.

If you are not walking with Him, no wonder you have doubts, frustration and confusion in your life. You are not building the right kind of building. Come back to what a Christian really is. Depend upon Him for everything, every single thing in your life. And when people look at you and say you are stupid for doing it, just smile right back at them because you know something they don't know, that you have been set apart to Him. He lives in you to be your sufficiency, and you can depend upon Him for everything. It is ridiculous to think that a believer would depend on anything other than Christ Jesus, drink from any other well than drinking from that well. To do so is to cheat yourself out of everything God has given to you.

He says in verse 4, "I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in everything you were enriched in Him." I love the statement that Bill Stafford made. He said, "Listen, if God loves a cheerful giver who is living attached to Him, who understands the principles of what it means to be a believer, then where in the world are they?" You can say the same thing right here. If God's people are to live in the riches of Christ Jesus, then where are the people living in them? That is the whole point of writing 1 Corinthians. They were upside down. They were not living as if they were true believers. They were building buildings that were not going to stand the test of God's judgment one day.

### **You Cannot Do It in Your Own Strength**

It is critical to realize this. Live according to His purpose and depend upon Him. Thirdly, is to know that you cannot do it in your own strength. You have to know this. This is bottom line. This is basic. You have got to understand that you cannot do it in your own strength. People say, "Hey preacher, don't pray for me yet. I am going to go a little bit further. I think I can handle a little bit more of this. Then I will call you or whatever." As if they can do it themselves. What is it Paul wishes for them in verse 3? Do you think this is just a greeting? Hey, it is the inspired Word of God. When you look at it, now you begin to realize what he is saying.

He says in 1 Corinthians 1:3, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." What do you think grace is? Do we know what grace is? "It is the unmerited favor of God." Yeah, that is basic. If you don't understand that, forget it. You are not going to go any further. Yes, we don't deserve any of it. But what is it? It is the transforming, enabling power that God places within us when the Spirit of God comes to live inside of us.

Now why would He put the Spirit in us if we could do it ourselves? That is why he told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:1, "Timothy, be strong in the grace that is found in Christ Jesus." Grace is what I need to deal with the sin in my life. When there is a problem with my flesh, I must go and confess it before God. But He doesn't just remove it, because the potential of sin continues to stay. He not only removes it, He fills me in that area and recreates me in that area. Where I was bitter, He makes me forgiving. Where I was proud, He makes me humble. It is Jesus being Jesus in me. That is the work of grace.

In Romans 6:14 he says you are no longer under law, you are under grace. What does it mean to be under grace? It means I am a brand new person in Christ. I have not only been set free from the penalty of sin, I have been set free from the power of sin. I don't have to live under it anymore. I don't have to say yes to my flesh any more. I can say yes to Him because He lives in me to give me that opportunity. That is where grace begins.

If you don't understand that, no wonder it is mechanical. No wonder it happens that way. What happens is you start building a house that is not going to stand the test of God's judgment because you are not operating in that which God says you ought to operate. You are not living under the principle of His grace. So Paul wishes grace upon them. Oh, man, how desperate we all are for the grace of God.

### **Pursue the Peace of God**

Well, we must live according to His purpose. We must live attaching ourselves to Christ. We must be aware of what we cannot do or we will never build the buildings that will stand the test of God's judgment. Fourthly, we must pursue the peace of God. In that same verse he says, "Grace and peace to you." Why do we need peace? Now, let me talk about this for a second.

Look over in Philippians 4. I want to show you something. Romans 5:1 says we already have peace with God. That is established, whether you ever feel it or not, you have peace with God. Now what does it mean to have peace with God? It means you have dropped your sword. You are not fighting God anymore. When you came to God, you came on the terms of surrender to Him. You laid the sword down. Therefore, you have peace now with God through Jesus. Jesus paid your sin debt and there is nothing standing between you and God. You are not going to fight Him anymore, and you have peace with Him.

There is not only the peace with God. There is also the peace of God. Look and see how Paul says you get it. Php 4:6 tells you. If you don't have the first thing we talked about nailed down, it just doesn't make much sense. But if you have those first three things knocked down, it makes a lot of sense. He says, "Be anxious for nothing." Let me ask you a question right now. Is anxiety eating you alive because something is happening in your life and you don't know what tomorrow is going to bring? You go to church to find some solace. You are not going to find it in church. You find it in Christ. He will give you the peace of God. You are already at peace with God, but it is the peace of God, that divine serenity He puts within you that no man can ever explain. It is beyond comprehension.

He says, "[Be anxious for nothing]] [and then he tells you what to do], but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your request be made known to God." Now thanksgiving always implies that which already has happened. If you have a bitter bone in your body, forget it. You haven't understood this verse yet. Go back and repent of something that you are bitter about because until you can be thankful and see God's hand in it, you can't go much further.

Look at Php 4:7, "And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension [man cannot understand it], shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Where is the problem coming from most of the time? It is coming right out of what we think or what we feel. It is going to stand guard over your emotions. It is going to stand guard over your mind.

That peace of God only comes when you are willing to trust Him and bring everything to Him by prayer and thanksgiving, all your supplication. Your whole attitude is to live separated unto Him. Depend on Him for everything, regardless of what is bombarding your mind. Push that out and just cling to Him. Then something supernatural happens. The peace of God that overflows you and you couldn't explain it if you had to. That is how you can live every day. That is also how you can know the house that is being built is the right one because God and God alone can produce that peace in your heart.

The peace of God. If you are just going to check out and say, "God, I know this is good stuff, but you know, not now. I think I will do my own worrying for a while." Number one, you are going to be one miserable individual. But number two, you can be assured that what you are building will not stand the test of His judgment one day. Until we repent of this kind of living, come to the altar and bow down and confess it before a holy God and repent of it and step back into the truth that we know has set us free, we live miserable lives. One day we stand and the whole building burns. That is something that we don't need to have to experience. We need to come back to the basics of what the Christian life is all about.

We are believers who have been set apart unto God and we are to live setting ourselves apart attached to Him, obeying Him, pursuing grace and peace in our life. These things are to continue guide and to motivate and drive our live. When they are not, number one, we are miserable and number two, when we stand before Him, the house will burn. Not us, we are saved, but there will be no reward. We will suffer loss is what the Scripture says in 1 Corinthians 3:15.

My plea to you is this, if there is something not right in your life, run to the cross. There is forgiveness, cleansing and mercy to bear up under the consequences and grace to transform you in that area of your life so that you can get back to building with the right materials so that one day you will not be ashamed when you stand before Jesus Christ. As long as our heart is beating, there is an opportunity to correct. But one day when we see Him, that is it and what has been built will be tested.



We are the dwelling of God. Secondly, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. Thirdly, Paul says there are those who seek to defile the dwelling of God. Here is when God, through Paul, is going to say, "You had better not mess with my people!"

I could have come up with a better title, I am sure. But to me it is more culturally understood. Here is my title, "Don't Mess with God's People." Now there are other ways I could have said that, "Don't tread on God's people," or whatever. But you know, we are in the south, so let's just go on and talk like we talk. Don't mess with God's people.

In verse 1Cor 3: we do not have a builder. We have somebody who is destroying that which is being built. One who doesn't build. Paul is warning those who come against the people who are busy about building upon the foundation of Christ. They are in the church and outside the church.

Some people say (I think it is erroneous) that in Paul's day the people would come to church, meet to worship and then when they would go out, Satan would persecute them and attack them. But today, Satan has joined the church and there is as much persecution inside the church as there is outside of the church. I think that is a wrong statement. I believe in Paul's day it was the same way as it is today. If you will read the letters, there was as many wicked people inside the church as there were outside the church.

So Paul gives a warning. God really is giving the warning through Paul to those people who would seek to destroy the building being built by God's own, by those who have been saved. We are going to learn a lot about these folks.

Look in 1 Cor 3:16-17. Let's read the passage and then we will get into it. It will take a while because it is not an easy passage. 1Cor 3:16 says, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are." Now, that may seem easy, but it is not. Let's just dig in.

#### We Are the Dwelling of God

There are three things that I want you to see. Perhaps they will help us better understand what is being said here in 1 Corinthians 3. First of all, Paul tells us that we are the dwelling of God. 1Cor 3:16 reads, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God." He uses this same terminology over in 1Cor 6. There he speaks of each individual being a temple of God, the body being the temple of God, the Holy of Holies, that place where God resides on this earth. Yes, that is included here in chapter 3, but I think he looks more at the broader picture of the whole church being a temple of God. We won't argue either way, but from the context I think you will see as we go along he is talking about the whole church, wherever they are, not just at Corinth.

Let's look over in 1 Corinthians 6:19 so you will know what I am talking about. He says, "Or do you not know that your body [he is talking about the individual] is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?" It appears there that he is talking about the individual person being a temple. Back in chapter 3, not only is that taken into consideration, but it looks at the whole picture of all of us being the residents of God on this earth.

God has chosen to dwell with His people on this earth. Go back to the Old Testament when God chose to tabernacle among His people. He had them build a tabernacle. Oh, what an exciting day that was when the fire came down from heaven, giving the people the understanding that God's presence was with them in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle that they had built. A little later on it moves from a temporary dwelling, the tabernacle, to a more permanent dwelling, which would be the temple that Solomon built. What a day that was when the temple was dedicated. God was dwelling with His people in the place called the Holy of Holies. In the Greek it would be that same word we are looking at here as the temple, naos. It is the idea of the place where God dwells. But you know that Israel rejected God. They continued to sin against Him. And out of His righteous anger, He withdrew His presence, and from the book of Malachi to the book of Matthew, there is 400 years called the Period of Darkness. Nothing was spoken from heaven. God was not dwelling among His people until the gospels were written.

Then God broke the silence and chose once again to dwell with us. He came and tabernacled in His Son, Jesus Christ. He was born of a virgin and took upon Himself flesh and blood. He actually didn't take a body, but He was born from a virgin, born flesh and blood. He had no earthly father, but He was conceived of the Heavenly Father. He became the unique Godman. God now dwelt in a fleshly body with His people on this earth, in Jesus Christ. Jesus was the actual temple of God on this earth.

Of course, man crucified Him and then He resurrected the third day, ascended, was glorified and then on the Day of Pentecost, He sent His Spirit back to this earth to dwell in the hearts of believers, to take up permanent residence within us. So the church becomes the Temple of God upon the earth. God dwells in us.

The apostle Paul says, "Do you not know?" The word "know" there is a form of the word eido. In other words, "Do you not have this perception? Do you not have this understanding?" Sometimes you want to remind Christians, "Do you not know?", especially in counseling, when a husband and wife are having difficulty. One of them says, "I just can't love him. I just can't put up with him." You

could say back to that person, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God upon this earth, where God dwells? Nobody ever says you could, but He can and He lives in you. You are the dwelling of God upon this earth."

Paul has just told them how important it is to build upon the foundation of Christ with precious stones, making sure that it stands the test of God's judgment. Now, as if to further explain that, he points out that they are the temple of God on this earth. In other words, it is not their reputation that is at stake, it is His reputation that is at stake. And if anything becomes a motivating factor in our life, it ought to be that Christ lives in us. That is why we should live lives by faith to build upon this foundation a building that will stand God's test one day.

So many people just do not realize that they are the dwelling of God on this earth. How many people come to church every week and don't know they bring God with them, that God lives in them. We have got to grasp this.

This is what Paul is trying to bring out. Why would you attach yourself to a man? Attach yourself to Christ. He lives in you. Let Him work through you so that people can see that you are His temple here on this earth. Some people say, "Well, God is omnipresent. Isn't He everywhere? Why would you say He lives in us if He is not everywhere?" Have you ever asked that question? Well, there is a very simple answer. Yes, He is everywhere, but everybody doesn't recognize that. He is everywhere. He is in creation. Some of the greatest poets have written beautiful things about creation and then signed beside their name, atheist. They don't believe in God. God is all around them and they can't see Him. But God has uniquely chosen human beings who He would come to live in, those who put their faith into Jesus Christ. And when they do, they can not only be aware of His omnipresence but they can understand Him.

We can walk with Him. We can talk with Him. We can hear Him. It is an intimate relationship He chose to have with you and me. He chose to take up permanent residence in the hearts and lives of believers.

This was the burden that Paul had for the church at Ephesus. I guess he had the same burden for every other epistle that He wrote, but particularly the Corinthians and the Ephesians. Look over to Ephesians 3:14. He really wanted these Gentiles to know that Christ lived in them, that they were the temple of God on this earth, that God actually dwelled in their hearts and in their lives. Ephesians 3:14 begins a prayer that I think is the hinge of the whole book of Ephesians. It sums up everything in chapters 1, 2 and 3 and sets up everything in chapters 4, 5 and 6.

Look what he says here in 1Cor 3:14. He says, "For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father." What reason? Observation, interpretation. Normally when you want to find out the reason, you read a few verses back and you will find the reason. Well, here it is more difficult. Look at 1Cor 3:1. He starts that verse the same way he starts 1Cor 3:14, the very same Greek word. He says, "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles." Now, I could be wrong but I think he starts his prayer in verse 1 and for 13 verses he just gets overwhelmed with what he is praying for them. Here he is in prison, loving Jesus, overwhelmed that Christ lives in him and he has such a high view of Christ, a high view of salvation, he is just continuously overwhelmed at the revelation and the mystery that God has shown to him. Then he comes back to his prayer in 1Cor 3:14. If I am correct, you have to go back to 1Cor 2:19-22 to find out why he bows his knees before the Father.

Look back in 1Cor 2:19. It is beautiful what he is saying to them here. He is a converted Jew writing to converted Gentiles, but he wants them to understand something. He says in verse 19, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord." Then in 1Cor 3:22 he just tops it off. He says, "In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit."

He wants them to understand that for this reason I bow my knees before the Father. "You Gentiles need to understand who lives in you. You need to understand who you are and whose you are in light of that truth and live out of that. If you don't, the foundation of the building that we are building upon is not going to stand the test of God's judgment one day, and our works will be destroyed instead of remaining which will bring forth a reward."

Understand what Paul is saying here. God is not there because there is building. He came and put up permanent residence in you and in me. He chose to do that. So we bring Him in the church with us, in that one respect. Even though He is omnipresent, we knowingly bring Him here. He is wherever we are. He is with us when nobody else can see us but just us. He lives in us. He is always there.

Now if this is not understood, there is going to be some serious problems in the building that we are building that is going to be tested one day. That is so clear from God's Word that there is going to be an accounting one day for what we are doing now. God has given us everything for life and godliness. He is going to test it one day just to see what we have done with it, not to approve us but to approve those works. So we must realize that we are the dwelling of God on this earth.

Now notice what Paul says back in 1 Corinthians 3:16. He says, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God." Now, let me show

you something here that perhaps you wouldn't see in the English. In the Greek there is no definite article here. You say, "What does that mean?" Well, when the definite article is there, it identifies. When it is not there, it qualifies. What does that mean? In other words, he is talking about God in the Godhead, the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, the three in one. I want to be honest with you, I can't understand it. If we could understand this in all of its totality, then God would be no bigger than our brain and you certainly wouldn't want a God who is no bigger than our brain. Why would we go to church? I mean, it is much bigger than that. You can't even illustrate it. However, we can show you some scriptures to show you that all of God comes to live in you, all that God decides to give to us.

Look in John 14:16. This is very important. This is Jesus speaking here in John 14:16. He says, "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever." The word "another," is *allos*, which means another of exactly the same kind, not the word *heteros*, which means another of a different kind.

Then in verse 17 we read, "that is the Spirit of truth [the Holy Spirit of God] whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you."

Look at verse 19. "After a while the world will behold Me no more [Jesus was saying, "It will neither see nor understand Me] but you will behold Me; because I live, you shall live also." There is going to be someone in you to give manifestation to Me.

Then in verse 20 of chapter 14 Jesus says, "In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." Then a little later in verse 23 it says, "Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him.'"

What I am trying to show you is, if the Holy Spirit of God lives in us, then that is God, very God. When you have the Holy Spirit, you have the Father and the Son wrapped up into one. When you have Jesus, you have the Father and the Spirit. When you have the Father you have the Son and the Spirit. They are all one. They are not three Gods. There is only one God in three persons. So if the Holy Spirit lives in you, God lives in you.

The word for "temple" in 1 Corinthians 3:16 is the word *naos*. In most instances it refers to the whole temple, but not here. In specific instances it refers to the Holy of Holies. There is another word that is synonymous with it and it means the sacred place, the Holy place, that place that God Himself dwells. Now, that ought to make you think the next time you make a choice. God Himself dwells in you. You are, in a sense, the Holy of Holies on this earth. Now the Holy of Holies is where God is in heaven. However, He is on earth and He has chosen to reside within the hearts of man. God dwells within us. We are His temples on this earth.

### **The Temple Was a Magnificent Structure**

Now what is the purpose of the temple? There are two things I want you to see, and I think it all fits with what we are looking at in the context of 1 Corinthians 3. First of all, the temple was a magnificent structure. It was made of all the things that were precious (precious stones, gold and silver) where God would manifest Himself. Now, everything was done to keep the temple from decaying or from corrupting. The problem was, the people who were in it were wicked and lived without faith. When Christ came on the scene, He made it possible for us to be that temple of God. We are to be that magnificent structure which people look at and see us pointing to Him. They see the righteous deeds that we do and these become the precious stones; not a cold stone or a cold piece of metal, but something that is living and fleshed out. When we are willing to walk by faith, people see that and that becomes the beauty that surrounds the One who dwells within us. People everywhere realize that there is a fragrance about us, the aroma of Christ is in our life. We now become the temple. The beauty again is those righteous stones, those righteous deeds that we do by faith.

### **The Temple Was A Place to Worship God**

The temple was also a place of worshiping God. Aren't you glad that we don't have to go to Jerusalem to worship God? We don't even have to go to church to worship God. What we do at church we do as a body. But wherever you are, you can worship God in spirit and in truth. Worship is a verb. Worship is not something you feel. Worship is something you do in response to what God has done in your own life. It may be in a restaurant when you have ordered something, and the waitress brought the wrong thing and it was cold. But you chose to die to the flesh and you let the spirit of God reach out to her. Then you have worshiped God by your response to His Spirit in your life. That is what it is all about. We worship Him by falling down before Him, by our willingness to serve Him, by our willingness to live lives that point to Him and not to us. So we are the temples of God on this earth.

People who see you at work won't see you at church, but they see you as the residence of God. They see you as that person in which God resides. That is our whole purpose. It is His reputation that is at stake, not ours.

### **We Are Indwelt By God the Holy Spirit**

To take it a step further in our motivation to build upon the foundation with the correct materials, Paul tells us that we are the dwelling of God on this earth. But the second thing I want you to look at here, by being the dwelling of God on this earth, he says we

are indwelt by God the Holy Spirit. Now I have said a little bit about that. I am not going to go back and try to prove He is God. You know He is God. He came to live in us. I want to take it a step further.

It says in 1Cor 3:16, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" The word for "dwells" is the word oikeo. It comes from oikos, which means house or residence. In other words, He has taken up residence within our life. It is in the present active indicative. Continuously He dwells in our life, of His own accord (active voice) and write it down, it is a fact (indicative) you see. In other words, this is something that you just take home and understand. God says He has taken up residence in your life. The Holy Spirit taking up residence in your life is proof of your holiness before God. Understand that.

Look in the last part 1Cor 3:17. He says, "for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are." The word "holy" is hagios. We saw that in chapter 1. Holiness does not mean perfection when it comes to us. When it comes to Him, yes, but not to us. His is inherent. Ours is imputed. But the word "holy" means we have been set apart, we have been put into a class all by ourselves. Amongst all humanity, we are in a class all by ourselves. Why? Because the Spirit of God has taken up residence in our heart. He has separated us unto Himself and for His purposes, therefore, we have been made holy. His living in our life is prove of that fact.

Paul says, "and that is what you are." You are holy because God is holy and lives in you and has separated you unto Himself and made you holy. We as believers are the very temple of God. He sent His own Spirit to take up residence in our life.

Now what does the Spirit do? Boy, if you think along the context here, it just excites you. The Holy Spirit is the Building Project Coordinator. Last time we saw that we are building a building. It is going to be tested one day. Well, now who is the one who is running this project? The Holy Spirit of God.

Look over in Ephesians 3:16. The same prayer and the same chapter, but a different verse. I want you to see what Paul says. What is the Holy Spirit in our life to do? He says in verse 16 of Ephesians 3, "that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man." It is the Spirit of God who enables the righteous bricks to be put upon the foundation of Christ in my life. If I am living in obedience to Him, if I am living surrendered to Him, the result is going to be a house that will withstand the test that God is going to give to it one day, the test of fire. We are to be as he says over in Ephesians 5:18, we are to be filled with the Spirit of God.

It says in verse 18 of Ephesians 5, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation [that is waste], but be filled with the Spirit." Now, what does it mean to be filled with the Spirit of God? Well, it is understood by the first part of the verse. We are to be totally affected by the Holy Spirit, not by stuff that is outside coming in like wine or that which makes us drunk.

The apostle Paul said, "No, be ye filled by the same way you get drunk with wine, be ye filled with the Spirit of God. Let the Holy Spirit through His Word control your mind. Let the Holy Spirit give you understanding and perception through your spiritual eyes. Let the Holy Spirit help you to hear what God is saying to you. Let the Holy Spirit teach you how to walk. Let the Holy Spirit control you." It is in the present tense. It means it is a lifestyle, be being filled. It is in the passive voice. Let Him do the filling, let Him do the controlling. It is imperative. There is no option to the believer.

The Holy Spirit lives in us to do exactly that. And if I live filled with the Spirit of God, controlled by the Spirit of God, surrendered to Him, then the building that is being built on the foundation of Christ one day will be tested by fire, will withstand the fire and there will be a reward in the end. Be filled with the Holy Spirit of God. That is what He is in our life to do, to rule and to reign and to enable us to build with the precious stones and the gold and the silver, the righteous deeds that will stand the test of God one day. It is the Holy Spirit of God who proves that we are holy. He lives in us and has separated us unto Himself. He enables us now to live separate unto Him and for the building to be built correctly.

### **There Are Those Who Seek To Defile the Dwelling Of God**

Well, there is one more thing. We are the dwelling of God. Secondly, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. But here comes the main thought of what Paul is saying. Thirdly, Paul says there are those who seek to defile the dwelling of God. Here is when God, through Paul, is going to say, "You had better not mess with my people!"

Look at 1Cor 3:17: "If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him." Many people think that means suicide. It's crazy how you can interpret something. Be real careful. That is not at all what he is talking about here. He is not saying if you go out and kill yourself, which is destroying the temple, that God is going to destroy you. That has nothing to do with it. If a Christian is a Christian, even suicide is not an unpardonable sin, because we are kept blameless, not sinless, in Christ until that day. No matter what sin we commit, it may have excruciating consequences, but once you put your faith into Christ, nothing can throw you out of the kingdom of God. You are His forever. So it is not talking about somebody committing suicide in this particular verse. It has nothing to do with it.

As a matter of fact, the word "destroy" could have been translated a little bit better. The King James translates it "defile." That is a

much better translation. Let me show you. The word normally translated as “destroy” is *apollumi*. That is not the word used here. The word that is used here is *phtheiro*. It comes from the word that means to waste away, to pine away, to corrupt. It refers to something that goes from this state to a much worsened state. That is what the idea means, to corrupt. To go from this state to this state which makes you worse off. The word “destroy,” *apollumi*, like I said, is a different word altogether. This word means to corrupt and defile.

### **The Man Who Destroys Is Not a Believer**

Paul says, “If any man destroys the temple of God.” Now who is this man? Let’s make some observations about him. First of all, he cannot be a believer, because 1Cor 3:17 says if you destroy the temple of God, God says he will destroy you. There is no way that the believer is ever going to be destroyed by God. But there is something about the believer that is going to be destroyed. What is it? His fleshly works. That is right. Not the believer, but his works. So we already have an observation here. This cannot be a believer.

### **The Man Who Destroys Is Bent On Corrupting the Church**

Secondly, he must be a person bent on corrupting the church, somebody who is out to get the church, to keep them from walking by faith and to walk after the world and the ways of the world. The verb there is in the present active indicative. Present tense is an ongoing thing. Active voice is of his own volition and then again, the indicative, you had better write this down, this is what these people are doing. The tense of it then is in that area. This is not a one time thing. It is an ongoing bent that somebody has to corrupt, to defile the pure walk of faith that the church is supposed to be living.

This should not surprise us that there are people like that even among us today. It should not surprise us. There are a lot of people who still have not gotten it in their theology of how bad we were before we got saved. Try to convince some people they are sinners and ungodly, etc. “Not me!” Look over in Romans 5:6 and I will show you what every one of us were before God found us. None of us found Him, He found us. It should not surprise us that there are people even among us today who hate the things of God, who are enemies of the walk of faith and would seek to corrupt and defile the people who are His temples on this earth.

Romans 5:6 says, “For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.” “Brother, I was never ungodly. Why I have believed in Jesus from the time I was born.” Have you heard that? “I wasn’t ungodly. We were good people, We were good people.” Yeah, right. No, you were ungodly. That is what you were. That is what I was. That is what all of us were. We were born into Adam. No matter how you covered it up, that is what we were.

Look at Ro 5:8. It tells you even more. “But God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners.” Do you know what that means? Habitual sinners. “Boy, not me. I was a good boy. I helped little old ladies across the street. I was good. I was a good person.” The prophet of the nation of Israel, Isaiah, said, “Take all of our good deeds and stack them up and they are filthy rags in the sight of God.” You see, we don’t understand that sin is anything that proceeds from a person who has not become the dwelling of God on this earth. Sin is sin, whether we want to call it rebellious or whatever. It is still sin. Sinners is what we were.

Then it goes on in Ro 5:10, “For if while we were enemies [Enemy! I wasn’t an enemy of God!] Yes, you were.], we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.”

Now, I want to tell you something. That kind of mindset is a lost person’s mindset. That is what he is. He is ungodly. He is a habitual sinner. And he is an enemy of God. He is an enemy to anything that is of God. Paul has already laid the ground work for us. He says the ungodly think the gospel, the preaching of the cross, is foolish, you see. Romans 1 says professing themselves to become wise, they became fools.

But this is the mindset of the lost. In our day and time there are people who have even joined the church who are lost. And they think because they have joined the church they have joined Jesus. You don’t join Jesus. You have to be born from above. That is entirely different. A lot of people inside the church still have a fleshly mindset. When anything goes wrong, they seek to pull you away from your walk of faith, from the simplicity of trusting God and put you back down on this earth and make you think like the world thinks. They are everywhere, folks. They are inside the church and outside the church. Their very lifestyle seeks to corrupt and defile the people who are the temples of God.

Corinth was absolutely no exception. As a matter of fact, it was the illustration of the day. It was the most wicked city on the face of this earth. All of a sudden you begin to understand the feel of this book. Evidently, some of them had gotten in this church and some of them, enemies of God, were seeking to tear down what these believers wanted to build up. God says, “Buddy, you corrupt my people, you defile my people and I will corrupt and defile you.”

Listen, the word “corrupt” there has the idea of deceiving somebody. Listen to how it is used. Look over in 2 Corinthians 7:2. This word that we are looking at here has the idea of corruption, perhaps by deception. It is not as easily seen as you think it is. 2 Corinthians 7:2 says, “Make room for us in your hearts; we wronged no one [Paul is speaking of his own defense now when he was

among them], we corrupted no one [same word], we took advantage of no one.”

In other words, he is saying, “We taught you the Word of God, pure. What we taught you is God’s Word. We didn’t corrupt. We didn’t deceive you. We didn’t defile you in any way.

Look over in 2 Corinthians 11:3. We find it again, this time connected with the idea of deception. He says in verse 3, “But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.” That term “led astray” is the same word we are looking at. I want you to get the idea here of what it means to corrupt somebody, lead them astray, deceive them.

Look in Revelation 19:2, where it is used again, of the great harlot who is going to seduce the world during that time, that awful time. It says in verse 2, “Because His judgments are true and righteous; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and He has avenged the blood of His bondservants on her.” “Corrupting the earth” is the same word that we are looking at.

So when Paul talks about people who would come in and corrupt or destroy the temple of God, he speaks of nonbelievers who are either inside the church or outside the church, who seek to deceive the people and lead them astray, lead them out of truth and lead them into error. God says, “Any of you who are doing that, I will destroy you the same way.” The word has the meaning of corrupting by the means of deception.

There are lost people, both outside and inside the church, who are doing just that. It may be their false doctrine of permissiveness or their false doctrine of worldliness. They say, “Oh, you can do it. Everybody is doing it.” If it pulls you away from your walk in faith and truth and leads you into error, look out whoever that person is because God says, “You are messing with my people and I am going to deal with you.”

1Cor 3:17 goes on to give us the warning right here. “If any man destroys the temple of God [corrupts it, defiles it], God will destroy him.” The tense here is future active. In other words, they are doing it present tense every day. This is some time in the future. At a point some time in the future, God is going to do the same thing to you. That is what he says.

Now, what is spoken of here needs to be looked at. The word “destroy” is the same word we just looked at, so nothing changes. It is translated “destroy,” but remember, it means to corrupt, defile, to bring to a worsened state. Now let’s make some more observations at this point. Observe here again it is the person, not his works, who is going to be corrupted and defiled.

Secondly, the only passage that helps us with this, I think, is Galatians 6:8 where it uses the same word. Look over there just for a second. Man, when this thing starts coming together for you, you are going to shout because it just paints a picture. Galatians 6:8 says, “For the one who sows to his own flesh [and that means a continual sowing] shall from the flesh reap corruption [that is your word right there. Now hang on to that word], but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life.”

So you have a difference here. You have corruption, and you have eternal life. Those are two distinctly different things. One is the result of this awful sowing of the flesh. The other is the result of sowing of the Spirit. Again, we are not talking about the believer here.

Now, go with me to the third thing. What is this corruption, this punishment that God is going to bring upon the person who continuously seeks to corrupt the temple of God? Alright. We don’t know. I think 1 Corinthians 15:52 gives us an idea. Watch this. We are the temples of God, and we are promised something that the lost people are not promised. “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.” This is when Jesus comes one day for His church and gives us a glorified body. “At the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead [talking about the righteous dead, their bodies] will be raised imperishable.” That means incorruptible. It is exactly the same word except it means incorruptible here. “And we shall be changed.”

In other words, there is going to come a day when God is going to raise us up, these old corruptible bodies that have been buried, if we die before He comes, and give us a glorified body that will clothe our immortal spirit forever. But what about the lost man? The lost man does not have that promise. He is corrupting, corrupting, corrupting, corrupting, and one day when God raises him, he will have no glorified body. He will stand before God with a corruptible body and in that sense of the word, be cast into hell forever and somehow have to suffer that corruption for all of eternity. God is warning them. He says, “All of you who corrupt and destroy and defile the work of My people, My temples on this earth, look out. One day I will corrupt you. You will have not what they have. They will have a resurrection body, but you will not. You will stand unrighteous before Me and live forever, separated from God in hell forever.”

The idea is payday some day. For the believer who is building, there is going to be a payday. If you are going to build after the flesh, it will be consumed. You will be saved, but you are not going to have much left. If you are building according to the Spirit, there will be a great reward. But there is also a payday some day to the person who is out to destroy the buildings, the temple of God, what

God is doing through His people. You know, when God pays you, it is never right away. Have you ever noticed that? To believers we get to enjoy the earnest of His Spirit and we get to enjoy the beauty and the victory of things today. But I am talking about in the sense of reward, that comes later on. That is the mindset.

Talk to a lost person who has really made it well in life. He doesn't really think he needs God. He doesn't live by the Word. He is crafty and sly. Everything he does is underhanded, but he comes to church. He thinks, "What are you talking about, man? I am doing better than I have ever done in my life." That is good, that is real good. Enjoy it while you can, because there is a day coming, folks, and it may not be when you think it is going to be. But you will stand before God one day.

What God is saying to all of us, whether you be a believer building with the right materials or a believer trying to build with the wrong materials, or you may be an unbeliever trying to tear it all down, payday is coming and there is going to be a judgment for all of us. There is integrity in what we are talking about, folks.

## 1 Corinthians 3:18 Beware of Self Deception

When you ask someone how tall he is, he can immediately respond. Do you know why? Because there is a standard by which he can measure himself. But when you ask somebody how beautiful or how handsome they are, that becomes a matter of one's opinion. It is the same way when you ask somebody how wise you are. What man calls wisdom is foolishness to God. A man can deceive himself quickly in this area by thinking himself to be wise.

You know, when you ask someone how tall he is, he can immediately respond. Do you know why? Because there is a standard by which he can measure himself. When I was growing up, my mother used to measure me on the door frame of our kitchen. She had it marked off in feet all the way up to the very top. We would mark how tall I was and write down how old I was and the date when I was measured. So, all the way growing up, I knew exactly how tall I was. There was a standard by which I could be measured.

But when you ask somebody how beautiful or how handsome they are, that becomes a matter of one's opinion. Whose standard are you going to go by? The saying goes, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." Now if somebody asks you how beautiful you are or how handsome you are, that is a matter of your opinion as compared to somebody else's opinion.

It is the same way when you ask somebody how wise you are. You see, wisdom is a quality that cannot be evaluated so quickly and so effectively. What man calls wisdom is foolishness to God. A man can deceive himself quickly in this area by thinking himself to be wise.

Now, get back in the context. The apostle Paul is still addressing the immature church at Corinth who would rather attach themselves to men than attach themselves to Christ. He has already told them that God works through all men, not just preachers, and therefore they should attach themselves to Jesus so that God can work through them, and one day He will test those works by fire.

Then he warns those who would corrupt the church. I think he still has this in mind as we go into our text. After warning those who seek to corrupt the church, to defile it, to bring it to a worsened state, particularly by the means of deception, now he warns them, "Do not deceive yourselves."

Look at 1Cor 3:18: "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become foolish that he may become wise." Now you see that is for any man, Christian or nonChristian. It is a warning. Christians, beware of self deception. Anyone can fall into this trap.

### The Cause of Self Deception

There are three things that I want to show you concerning this self deception. First of all, the cause of this self deception. What causes a person to deceive himself? 1Cor 3:18 reads, "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become foolish that he may become wise." The word for "deceive" is *exapatao*. It comes from *ek*, out of, and *apatao*, to seduce or to deceive. In other words, to lead out of the right way and the truth and to lead into error. Actually, in this sense of the word, to actually walk out of truth and to walk over into error.

It is a present active imperative verb. Present tense means it is a pursuit, not just a onetime thing. A person always seems to be prone to go this way. Active voice means it is by his own volition. Nobody made him do it. He may have been deceived to go that way, but he made his own choice. And now he is headed in that direction. Imperative here means it is a command. Don't do this, in other words. Don't be a person like this. Don't be a person who constantly pursues the wrong way, walking out of truth and walking into error.

Self deception is something that is different than being deceived by someone else. You can be deceived into self deception if you are not careful. Self deception is what you do to yourself. Now, if self deception is being lured out from under truth into error, what is it that is so magnetic and so attractive that would cause believers to go that direction? Well, we know first of all that it is a common thing to all of us. He said, "If any man among you." This could happen to anybody. It is something that every one of us has to deal with.

Secondly, it involves how we think of ourselves. He says, "If any man among you thinks." The word "think" there is a present indicative active dokeo. Here it has the idea of one's personal concept of himself. He is walking around with this mindset of himself. So be careful, there is a mindset involved here. It is the way you think from within concerning yourself.

Think what? "If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age." Here it is. That is the main characteristic of self deception. Thinking you are wise in this age. The word for "age" is the word aion. Sometimes it is translated "world," but that is wrong. World is kosmos. It has something else to say, which we will see in a later verse. In this verse the word is aion, which means there are ages within ages. Each age has specific characteristics about it. It is the way the world thinks, the way they think during this age. All of the characteristics of all of the ages are similar here. All of it has the same basic likeness. It involves the way we think of ourselves as being wise. And when we buy into this mindset, when we start thinking of ourselves the way the world thinks of itself, look out, we have walked out from under truth and we have walked into error.

Paul has already discussed the trap called worldly wisdom that is characteristic to every age. Again, it has to do with the way the world thinks of itself. Look back in 1:19. Let's just make sure we have done our homework here. He has already addressed this. This is the way the world thinks of itself. They proclaim themselves to be wise, Romans says, and therefore they became fools. In 1Cor 1:19 it says, "For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.'" God said, "I will destroy it." I mean, totally annihilate it.

Then he calls it the wisdom of the age in verse 20 of chapter 1. This is the way the world thinks of itself. He calls it the wisdom of the age. "Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" The word for "world" is aion. The wisdom of this age. Has God not made it foolish? So he calls it the wisdom of the age. It is also the same as fleshly wisdom. If you want to know what he is saying here, wise as the world is wise, it is a fleshly wisdom. It is how they think of themselves, not how God thinks of them.

Look in 1 Corinthians 1:26. He says, "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble." So what we see here then is a wisdom of this age, a wisdom of the world, a wisdom of the flesh, a fleshly wisdom. Paul is saying this is deceptive because this is something that they think of themselves, not based on how God thinks of them. Ask them, "Are you wise?" They will tell you in a minute, "Yes, I am wise." Paul says, "Don't fall into that trap."

Paul has been talking about wisdom, teaching and the works that man does. Now, doing these things can lead to a worldly pride. Be careful. The more you learn, in other words, of what you study, all of a sudden you can become wise in your own estimation based on what you think. Or it could be pride of what you have done. God could have enabled you to do great things and used you in powerful ways, but somehow you adopted the world's thinking and you think you are somebody because that has taken place. You may be proud of what you have. God may have blessed you in a very successful manner in the world and you think you did that yourself. You have become proud as the world would view wisdom of this kind. Buying into this kind of wisdom is the epitome of self deception. That is what Paul is trying to help them to understand. It will cost you in your reward one day. It will cost you one day when God tests all of our work by fire. It will not stand, because this is fleshly wisdom.

There are people out there who are trying to corrupt us and defile us. The way they do it is they come across with their way of thinking, and if you buy into it, it is going to be the epitome of that self deception. It was obviously the trap that was set for the Corinthian believers.

Let's just illustrate this for a minute. Maybe you take a Bible study course. All of a sudden you have all of this knowledge in your head. Man, are you ever biblically literate! And you come across as, "I am a smart person. I am a wise person. Why, I have been in a Bible study!" You have fallen into the very trap Paul is warning them against, because you don't know anything unless you are living it. And if you are living it, it is God giving you understanding. You never boast in what you know, you boast in what God has revealed to your heart.

You can easily fall into this trap. You can adopt the world's way of thinking when it comes to wisdom, when it comes to pride. You think you know something as a result of all of that. Perhaps God has used you in something else. Maybe you have been on a mission trip. Maybe you are a pastor. Maybe there is a congregation that has grown large because of your being there. But one day you fall into the trap. And the trap is, from within, you start thinking that you are indispensable. You are the one who built this church. I tell you what, folks, that is rampant in the day that we are living in. They are having conferences all over our country on how you can build a church, how you can organize it. You do, you do this, you do this, you do this and you can have a great congregation.



But it has nothing to do with man's wisdom. It is what God does. God is the one who builds His church. Man cannot build His church. All man can do is attract a crowd. God builds His church. But you can fall into the trap of estimating your wisdom based on what you can see and count and feel rather than how God looks at a matter.

In the first century in Corinth, all you had to do to insult a Greek was to question his wisdom. The Greeks were proud of their wisdom. As a matter of fact, the apostle Paul was perfect to be in the slot that God put him in because he was born as a Greek and he understood that mentality. He had the intelligence to deal with it. But all you had to do to insult them was to question their wisdom. A Greek would rather be poor than stupid. He would rather be a criminal than be known as a fool. The Corinthians were proud of their wisdom.

But look at what the apostle Paul is doing here. Paul is saying, "Hey, don't fall into that trap." He is a Greek. He understands the way they think. He is saying, "The height of self deception is to consider yourself wise in the age in which you live."

Now before we leave this, look in 3:19. He changes a word here. He uses another word for "world" instead of *aion*, which is age. In 1 Corinthians 3:19 he says, "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God." Now the word for "world" here is the word *kosmos*, which is different from *aion*. *Aion* should be translated age and has a different meaning altogether. *Kosmos*, however, has to do with the material things of this world that we live within.

You see, the people of the world, when they are wise according to the world (and that is called foolishness by God), they base their wisdom on that which they can see, that which they can count. In other words, a man is considered to be wise if he has made a lot of money in this world. He thinks himself to be wise if he has done that. The people who are the billionaires laugh and make mockery of the church, but they call themselves wise. They say, "I know I am wise. Look at the kingdom that I have built. You can see it. You can count it. You can read my bank account, you see." How many things have they really done? You see, God is the one who has actually done it. They think they have done these things. They count themselves by how others think of them.

We think wisdom comes by how many degrees one has. Vance Havner said, "I speak with these people who have a D.D. and a Ph.D. and an L.D." He said, "You know, they are just a bunch of fiddledeedees if you ask me." But I tell you what, there are people who are so proud of those degrees. When you walk into their offices, all you see is plaques. It is not wrong to put them on the wall, but some people think they are wise because of that degree. They can see it. They went to school. They paid the money. They passed the course. I am wise according to the world.

God said that kind of wisdom is nothing more than foolishness before God. When a man thinks himself to be wise based on the standard of the material, the standard of what you can see and touch and feel, that man is a foolish man. Paul is warning the church, warning the believer, "Don't fall into this kind of self deception."

I have a friend in a Eastern European country whose church grew very large under persecution. When I met him the next time, I began to sense pride in his life. I began to sense something I didn't sense before. Back under persecution, back when they were sufferings, I sensed humility. I sensed desperation to get hold of God. But then when I met him later, I began to pick up that he has fallen into the trap that you and I can fall into. Success must mean we are wise. No, it does not. That is what Paul is saying.

The lure, the attractiveness out here is that I can look to myself as being wise. The accolades of people can make me think, "Wow, I really know something. I have done something." I tell you what, that is the epitome of self deception. Don't deceive yourself by walking into their trap. Don't start looking to what you know, what you have done and what you have and considering yourself wise because of it. Friend, the world looks at wisdom differently than God looks at it. God calls the world's wisdom foolishness. Well, I guess you could say, the reason we are attracted to it is because our flesh loves it. Our flesh loves it.

Don't you dare think yourself wise in the midst of all that is going on. I tell you what, when you start thinking yourself as the world considers themselves wise, you are literally using the wrong materials to build the building which one day will be judged by fire, and it won't last. It will not stand. So whatever God has done, whatever you have, whatever you know because of God's revealing it by the precious Holy Spirit's power, give God the glory back and say, "I would never have known it had it not been for God." Because if you fall in that trap of worldly wisdom, it will defeat the very purpose for which God has come to live in your life.

### **The Cure for Self Deception**

Secondly, we see the cure for self deception. Maybe you have fallen into that trap. I have fallen into it. All of us are susceptible to it because it is so magnetic, the lure of the way people think rather than what God thinks. In 1Cor 3:18 he says, "Let no man deceive himself. If [hypothetically] any man among you thinks he is wise in this age [evidently somebody fell in this trap: he thinks he is wise], let him become foolish that he may become wise." Look at the phrase, "let him become foolish." The word "become" is an aorist imperative, *ginomai*. It means become, properly translated there. The aorist there has the sense of just do it. Stop talking about it. Make up your mind. You know the truth, now just do it. You become foolish. You do it.

Middle voice, it is middle deponent really. It has the active sense. Make up your own mind. Don't make somebody tell you. You know good and well that this kind of thing is human wisdom and that is foolishness to God. Now you become foolish.

What does "become foolish" mean? Now wait a minute, the context will rule here. The word "foolish" is the word *moros*. We get the word *moron* from it. Isn't that exciting? The context rules. Foolish as the world would view foolishness. In other words, when you step off that pedestal, the world is going to call you a fool. "What do you mean, man? You know you did it. I mean, give God a little bit of the credit, but you know you did it." That is the way the world thinks. But when you become foolish, it means as they see foolish. God will see it as wise, but the world will see it as foolish. You must admit the foolishness of ever thinking you are anything outside of Christ. You have got to come to that place.

I tell you, that is a humbling thing in our life, isn't it? To come to the place that we are nothing outside of Him. We know nothing outside of Him. We have nothing outside of Him. We can do nothing outside of Him. To admit that before others. In 1 Corinthians 4:10 the apostle Paul talks of him and his compadres. He says, "We are fools for Christ's sake." Paul said that. Did you know that Paul was the most intelligent man, other than Jesus, in the whole New Testament? You talk about a man who could draw a crowd. Remember, we looked at this back in chapter 1. At one time they thought he was one of the gods, the particular god who was the voice of all the gods because he had such a speaking ability. When he spoke, they said, "Oh, the gods have come to visit us." Paul was an intelligent man. Paul had that Socratic method of reasoning and he would come in amongst them and wouldn't threaten them right off. He wouldn't tell them where he was going. He would kind of come up alongside of them and say, "This is great." Then he would start asking questions and lead them to come to the conclusion. He would never have to say another word by asking the right questions at the right time. A brilliant man! He could handle any kind of situation. Yet he calls himself a fool for Christ.

You see, he understood something now that he didn't understand before. For years of his life, he thought the message of Christ was foolish. As a matter of fact, to show you how foolish he thought it was, he was out to defeat and kill Christians. He stood there when Stephen was stoned to death. Then he was on his way to Damascus, breathing threats against those he would arrest in Damascus, but he got arrested on the Damascus Road and God met with him and blinded him for three days. After those three days, he was never the same. I mean, here is a man who was wise in his own estimation, a man whose religion had really helped him profit. He had a lot of gain because of it. But now that he is a Christian, now that he has met Christ, he realizes how foolish he really was all of that time. And now he calls himself a fool for Christ's sake.

Turn away from thinking yourself wise in the standards of the world and the flesh. You start doing that by realizing how everything you have is nothing more than a blessing that comes from God. Everything you do is nothing more than what His Spirit living in you energized you to do. Everything that you have, everything you know, everything that you do, all of it comes from Him.

The wisdom of the world and the way it thinks of itself is amazing. "Hey, look what I have done. Look at my stock market receipts. Look at my investments. Look how they have paid off. Hey, man, I am a wise man in this world." And God says, "Baloney! That is foolish."

So, the way the world thinks of itself, the standards by which they come to the opinions that they have formed of themselves, don't fall into that trap. It can happen to you in a moment. It can happen to you when good things happen in your life, but you have adopted from within. Nobody told you this, but you adopted it from within. Wow, I must be wise. You have adopted the very philosophy of the world by saying what you have said. You see, only what God does ever counts in our life. That is what will be rewarded one day when we have our work tested by fire.

### **The Caution for the Self Deceived**

Then third, we have the caution for the self deceived. They need to understand a principle about God, a truth about God that will help them down the road. It says in 1Cor 3:19, "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, 'He is the one who catches the wise in their craftiness'; and again, 'The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless.'"

What in the world is Paul talking about? Well, when one thinks himself to be wise, this has come from within. I want to make sure you understand. A man loves what he is much more than what he has. And if this wisdom is not from God, then all that he thinks he is, is foolishness when put next to God. A man must humble himself and admit what he does not know before he can become wise before God.

Now, the wisdom of this world, according to 1Cor 3:19, is foolishness before God. The word for "before" there is the word *para*. It means in the closest proximity to someone. In other words, when you take all the wisdom of the world and put it over here as close as you can get to God, next to Him and His wisdom, it is absolute foolishness, you see. And therefore, it will not stand the test. What the world thinks of itself and its wisdom is foolishness next to God.

"For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, 'He is the one who catches the wise in their craftiness.'" He quotes out of Job 5:13. Remember Job's life was quite difficult. There is a principle in this that shows you how man's wisdom is

really foolishness when it comes to dealing with God.

The word “catches” is only used here in the New Testament. It is the verb *drassomai*. It is in the present tense. Now, this tells you something about the character of God. The word means that He seizes, He catches, He grasps by the hand, He lays hold of, or you could say, He traps in His net. The verse implies that this seizing, this grabbing hold of, this trapping in His net, catching is part of the character of God because it is present tense. He is always doing this. He is about this all the time.

Now what is he saying here? This is really interesting to me. You see, He sees the wise in their own estimation. He knows who they are and the world's wisdom. And He quickly moves to seize him in His hand to expose him. Now this craftiness here really speaks of a lost person because a lost person is just a crafty person. He may be wise in the world's eyes, but he is underhanded. He will use methods that a Christian would never use in business. He will do whatever he can do to cheat the income tax to get his money. That is the way the world gets their things and that is the way they proclaim themselves to be wise. But God knows that, and God is watching the crafty. He knows what they are doing. It is like a crafty scoundrel or a criminal who is arrested. God arrests him. He grabs him, then exposes him and punishes him accordingly. In other words, God does not allow the world to get away with what they call their worldly wisdom. That is part of his character. He moves quickly to do that. It is crafty reasoning by which the wise put their deceitful wisdom across and rob men's souls of Christ and believers of their reward one day in heaven.

Remember, he said look out for the ones who seek to corrupt My people. We talked about that earlier. How do they do it? These are those crafty people. They can lure you into their trap, oh, folks, in a minute.

I remember one day we were going out witnessing. We drove up in this man's yard. Everybody told me, “You will never get anywhere with this guy.” So I drive up in his driveway, get out of the car, and the guy is outside watering his yard. He sees me and he says, “Wayne Barber!” And I am thinking, “Oh, here we go.” He said, “I have been looking for you. You are just the man I wanted to see.” Oh, no! We walk inside and he was a part of a certain organization. I won't get into all that, he had brochures of what I could have and all this kind of thing. I could be financially free, etc. But I was already financially free.

He started telling me all these things that I could have. I had to finally stop him. I said, “Sir, I want you to know, I have been cut free from all that.” He said, “You don't want any of that stuff?” I said, “No, I don't want it because when you have it, it costs you more than you ever dreamed that you were going to pay for it. You never have it. It owns you.” He looked at me totally perplexed. I said, “As a matter of fact, I came over here to offer you something way beyond that. I came over here to share Jesus Christ with you.” His wife was sitting in the room, and boy, he just turned his whole body away from me. You know how people do when you are talking to them and they don't want to hear you. I mean, he just turned away from me. His wife, though, didn't. She was sitting over there with big tears in her eyes.

I looked at him and I said, “Can I speak to your wife? Is it okay?” And he said, “Sure.” I said, “I sense that you are listening to what I am saying. Would you like to receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior?” She said, “Could I? Right now?” I said, “Can you!” And she got down on her knees and I got down on mine with her on the floor and she began to pray and she broke. You know, folks, if you have never led somebody to Jesus, you have missed one of the greatest experiences of your life. It is not really you leading them to Jesus. It is Jesus using you to draw them.

She began to pray, and I could tell that had tenderized her husband sitting over there. After she finished, I looked over at him and I could see the mistiness in his eyes. I said, “Hey, would you like to receive Christ?” He said, “Man, could I?” And he got down on his knees beside his wife and received the Lord.

I thought that was the most interesting thing in the world. He already had his scheme. He already had his plan. But God was way ahead of me. As we walked in there, God showed him that what he was pursuing wasn't worth anything. It wasn't worth pursuing. But what God could offer him was worth everything in his life.

But I want to warn you, there are people in this world who sound good. They have got a wonderful scheme of how to get you into whatever it is they are trying to lure you into. But if it gets you off track from your simplicity of trusting Christ, from your simplicity of living by faith, you have fallen into the trap that Paul is warning the church of Corinth about. Corinth was famous for this kind of thing. He was warning them, “Look out. They are crafty. They know what they are doing. Be careful. Don't let them lure you into their trap. It is crafty reasoning of the wise in this world.”

The one that people look up to, the ones who are on television who talk about instant success stories. It is the craftiness of these people that lure precious believers out of a faith walk and trusting Christ and obeying Him into that which the world calls wise and God calls foolish. But the fact is, God catches these people in their craftiness, in all of their schemes. He exposes them. By the fact that He catches them like He does and exposes them like He does is the factual evidence that His wisdom completely outranks theirs. And nothing is more convincing than that. God will show you, give Him time. He will show you the futility of what the world says is wise. He will catch them in His net and expose them. And then their punishment will be as a result of what has been exposed in their life.

The verb *drassomai* implies speedy action. He seizes the opportunity. When he sees somebody working in worldly wisdom and craftiness, He seizes the opportunity to immediately move on that person. Normally He will allow them to go ahead and do what they are doing so once they have sinned, He will use that sin and turn it right back against them and expose them and bring them down from their platform they put themselves upon. God's net catches man in his fleshly wisdom.

Paul wants the Corinthians to understand this so that they will realize that these people in Corinth who are trying to lure them into this type of thinking, these people are already caught by God. So why in the world would you want to go that route? You will be caught also. Come back to living and walking by faith. And they will have no excuse before God.

In 1 Corinthians 3:20 he quotes out of Psalms 94:11. Now look at this. He says, "and again, 'The Lord knows the reasonings [that is an interesting word there] of the wise, that they are useless.'" Now, when the world has somebody out there they have built up, they say, "This man, now, he is wise!" God knows the reasonings of the wise that they are useless. God knows the logic. God knows the intelligence man thinks he has. Before man ever does anything, before he even has to move to catch him in His net, God already knows what he is planning to do. God knows how ineffectual it really is.

The word "useless" is the word meaning having no aim, empty of any beneficial result. The ineffectiveness of these wise men is illustrated, I think, so beautifully in the gospels when the Pharisees, by their schemes and their plots and their tricky questions, tried to trap Jesus. Jesus had already trapped them because He knew their schemes. He knew their logic. He knew it was useless and had no end to it. Therefore, He would turn it around. Every time He would turn around they tried to trap Him. The only reason they ever asked Him a question was to trap Him. But Jesus already knew that. Jesus would turn a question back to them and in one or two words make them look stupid before the whole crowd, showing everybody that His wisdom is far beyond the wisdom of what man says is wise. God's wisdom exposes the world's wise men as fools. Paul wants the Corinthians to keep that in mind.

You know what? There may be an application here, I am not sure. I haven't really sat on it long enough, meditated on it long enough, but I think there is an application here. Because I know in my own personal experience, when I have fallen into that trap, God moves quickly to expose me, even if He has to humiliate or embarrass me, to show me the futility of going that way. And I thank Him for doing that. I wonder if it is not an application even of what He is saying right here. Because the wisdom of the world is something God detests. If we are not going to live by faith, God quickly moves to expose those who try to work in their own wisdom.

Well, whether it is found in your own mind – how you think of yourself – or maybe in the teachers you have attached yourselves to, whatever, the world's wisdom is foolishness in God's eyes. It is a trap. Don't be self deceived. Don't allow yourself to think more highly of yourself than you ought to think. Never brag on what you have. Never brag on what you can do. Never brag about what you know because that has nothing to do with eternity. God looks at all of it and says, "You would not know anything if it was not for Me."

Look at Jeremiah 9:23. From time to time, we have brought up this verse. It is such a precious verse. It just shows you the tendencies of man, the wisdom of the world, but again how foolish it really is. Really, Jer 9:24 has to be read with it so we will understand the difference. He says in verse 23, "Thus says the Lord, 'Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches.'" Now, that is what the world does, but he says, "Don't you dare do it. Don't you dare do it. Don't boast of what you know. Don't boast in what you can do. And don't boast in what you have. Don't you dare." But in verse 24 look at what he says. "But let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me."

1Cor 3:21, the first few words say, "So then let no one boast in men." Now remember the context. Why in the world would you attach yourself to a man? If that man is anything it is because God made him that way. You attach yourself to Christ and become a vessel through which Christ can do His work. Remember, don't fall into this trap of thinking you can do anything apart from Him, that you can know anything apart from Him or that you can have anything apart from Him. That kind of wisdom is foolishness. God already has a trap set for you. It is a net that He is going to grab you in and expose that kind of wisdom because His wisdom is far above that which man could ever have.

One of Aesop's Fables tells the story of a lottery that Jupiter held for all the gods. And it happened that when they spun the wheel as to who would win the lottery, it fell upon his daughter, Minerva, and he gave his daughter the prize, which was wisdom. But some of the people who were standing around said, "Hold it, hold it, hold it. How convenient that the wheel fell on your daughter. It was rigged." So Jupiter, to appease the crowd and the doubters, instead of awarding her wisdom, awarded her folly. The myth says, from that time on fools thought of themselves as the wisest among men.

Take that home and chew on it. Because friend, when a person thinks he is wise, he is a fool. When he boasts of anything other than Christ, he is a fool. He is a man who thinks of himself in a way that God does not see him. Don't fall into that trap. That is why we have to live by faith, trusting God minute by minute because we know nothing can do nothing apart from that which He reveals and that which He energizes in our life.

Therefore, the building that we are building will be the right kind and will stand the test of God's judgment one day. One day we will

not be ashamed when we stand before Him. I hope 1 Corinthians is ministering to you like it is to me. Has it ever been a blessing to my life.

## 1 Corinthians 3:18 The Meaning of Being Foolish

In 1 Corinthians 3:18 the apostle Paul says, "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become foolish that he may become wise." What does it mean to become foolish?

In 1 Corinthians 3:18 the apostle Paul says, "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become foolish that he may become wise." What does it mean to become foolish? Well, to show you this, I am going to have to back up and take a running start at chapter 3. You have to stay in the flow of a text at all times. I am committed to that.

When we were in South Africa, we went walking for a half a mile or so one day, and we just couldn't see where we were going. Have you ever done that? We finally got to a high hill and that high hill, that perspective, allowed us to see where we had come from, but it also gave us a full view of where we were headed. We could see in the distance a big waterfall that we were going to see. It was precious.

If you stand on the high hill of 3:1 and look down over the valley to the banks of chapter 4, here is what you would see. Make sure you get the full picture of what is going on here. After one and one half chapters of Paul really bringing the people of Corinth to grips with the fact that they had attached themselves to man and not to God, he shows them the reason why they were doing this in chapter 3. It is very clear. He calls them babies in the nursery who have refused to grow up.

In 1 Corinthians 3:1 he says, "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it." Now, there is no indictment in that. He is just pointing back to a time when he came there. He, Timothy and Silas had led many of them to the Lord. There is a time to be a baby and there is a thirst to being a baby.

The indictment comes in the last phrase of 1Cor 3:2. He says, "Indeed, even now you are not yet able." You see, they were attached to flesh. Babies do that, you know. Babies like to grab something they can see, touch and feel. It is very difficult for a baby, in the spiritual sense, to walk by faith. They would rather cling to a preacher, cling to a church, cling to a denomination, cling to an experience, anything but cling to Jesus. There is just something about being a baby that hasn't allowed for that yet, and they need to grow out of that.

Well, Paul admonishes them. The symptoms of this are in 1Cor 3:3 and 4. He says, "for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you [those are not good words, folks; those two words always go together in scripture], are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?" King James adds "divisions among you."

Then in 1Cor 3:4 he says, "For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not mere men?" You see, the believers who refused to grow by faith are like babies in a nursery. They can be adults.

I learned something in South Africa and Australia. Do you know what a baby pacifier is called over there? In South Africa and Australia they call them dummies. Now that is the funniest thing. They have an expression in Australia that I think is classic. When an adult is acting the wrong way, when they lose their temper, they act like a baby, they just want their way and they whine and gripe and complain and want to have a fit, they call it "spitting the dummy."

Have you ever watched a little baby who is just about ready to blow up and they have a pacifier in their mouth? What is the first thing they do? Pppt, they spit it out and just let it go. And so when adults do that in Australia, they call it "spitting the dummy."

Well, welcome to the church of Corinth. What you need to do is go back to the church of Corinth, hand every one of them a pacifier, stick it in their mouth and tell them to get over in the corner. That is exactly what they were. They refused to get out of the nursery. That was their problem. They would not grow up. They would rather be attached to man than be attached to God.

I told you the story before about little Johnny who went to bed one night, and a little bit later his Mama heard a big noise upstairs. She ran upstairs to find that he had fallen out of bed. She asked him, "Johnny, what happened?" He said, "Mama, I guess I just stayed too close to where I got in." That is the church of Corinth.

Now, I want you to make sure you get a feel of this. He is showing them where their problem is coming from. They had made a conscious choice not to grow in the Word of God. In 1Cor 3:5-9 he tries to show them. He says, "I planted, and Apollos watered." He tries to show them that we are just vessels. That is all we are. Christ hasn't been divided, as he said earlier in chapter 1. He said,

"We are just vessels and God is using us. Take what we have shared with you from Him and let it cause you to grow. But don't attach yourselves to us."

Do you realize that people are still doing that today? You know, preachers who stay at a church a long time, and that preacher dies or resigns or does something else, the church falls apart because people have attached themselves to a preacher. They have attached themselves to the way things are. And the next guy who comes in they crucify, all because they won't come out of the nursery. All of us have to face this kind of thing in our Christian walk.

Paul says, "Don't do that. Don't attach yourself to the vessel. Attach yourself to the One who lives in the vessel." In 1Cor 3:10-11, Paul shows that God enabled him by grace to lay a foundation in their life. He was used to come into their area and preach the gospel. The foundation, of course, is Christ. He says in 1Cor 3:10, "According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

Now, what Paul is telling them is that each person, when they become a believer, becomes a builder. That is very important, by the way. God respects us more than we respect Him. He gives us a will. We have a choice to make, and we choose whether to build of one kind of material or another. He lists those materials in 1Cor 3:12. There are only two kinds; three in each group. Look at 1Cor 3:12: "Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones [that's one group], wood, hay, straw [the other group]." We have a choice of these two materials. Every believer is a builder. We either walk after the flesh or we walk by faith and let God produce the works through us that will stand His test one day when we are rewarded for those works in our life. If we choose to walk by the flesh or after the flesh, we are miserable because the Holy Spirit living in us makes us miserable. If a person is living after the flesh and is not miserable, I question whether he is saved or not. He is building a shack that is going to burn one day.

Paul talks about that test in 1Cor 3:13. There is going to be accountability one day for allowing God to use you, of walking by faith. He says in 1 Corinthians 3:13, "each man's work will become evident [the word is *phaneros*, the light will be turned on] for the day will show it." The word for "show it" is *deloo*. It will give information that we really don't have down here. It is very difficult down here to tell the people who are really walking by faith because some people know the game real well. They play the game well. But when we get up there, when we see Him one day, it will be clearly evident.

1Cor 3:13 goes on to say, "because it is to be revealed [apokalupto means uncovered because it is covered now] with fire." What is going to reveal it? It is going to be fire. Not the light; the light will show clearly what is revealed, but the fire is the test. The verse says, "and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work." The deeds of the flesh, those immature acts that we do that we do not confess or repent of, will be consumed.

By the way, that is a precious teaching in one way. It is not a negative thing. God is out to reward us. This is a judgment not to approve man, but to approve his works. Remember that. He already has you. He already has me. We have been accepted in the beloved. This is not that kind of judgment. This is the judgment for work because God wants to reward His people.

1Cor 3:14 continues, "If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward." This reward is for those who build upon the foundation by faith. That is why Paul says, "Man, don't attach yourself to me. That is flesh. Attach yourself to Christ and walk by faith. Grow up. Throw the pacifier away. Come out of the nursery. Come on, man, let God use you. He wants to use you like He has used us."

1Cor 3:15 clearly shows us that God is not out to get us. I have heard messages on judgment for Christians preached in ways that would just make you cringe. But, folks, I want to show you the heart of God. God really wants to reward us. That is what this judgment is about. "If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire." The fire is going to consume all that is flesh when you stand before God. It is not going to be shown up on a screen to embarrass you. Have you heard that before? It is not going to nail you to the wall. No, it is going to be consumed immediately, gone. He wants to reward what is left. There will be a suffering of loss. There will be some kind of shame there because it suddenly dawns on you what salvation was all about, what you didn't do, what you could have had, that kind of thing. But you are still saved. He says, "but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire."

Now, I preach these things and you think I understand them. But I want to tell you something, I did not understand that phrase. What does "he himself shall be saved, yet as by fire" mean? I was down in Australia and I was preaching in 1 Corinthians 3. God began to show me something about that phrase. What does it mean: "he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire," even though his works are burned up? It hit me like a ton of bricks. Jesus Christ is the foundation, and the fire cannot destroy the foundation. Folks, listen to me. We were saved, not based on our works, we were saved based on His work. And His work will stand His own test one day. That foundation is going to sit there. There may not be one brick left on it and that man will suffer loss, but the fire will not consume the foundation. If you believe you can lose your salvation, wrestle with that verse for a while. You see, the foundation has been laid and no man can un-lay it and the fire cannot consume it. It will stand. So, therefore, we are saved yet so as by fire.

Paul then reminds them that Christ lives in them to do through them what they could not do themselves. How many times have we said this? That is our whole philosophy of ministry. It is being vessels through which God can do His work. No man can do the works of God. God does His works through man. 1Cor 3:16 reads, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" Wherever I go, He lives in me to enable me to do whatever He has commanded me to do. And when I walk by faith, attaching myself to Him in the sense that I am obedient, surrendered to Him, bondservant, slave to Him out of love, trusting His Word, walking by faith, then God works through me those things which will stand the test one day when I see Him.

In 1Cor 3:17 Paul sends a message to anybody who would seek to destroy the temple of God. Now remember, believers are builders, by the context. This person in 1Cor 3:17 has to be an unbeliever because he is a destroyer. It says in 1Cor 3:17, "If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are." The word "destroy" there does not mean destroy as we think of it. It means corrupt, defile. It means to defile with the means of deception. In other words, the world is all around us at all times, trying to pull us out of our walk in the Word and put our minds back on the world, to think like they think. Once you fall into that trap, you have been pulled aside, you have been corrupted, you have been defiled in your walk. God says, you better not mess with My people.

Once Paul has warned whoever it is that seeks to corrupt God's temple in 1 Corinthians 3:17, he turns around and refers to the believer himself. In 1Cor 3:18 he says, "Let no man deceive himself." It is very obvious to me that there had to be false teachers who had gotten into the church at Corinth. I mean, look at all the idolatry that is in Corinth to begin with. Paul has to have it in mind. Over in 2 Corinthians 11:3 he says, "But I am afraid lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your mind should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ." So he already has this in mind. There has got to be somebody there trying to pull them away from their faith walk. Paul says, "Listen, you can't do that. You can't allow that, because the moment you get out of your faith walk, that is going to cost you one day when you stand before God. You are going to be miserable while you are down here. So don't fall into that trap. Don't deceive yourself." The word "deceive" comes from two words, one means "out of," and the other means to seduce, to deceive in the sense of leading out of the right way into error. It is even in a tense that means stop letting yourself do that. How susceptible we are to being led out from truth because we are around people who are smart and the world looks at them who have attained. We hear them talking and start listening to them and forget what the Word of God has to say. We deceive ourselves.

James 1:22 says a very similar thing. He says, "But prove yourselves doers of the Word and not merely hearers who delude themselves." Listen, any time I refuse God's Word in my life I deceive myself. It doesn't matter what it is. Think of the million situations we could all get into in a week's time. Of all the choices that we make, and when we choose not to line up under the authority of God's Word, when we choose not to obey Him, we have conscientiously deceived ourselves.

Now, Paul is opening this up. He said, "Let no man." This could be a lost person or a saved person. I think the emphasis here is more on the saved person because a lost man doesn't make a conscious decision one day apart from the grace of God just to not deceive himself. He is already deceived. I think he is really referring to the believer here. He is saying, "Watch out, watch out. You can slip into that trap so quick." The moment I stop becoming obedient to God's Word is the very moment I have deceived myself, deluded myself, as James says.

Then in 1Cor 3:18 we have the solution. "If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become foolish that he may become wise." There it is right there. Now, whether lost or saved, you have got to become foolish before you can become wise. What does it mean to become foolish? And there are three things I want you to look at. We need to understand this today because there is a richness in this.

### **The technical use of the word "foolish"**

There are three things that I want you to see about becoming foolish. First of all, the technical use of the word "foolish." The word "foolish" in 1Cor 3:18 is the word *moros*. Now what do you think is the English word that we get from that? The word "moron," that is right. One who has no capacity to think or reason and therefore acts senselessly. That is *moros*, that is a moron. Webster says that a moron is "a feeble-minded person, one who has potential mental age of only about 812 years old and is only capable under strict supervision." So in other words, a child; a person who is not able to really think and therefore acts senselessly.

Now there are several words translated "fool" in the New Testament, but there are two prominent words. One of them is the word we are dealing with here, and another one is found in Matthew 5. Seeing the comparison may help you to understand the meaning of the word. Look in Matthew 5:22. Of course, this is the Beatitudes, and Jesus is speaking here.

In Mt 5:22 you see both of these words used and the contrast between the meanings helps you understand what he is dealing with here. He says, "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whosoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be guilty before the supreme court." Now that is one of the words for fool, *raca*. But then he says, "And whosoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell." Now he uses the second one, *moros*. Now wait a

minute. One is guilty before the court and the other one goes to hell because of what he did.

Do you see the seriousness of the two things? Raca means to call somebody or label them as stupid, which means they probably know better but they did it anyway. I don't do dumb things, I do stupid things. I know better, but I do it anyway at times. That is just stupid. I have enough sense to know better, but I just act stupidly.

However, moros is different. It gives the idea of attacking a person's intelligence. It says he doesn't have enough sense to know. He doesn't have the understanding; therefore whatever he does is senseless. That is moros. Do you see the difference? One is stupid. He knew better, and he could think it through. But the other one doesn't have the ability, he just doesn't have the understanding.

To better understand it, there is a synonym for the word moros that helps us. It is the Greek word aphron. A means "without." The other part of the word is phren. It doesn't mean "mind" like we think of mind, but that is the word. So aphron means without understanding. It is synonym for the word moros. So a person who is a fool, in a technical sense of the word, means they don't have the mental capacity. Therefore, whatever they do, they cannot act intelligibly. Whatever they do is absolutely senseless. A fool is moros. That is the person. What he does is moria, the word for foolishness. That is the word, by the way, that we are looking at over and over again in 1 Corinthians 1, 2 and 3. Moria are the senseless acts of a person who doesn't know better, a person who doesn't have the ability even to understand.

So again, one more time, moros is a person who doesn't have that sense or intelligence to understand, and moria is what he does. They are the senseless, foolish acts that he does. That's the technical use of the word.

But now let's look at the textual use of the word. When you take a word like that out of society and put it into a spiritual vocabulary, it changes a little bit. We need to understand that. Paul brings this word into 1 Corinthians and adds it to the Christians' or the believers' spiritual vocabulary. We have seen the word very frequently. The first way he uses it in the text, in the scripture, is to describe the sin sick world and the way that they view God. Now that is very important. They think Jesus coming to die on the cross is an act of senselessness and foolishness. They actually attribute to God the fact that He is foolish or we would say, a fool. That is a tough estimation of God, isn't it? But that is the way the world thinks. They look at the gospel and laugh at it. They profess themselves as gods and therefore, they think God is the foolish one and what He did through the gospel is absolutely senseless. They believe that God is not capable of understanding their problems and their circumstances. They never turn to Him. They never turn to His Word.

Go back to 1:18 and we will see the word moria. It tells you exactly what I just said. The first phrase there is very telling. It says, "For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness." Now, that is the word moria. In other words, "Oh, who needs the cross?" You see, that is foolish. "I am not lost." Have you ever talked to somebody who is lost and didn't know they were lost? You are trying to tell them what Jesus did for them on the cross and they look at you like you are two bricks shy of a full load. They can't understand what you are talking about. "What do you mean, lost? I am not lost." Well, you are dead in your sins. "I am alive, man." They can't understand. They won't understand. They see the whole thing as foolishness, an act, a senseless act from a person who couldn't understand to begin with. That is the way they see it.

Remember, back in Romans 1:22, it shows you that when they think this way, they are professing themselves to be wise, but they are showing themselves to be that which they are claiming God to be. In other words, they are showing themselves to be fools. They are showing themselves with no mental capacity of understanding God, therefore, everything that God does is senseless in their eyes. They are showing themselves to be fools. It says in Romans 1:22, "Professing to be wise, they became fools." And the word "fools" there is a form of the word that we are looking at.

You see, the world says they don't need God, they don't want God. How many of you know somebody like that right now? Let me ask you even a more personal question. How many of you are kin to somebody like that? Those are the tougher ones, aren't it? You are around them and you try to tell them of the joy of Jesus, what Jesus can do for their life, and they just look at you. I mean, seriously, they have no capacity to understand. They think everything you said is absolute foolishness, which means they think God is a fool because they are their own god. They are not about to listen to God. They don't care about His Word. It is senseless and foolishness to them. They are their own god.

Look in 1Cor 1:18 again and finish the verse: "For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God." The very thing they think comes from a senseless God is the thing that saves you and me, you see.

Well, go down to 1Cor 1:21. He continues the thought. He says, "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well pleased through the foolishness [now be careful; he has already told you what the foolishness is, that act of God which the world thinks is foolish; it is not foolish, but the world thinks it is] of the message preached to save those who believe." This message that the world thinks is an act of senselessness, of an incompetent God, is the very message that the apostle Paul preached.



Look at 1Cor 1:23. The same word is used there. He says, “but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness.” They say, “What do you mean? I am not lost. I have got everything.” The Greeks especially were those who could argue about anything. They thought they had it all figured out anyway. Who needs God? That is why Paul one day, when he was in Athens, saw that sign that said “To the Unknown God,” and he walked up there and said, “Let me tell you who He is. I know Him personally. You guys think that it is senseless and foolish, but let me tell you who He is and what He did for you and perhaps He can save you while we are here.”

Well, why do they think it is foolish? This is a question that comes to my mind. Why does the world look at the gospel, look at what Christ did for us on the cross and think it is foolish? Look in 2:14. We studied this but I want to make sure you are following the word with me all the way through. I have taken the word *moria* and just followed it through. In 1 Corinthians 2:14, it tells you exactly why they think it is foolish. It says, “But a natural man [*psuchikos*. That is different than *sarkikos*. I think, as I see it used in scripture, it refers to a lost man] does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”

So the first way that Paul uses the word *moria* is the way the lost people see the gospel. They see it as foolishness. They see God as not caring about them or understanding them. As a matter of fact, they don't even believe in Him. They are their own gods. So whatever He does is senseless and lacks intelligence.

It is interesting to me in this whole line of thinking, in John 1:1 it says, “In the beginning was the word [*logos*, which means the divine intelligence], and the word was with God and the word was God.” Verse 14 says, “And the word became flesh.” God brought His wisdom and intelligence down here to man and man looks at it and calls it foolishness. That is exactly the lost state of mankind.

### **The textual use of the word “foolish”**

But the second way Paul uses it is in 3:18. He uses it a different way. He even tells those who want to become wise that they have to become foolish. You have got to understand this. “Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become foolish that he may become wise.” Now, as we have studied, the moron in English terms is a little child. What is he saying? I think he is talking more to the church than he is to the lost people, because they don't make that conscious decision. If you are believer and want to become wise, you become like a child, like a moron who knows nothing. That is what he is saying.

In other words, when I come before God, I say, “God, I am teachable. God, I don't know it all.” What happens to preachers and what happens to teachers and anybody who is in the Word a lot? You come to think that you have a grasp on everything, and you become unteachable, and you can't listen to anybody because you already know it. That is the problem. What he is saying is, “If you want to become wise, you must become foolish. You come to God as a child.” You come to God and say, “Oh, God, I don't know, but God, I want you to renew my mind and teach me so that I can know.”

Roy Hessein, who is with the Lord now, called me one time when he was going to come to the church for a meeting. He said, “Brother Wayne, I can't wait to be with you.” I said, “Roy, what are you going to preach on?” Brother Roy said, “Oh, Wayne, will you pray for me? I am so empty. Would you pray for me that God would just fill me so that we can all feast on the Word that He has for us?” That is a teachable man. That man said that when he was 80 years old.

Folks, listen to me. Some people think the way the world thinks. “I have my degrees, therefore, I know.” No, no. There are no degrees in this thing. You always come before God that way. That is the way we approach Him. We take our opinions and lay them down at the cross and say, “God, I want to become foolish so that You through Your Word can make me wise.” Wisdom, true wisdom, is that which comes from God, not what comes from man.

Proverbs 1:7 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” Fools despise wisdom and instruction. The word for “fear” there has the idea of awesome respect. You know how we, as believers, show respect to God, that we truly are coming as children, foolish, knowing nothing, is when we get into His Word, bow down before Him and say, “God, would you speak your Word to my heart and I am willing to obey it.” We hold Him up by holding His Word up.

Jesus said in John 14, “If you love me, you will keep My Word.” That is the way we become foolish. We never think we have arrived. We can listen to other people as long as it is the Word of God and as long as the Word of God is being spoken. We say, “God, make me wise. I come to you becoming foolish. I come to You as a child. You teach me. Make me teachable.”

The older I get the more I see the wisdom in this. I tell you why: because of my stupid failures and sins in my life. Go down that road for a few times and after a while, it is such a dead-end street. You come before God and say, “God, what do I really know? Will You make me wise? Will you speak to me through Your Word? Will you renew my mind?” You don't come to Him as some authority, giving your opinion to God and asking Him to bless it. You are willing to detach yourself from denominational thinking and from whatever other bias you have and attach yourself to Him and to His Word and come as a child and say, “God, just speak to me. I

want to be a learner. I want to be teachable.” God can make that person wise.

You see, that is what God says. That is the only way we are going to be the vessel through which God can do His work is if we are willing to become foolish that we might become wise. Our problems begin when we walk away from what God's Word says.

That is what Paul is saying. Attach yourself to His Word. Attach yourself to Christ. Stop attaching yourselves to people who corrupt and defile your whole mindset and shut down your reward one day when you stand before God. We have to be so careful, folks, walking away from the Word of God. There is a relativism that has moved into our world. It has not moved in. It has been there for a while, but it is manifesting itself. It is all over Europe, Africa, Australia and definitely in America.

Well, just let me ask you a question. Number one, are you willing to pray for the preacher so that he can get it right if he is wrong? And number two, are you willing to give up that experience or whatever else you are hanging on to and be willing to listen to what the Word of God has to say? If you are, God can make you wise and use you as a vessel through which He can do His work. Otherwise, it is nothing more than pure religious flesh. That is all there is to it. And folks, I put myself right in the same category. I open myself as much as I possibly can to you. If I am wrong, show me where I am wrong. But bring the Word with you. And if I am wrong, I will correct it. But the problem with most people is, they sit, they soak, they listen and they say, “Well, that really didn't relate to me today,” and they go right on living their life as if they are the wise ones and don't even need God. And they are saying by doing that, “God, you are a fool. I am the one who is wise. I don't need your Word. I can do it myself.”

That is what Paul is talking about. The way you become wise is to become a fool. He says you are acting just like the world when you are not willing to receive truth. When our lifestyle begins to develop this way, we begin to produce the right materials for the building one day which will be tested by fire.

Think of the people you counsel with. I counsel, all of us counsel. Do you know what I am really doing? I am lifting up the Word of God above anything that is on this earth. But think about the people that you bring in and counsel. You say, “This is what God says.” They get up and storm out of the room. That is exactly what they are saying. “I want to be a fool and I want to show myself to be a fool. I am wiser than God. I don't need You.” That is exactly what they are saying. Now folks, I tell you what, that gets in the area of stupidity. But what God is saying is, “Become a child, become a child.” Just let God's Word do its work in your heart.

Well, the technical meaning, the textual meaning. He uses it of lost people and how they see the gospel. They see it as foolishness. But it also uses it of people who want to become wise, become a fool, become foolish. Later on in chapter 4, Paul says we are fools for Christ's sake. We are open to Him. We are like children. We are obeying Him. We let His Word do its work in our heart and in our life.

### **The tragic meaning of the word “foolish”**

Well, the third thing is the tragic meaning of the word “foolish.” When you use the word “foolish” or “fool” in regards to lost people, that is tragic because by professing themselves to become wise, they become fools. But I think it is more tragic when you use it in reference, not in the way Paul is using it, to a Christian who will not allow God's Word to reign and rule in his heart, will not make himself a child where God can teach him and make him wise. This is the church of Corinth, folks, this is the church of Corinth. Let me show you how it shows up in the church, in your lifestyle. If these problems exist today, I guarantee you it is because somebody didn't pay attention to what the Word of God had to say. This is in Corinth.

There was gross sin of immorality in their midst. As a matter of fact, Paul said it is even worse than the pagans. There was the sin of believers taking other believers before the unbelieving world in court and suing each other. That was a sin that Paul dealt with. There was the problem of marriage breakups and difficulties. There was the problem of disorderly and disrespectful conduct in church meetings. They had disorder in the services, problems with the Lord's Supper. They made a feast out of it instead of remembering what it meant. There was the problem of eating meat sacrificed to idols. There was the confusion of the women's role in the church. There were heresies about the afterlife. It went on and on and on. Why? Because this Word did not hold supreme authority in their life. They stayed in the nursery. They attached themselves to teachers and never listened to what they said. They didn't allow God to use them as instruments of growth in their life. They just attached themselves to them and excluded others who didn't agree with them. They didn't allow God's Word to change their life. So as a result, all these things began to rise up in their midst.

We are to become foolish. Come before God and say, “God, if you don't teach me, I will not be taught. I am coming to your Word with an open heart and an open mind. God, the Holy Spirit, teach me, change me, transform me, renew me.” That is the way you approach God. He makes that person wise and useable in the kingdom of God.

Ben is a precious friend of mine. He was at our church once and spoke on a Sunday night. Afterwards I said, “Ben, let's go get something to eat. I am starved to death.” He said, “I can't, Wayne. We honor the Sabbath and we can't go to restaurants on the Sabbath.” I said, “Ben, here is what we are going to do. We are going to go eat. That is my hobby. I do that well.” I said, “Ben, we are going to eat and you are going to sit there and talk to us and do whatever else you are going to do. Whatever you can't do, don't do

it, but we are going to eat. When I finish eating, I am going to put your meal in one of those little containers and you can take it back to your motel room and at 12:01 in the morning, you can have a feast. How's that?" He said, "Well, I guess so."

We went over to this restaurant and I ordered a big meal. I was starving to death. It was one of those days I hadn't eaten all day and I was just starving. I had that meal sitting there and Ben was sitting there looking at that, looking around the table. Ben said, "I tell you what, I want to order. I can get forgiveness." So he went ahead and ordered. He is a dear brother of mine.

Well, when we got to South Africa we went down and did a little trout fishing. Ben was talking to me and said, "You know, Wayne. You don't know the impact that had on my life. I was taught this and taught this and taught this. But after that day, I began to go back to the Word and began to realize we don't live under fear. We live in freedom under the grace of God. And when you are obeying Christ, love is the fruit of that. When love is produced, there is no law against it. The law is being obeyed because you are obeying the One who gave it." He said, "I got up in my church in the particular denomination that feels exactly opposite and I apologized to my church for ever preaching it that way. I preached the message of being under grace, not under law."

Now, folks, what did he do? He became foolish and God made him wise. How did he become foolish? He cut the strings of what man had taught him and let God's Word renew and transform his life. That is what Paul is saying. Folks, the problems we have in church we will have until Jesus comes back. Look at the New Testament. Every church you deal with has problems, but they always come from people who are not willing to be taught. They are going to do their thing and you are not going to tell anything. That is where problems are developed.

That is the church of Corinth. Welcome to the church of Corinth. My prayer is, folks, that we will all be teachable. That is why I pray when I get up to speak, "God, as I seek to teach, teach me. If anybody needs to learn, I need to learn." Let's just make sure it is "Thus saith the Word of God." That is the key. There is no private interpretation of scripture. Be teachable. I will be. I ask you to be so we can become wise.

## **1 Corinthians 3:21-All Things Belong to You**

There are two things I want you to see. I want you to think clearly now as to what Paul is trying to say. Why in the world would you run around attaching yourself to man's ways and wisdom when you can live attached to Jesus Christ Himself? We belong to Him and all things belong to us.

I want to discuss the phrase that is found in 1Cor 3:21, "All Things Belong to You." Now we know that we are dealing with the church there in Corinth which was mancentered. It was not Godcentered. They were babies who refused to grow up. You may say, "Well, you are just being smart calling them babies." No, that is what Paul called them in 3:2. He said, "You were babies. You were at the time in your life when you were just babes in Christ." But he went on to say, "You are still babes in Christ." That is not my terminology, that is Paul's terminology.

But think about it, the moment you don't walk by faith, you are still in the nursery. You walk right back into it. I mean, you should just carry a little sign around and say, "I am in the nursery. Don't bother me." Churches are filled with people who won't grow up.

Well, if it is not crystal clear in your mind by now, following the context as closely as we can, that Paul is saying not only don't attach yourself to man, but don't ever boast in man, it should be in 1Cor 3:21, because that is exactly what he says. He says, "So then," connecting all that he has said thus far. He says in 1Cor 3:21, "So then let no one boast in men." Now that word "boasting" has appeared several times in many of the studies we have done and also in Corinthians. The word "boast," *kauchaomai*, is the word that most people think comes from the word "neck." When you think of somebody boasting, you think of them sticking that neck out. I can just see those Corinthians walking around saying, "I am of Paul." And another one walks around saying, "I am of Apollos." And the other one says, "I am of Cephas." They have that neck stuck out. He says, "Let no man boast in men." The point of this is that boasting in men is in an absolute sense.

Now you have to understand this. Sometimes you think it is wrong to boast about your children. No, that is not what he is saying. I mean, come on, if my son hits a home run, you are going to hear about it. I am going to write about it in the newspaper. That is not what Paul is saying. When he says "don't boast in men," he is saying it in the absolute sense. In other words, don't have a mindset that trusts men, that believes in what men have to say. Don't live that way, you see. That is the whole point that he has been bringing out. Don't look at the merits of man. Don't put any faith in the wisdom of man. Put your faith into God. Put your faith in His merit and His worth and His Word. A believer who won't attach themselves to Christ is like that little baby. He has to attach himself to what he can see, touch and feel. If he won't attach himself to Christ, he is the epitome of a person who boasts in man. I don't know why we can't understand that.

Another term for that would be humanism. We drag it right into our Christian walk. If we are not under the Word of God, then we are being affected and infected by the way man thinks and what man does. Churches all over this country are built on that premise. So was Corinth. That is what he is trying to say. Christ is the builder of the church. Attach yourself to Him. He said, "Man, listen, I was your first pastor. Apollos was your second pastor. Cephas, or Simon Peter, is the unsung leader of all the Christians. But man, listen to me, don't you ever hook yourself to us. Jesus is the one who builds the church." Jesus said, "I will build my own church." That is why you never ever attach yourself to the ways of man. You attach yourself to the ways of God.

Paul says back in 1:12 every one of them is affected. A man said years ago about the church of Jesus Christ in America today, "The Holy Spirit could leave and nobody would ever miss Him, because they don't need Him to begin with."

Miss Bertha Smith died at 100 years old. If you ever knew anything about Miss Bertha Smith, I mean, she was a saint. She came out of the Shantung Revival in China. Miss Bertha Smith said many pastors came to know Christ at her conferences she would be doing over in the country. They would come to listen, and the teaching on sin and the teaching on the cross was so powerful that preachers came forward and actually got saved. You see, in America for some reason or another, you don't have to be saved anymore to be a pastor. Just be able to be a good manager, be a good administrator, be a good personal type of person. As long as you can stroke the people and keep them pacified, you can stay in your office.

Paul says that is not what it is talking about here in the book of 1 Corinthians. That is not the way the church is built. You don't build a church to depend upon staff. You don't build a church to depend on a preacher. You build a church like God built it, to depend upon Christ and to depend upon His Word. Even when we make mistakes, we come back to this principle because we want to stay attached to Him, not attached to anything of man.

Well, it is a stern warning to the Corinthian church and to all of us. Let no man boast, let no one boast in man. They had already fallen into that trap. I pray we will never fall into that trap.

The basis of him telling them this is found in the next several verses here. Now, it is kind of like you ask a guy, "Why do you want a cow when you can have the farm?" I mean, why do you want to attach yourself to man when you can attach yourself to the creator of all mankind? I mean, hey, folks, which one do you want? Paul is limited. You will never find a man who has it all together. I don't care who he is. That is the fallacy of attaching yourself to men. But I want to tell you something, Jesus has it all together. You can attach yourself to Him and you can have it all. This is the whole point of what he is saying. Look at what he says in 1Cor 3:v21: "So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you [now watch this] whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God."

There are two things I want you to see. I want you to think clearly now as to what Paul is trying to say. Why in the world would you run around attaching yourself to man's ways and wisdom when you can live attached to Jesus Christ Himself? We belong to Him and all things belong to us.

### **Why do we have all things?**

The first thing we have got to look at is we must look at why we have all things. I mean, that is kind of an interesting point. Why do we have all things? What makes that possible? I mean, all of a sudden here are these people who are babies in the nursery attaching themselves to men. Paul says, "What are you doing that for? All things belong to you." I guarantee you that was a revelation. Why is it that all things belong to us? You really can't understand it from 1Cor 3:21. You have got to jump to 1Cor 3:23. In fact, the last phrase says, "And you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God." That is the phrase, Christ belongs to God. Now the literal Greek there does not have the verb "belongs to." In the Greek it says, "And Christ, God's."

It is interesting here that the definite article is not used there, which describes the Godhead. So the term, "belongs to" God is implied, even though it is not in there. Christ, God's. He belongs to God, the Godhead. Christ is God. He belongs to the Godhead. He is not referring to rank. He is referring to possession. In other words, He is God. He is possessed by the Godhead. You take Christ out of the Godhead and you don't have a Godhead anymore. He is God, very God. It is one God in three persons. He belongs to the Godhead. It is who Christ is that makes all of this possible, not who Paul is, not who Apollos is, not who Cephas is, but who Christ is. That is what makes the whole thing open up.

In John 1:1 it says, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." The word for "word" there is divine intelligence. In verse 14 of John 1 it says, "And the word became flesh." Christ has always been. He has always been the Son of God. He came to this earth.

(Now, when He came, His name was Jesus upon this earth. He says, "You shall call His name Jesus," because that is what God said. If you ever relegate just the word "Jesus" to Him, you have His earthly life here. But when you use the term "Christ," that is the term He has always had, the anointed One, for He was the one before the foundation of the world who stood in the portals of heaven ready to come and die for our sins. And when Christ came into the world they knew Him as Jesus, but when He went to the cross

and they crucified Him and He resurrected the third day, you watch through the epistles, they turn that around. Instead of Jesus Christ, it is Christ Jesus, pointing to who He is, for all times, to His eternal essence as being God.)

Now, this a very important fact. We would have nothing were it not for the fact that Christ belongs to God. He is a part of the Godhead. He is God. Now we can begin to understand why all things belong to us. It makes all the rest of 1Cor 3:21-23 possible.

The second thing we need to realize here in 1Cor 3:23, not only does Christ belong to God, but also he says, you belong to Christ. It is the same basic phrase there. It is just referring now to us. We belong to Him as He belongs to the Father. That is what salvation is all about. You see, I receive the Lord Jesus Christ, with His Spirit wooing and drawing me to Him, for no man comes to Jesus except the Father draw him. When I get under conviction and God reveals to me that I am a sinner through His Word, which is that seed which must fall into human hearts that contains the gospel, the good news of Christ, when I bow down and in repentance and faith receive the Lord Jesus into my heart, then I become a believer. Now I belong to Him.

Paul refers to that in 1 Corinthians 15. He goes back and shows them the message that he preached to them and what it was they believed. He refers then to their [[salvation]] experience. I think it is critical sometimes just to slow down on and make sure we understand what it means to be a believer. Well, this is what you must believe in 1Cor 15:1. "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel [the good news] which I preached to you, which also you received [he is talking to believers now that he had a great part in] in which also you stand." Now, look at verse 3, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received." In other words, I am just a mouthpiece. It came to me, and I gave it to you. "That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures [Christ, now notice the term], and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."

Since Christ is the possession of God, He is God, therefore, that makes it possible for Him to bring God to me. That is what He did by coming down to this earth. By drawing me to God and when I receive Him, then I become a part of Him and I belong to Him. Now, the literal there is, "you are Christ's." In other words, you are possessed by Christ.

Look in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 just to make sure we understand that we are possessed by Christ. We are His. He belongs to God. We belong to Christ. He says, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?" You are not your own. That is very important. 1Cor 6:20 continues, "For you have been bought with a price," bought and paid for, "therefore glorify God in your body." What was the price He paid so that we might belong to Him?

Look over in Acts 20:28. It is just as clear as a bell. You see, grace to us is free, but to God it is very expensive. Here is the price that was paid for you and me so that we might belong to Christ. He belongs to God. That is what makes it all possible. He is God. God coming to this earth to become a man for us and to go to the cross and pay our sin debt. In Acts 20:28 it says, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock [he is talking to the Ephesian elders there on the isle of Miletus] among whom the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood," not the blood of bulls and goats. Hebrews says He was sacrificed once. His blood was shed once and it was sufficient. It wasn't just human blood; it wasn't just divine blood; it was divinely human blood that was shed for us upon the cross and for that reason, we have been purchased lock, stock and barrel. When you receive Jesus, you instantly belong to Him. He belongs to God. We belong to Him. We are attached to Him at [[salvation]]. We belong to Him.

Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians, attaching yourself to Him. We are already attached to Him. However, he uses the analogy of baptism and says, "Were you baptized in the name of Paul? I think not." What he is talking about is, when you are baptized in the name of somebody? It is a statement of attachment. You see, when we are saved, God attaches us to Him, but when we are baptized, we make a public statement of choice. We are attaching ourselves to Him now. We are living that way. That is why Paul said, "What are you doing attaching yourself to me?" So when you are saved, God attaches us to Himself. He is in us.

Look in 6:19 again. He is in us. Now make sure you understand how much this is all a part of His possession. He is in us. First Corinthians 6:19 reads, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?"

Not only is He in us, but secondly, we are in Him. He is in us, but we are in Him. Why do we belong to God? He purchased us with His own blood and when you receive Him, He comes to live in you in the person of His Spirit but He also baptizes us into His body. We are in Him. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 he says, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." So we were baptized into one body.

Look over in 12:27. "Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it." Paul has the same exact idea in Ephesians. Look over in Ephesians 1:22-23. It is just good to mark these things. But there are many other scriptures. Oh, there are so many more that I am not sharing with you, but I just want to get across the understanding why it is we belong to God. We know that Christ belongs to God; He is God. That made it possible for me to belong to Christ. It is a beautiful picture here. Ephesians 1:22 says, "And He put all things in subjection under His feet, [Christ's] and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body." We are

members of that body, just like my arms are attached to my body and my legs are attached to my body, my feet are attached to my body. He attaches us to Him. He is in us, but we are in Him. We are part of His body. That is what the church is called on earth.

Look in Romans 12. Right before he begins to show the diversity of gifts there in the body, look at what he says. Romans 12:5 says, "So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another." If I had a big, clear bowl right now, and I filled it with dye and I took a white cloth and immersed it into the dye, what immediately happens? The dye is immersed into the cloth. So the cloth is in the dye, but the dye is in the cloth. You see, that is the whole picture here. Now that the cloth has been baptized into the dye, submerged in the dye, it has taken upon itself the properties of the dye and the dye and the cloth belong to one another. You can't separate them. Especially if it is the right kind of dye, you can't separate them.

That is how we belong to Him, purchased by His own blood. When we receive Him, we are baptized into His body with or by the means of the Holy Spirit of God, but also His Spirit comes to live in us. Therefore, we belong to Him. He is in us, we are in Him.

Now there are critical points to understand why all things can belong to us. You have got to know that. You have got to understand Christ's relationship to the Godhead. He is God, the second person of the Godhead. He belongs to the Godhead. You can't take Him apart from the Godhead, you won't have a Godhead. But as Christ belonged to God, that made it possible for Him to bring God to us. He came down to man, went to the cross, paid our sin debt, and now He draws us to God. He is the one who brings us to God. So, we belong to Christ. Some people think that you can separate that. Well friend, as I understand it, you can no more separate a believer from Christ than you could Christ from the Godhead because the same terminology is used there. Just as much as He belongs to God, we belong to Him.

By the way, sometimes you ought to take a red pencil or something and every time we hit a verse like this, mark it in your scriptures. You will find hundreds of verses on the assurance of your eternal security in Jesus Christ. We belong to Him, not by any work that we have done, but by the work that He did for us on the cross and He now is the foundation in our life. Everything hinges on the fact of Christ being God.

### **What do we have in and because of him?**

Secondly, now that we understand why all things now can belong to us, we also want to see what we have in and because of Him. Now, here is Paul's argument. "What in the world can I offer to you when you compare it to the fact that you belong to Christ and all things belong to you?" I go back to what I said a while ago. Why do you want a cow? Why don't you want the whole farm? I mean, come on, man. Why are you attaching yourself to a part of it? Why don't you attach yourself to the One who attaches you to Himself? You belong to Him, therefore, all things can belong to you. This is what you are missing when you don't walk by faith. This is what happens in your life.

Well, 1Cor 3:21 says, "For all things belong to you." Now, it would help right now before we go any further to realize what Christ possesses, because if you see what He possesses, then you can begin to understand why we can possess those things. Alright?

Look over in Colossians 1:16. This is who He is. He is God. What belongs to Him? Colossians 1:16-17 tells us two different things about Him. First of all, He is the creator of all things. In verse 16 we read, "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities." That would be a great verse to put on your refrigerator, when you read the newspaper or hear the news. What belongs to Christ? He says, "All things have been created by Him and for Him."

Christ is the creator of all things. But wait a minute, it doesn't stop there. Not only is He the creator of all things, but He obviously is the possessor of all things. Not only that, He is the sustainer of all things. Look in Col 1:17. Why is this world still hanging together? I hear people all the time say, "I can't understand why this world even hangs on." I can tell you why, because all things consist in Him. That's why. The moment He turns loose of it, friend, you will know that and there is going to be a day that He is still in control but it is going to be very difficult here. Verse 17 says, "And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." Now, let's see. All things were created by Him, for Him, He sustains all things. That means He possesses all things. That means He controls all things.

I think I am going to make me a deduction. I think we will put this together here. If all things belong to Him and were created by Him and are sustained by Him, and I belong to Him, now I can see why all things belong to me in Him. That is the key, in Him. In other words, in Him now I become an heir to all that He has. You see, we are joint heirs. Joint heirs is different than a coheir. There are eight children in my wife's family and if they were to get an inheritance, coheir means that she would have one eighth of that inheritance. However, a joint heir means that you don't get one eighth. Wouldn't it be terrible if we were coheirs with Christ? Say there are 30 million Christians on earth. I don't know if there are that many of not, but let's just say there are. A person gets saved and says, "I am real excited I have one thirty millionth of Him." Of course, to me that would be enough for you to shout all the way through glory. But that is not the point. A joint heir shares in all that He has.

So how can all things belong to me? In Him; because He belongs to God and I belong to Him and He created it all and sustains it all,

so if it all belongs to Him, then in Him and I am a joint heir, it all belongs to me. Now, why in the world would you want to attach yourself to man? Are you kidding me? Let's go to the source, the one who is God, the one who possesses all things.

The sovereignty over all things was given to man when he was created on this earth. Go back to Genesis 1:26. I am wondering sometimes if we have ever studied this, or if you have ever studied this and you have come to understand what was given to man in creation. I am not so sure sometimes we realize the significance of it. In Genesis 1:26 let's just look and see what God says about creating man. There was a counsel in the Godhead and the decision to make man and it says, "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'"

Is that dominion or what? Expression of His character, an exhibit of His power. Maybe you don't realize that man lost every bit of that when he sinned. But it is reclaimed, not in us, but in the Godman. And the only way you could ever say all things belong to you is when you say I belong to God. It is in Him that these things begin to work themselves out. You see, it wasn't given back to man, it was given back to the Godman. And when you are saved, you are taking out of Adam and he lost it all, and put into Christ who has it all. And because He owns it, all things belong to us. It is in Christ, the Godman, that it is restored.

The phrase "all things are yours" actually is "all things is yours." Now you say, "That is terrible grammar, Wayne. You can't do that. That can't be the phrase." But in the Greek, as I understand it, when the subject is in the neuter plural, the singular can be used with it. Now this adds to the thought tremendously. All things is, are, ours but stop thinking of "this, this and this" and think of the whole all together. The whole is ours. That includes everything we have in our Christian walk. All that belongs to Christ now belongs to us in Him.

Before we take off on a treasure hunt to see what belongs to us, let's stick to the context. If Paul had wanted us to know every single thing that is ours in Christ, that would have taken the next two million verses. But he doesn't do that. He goes right to the heart and stays right within his context of what he is writing to the Corinthians. He gives us a list of the essentials that belong to us in Christ, only in Him. He is in the context, remember, of talking to the Corinthians about attaching themselves to men.

Look at the first thing he addresses in 1Cor 3:22. He gives us all the context we need because when you get through this list, there is nothing else that you even want to belong to you, if you will understand it. First all he says, "whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you." Look at that first phrase, "whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas." Now that ought to ring a bell. Man, he has mentioned that from 1:12 all the way down to where we are. That was their problem, attaching themselves to men. What is he saying? All the teachers, preachers and gifted men in the body of Christ belong to you. Not just one. Don't run over to Paul and hook yourself to him. Don't run over to Apollos. All of them who teach the Word very faithfully have been given to the body.

Ephesians 4 says the same thing, that they are given, they are gifts. They were given so that we might learn the Word more, might be encouraged to be in the Word, might understand the Word better. But don't ever attach yourself to one of them, because if you do, and he is off somewhere and you don't know where that is, you have just bought the cow instead of taking the farm.

So many people are this way. That is his whole argument. "I am of John MacArthur!" Well, good for you. "I am of Chuck Swindoll." Well man, do you realize what you have just done? You have just chosen one little tiny aspect of the teachers God has given to the body, because all of them are yours. They are the ones who help you and come alongside you and get you into the Word of God and help you to clarify that Word. The Holy Spirit is always your teacher, but God has given these as gifts to the body. They all belong to you.

Think of the body of Christ today, and think what they had been given in Corinth. We still have the same people with those pacifiers in their mouths, running around saying, "I am of him, I am of him. I don't like you because you are not of him." Folks, you are missing the whole point. All of them are yours. They all belong to you. They are vessels through which God can use.

Now he goes on and says, "whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world." Now, if you didn't understand what he was talking about here, somebody could jump up and say, "I knew it, I knew it, I knew it. Name it and claim it. I have all the world. The whole world belongs to me." Sometimes I wish that doctrine worked. I would like to walk outside and say, "God, I love my Suburban. I need three of them. I am going to name it and claim it." I wish I could do that and it worked. Wouldn't that be great! Hey, man, just enjoy yourself.

What does he mean by this? You have got to be very careful when it comes to this. The world here does not mean the physical world. The physical world is under the dominion of Satan and is a temporary dominion. Why? Because of man's sin. He can't mean the temporary world. As a matter of fact, if you will think about it for a second, it was not the Lord Jesus who tempted anybody with the kingdoms of the world, was it? It was Satan who tempted the Lord Jesus with the kingdoms of the world. He owns them. They are his. It is his domain. Why in the world would God say that belongs to you? That is not what he is talking about.

There are many Christians in this world who don't have anything. I feel so rich. People give me a lot of stuff. I feel a little embarrassed sometimes receiving it. I don't run out and get it. Most of what I have is exceedingly, abundantly beyond what I have even asked God for. Sometimes I feel embarrassed because of what we have in America. Man, go overseas with us sometime. Just help yourself. Come on, go with us. Those bush pastors in Africa, who we bring in for the International Congress on Revival, come in and don't even have shoes to wear, but all things belong to them, Paul, Apollos, Cephas, the world. Now, how are they supposed to understand that? Well, hang on.

What we have that the unbeliever does not have is an understanding of the guiding hand of God in this world. The unbeliever who has the world's things sees himself as a victim. You watch it in every election. They always have to make their stand on why the world is treating them this way.

But the believer is not a victim. The believer is a possessor of understanding of who is in control of this world. He understands what makes this world tick. He understands there is an unseen hand in control of it. So when he votes in the election in America, where we are free to vote, and his candidate does not get put into office, he doesn't go running and bury his head and say, "Oh, no." He knows that God raises up kings. God establishes kingdoms. And God takes them down. And whatever is going on, God is sovereignly in control of that. That is the believer. The world is his. He knows what is going on. The unbeliever does not. Christ teaches that He is in total control of all that is going on.

The believer possesses the world in this way. He sees the world not as a play of blind power but as a carefully oiled machine designed by love and God's wisdom and totally under the control of what God is doing. His circumstances do not work against him but for him. World ownership is a matter of spiritual capacity, folks.

If we are willing to bow down before Him and become foolish so that we might become wise, we start to become possessors of what is around us. But we possess it through understanding. We possess it through appreciation. We possess it by the fact of what God has revealed in our hearts.

Let me read a quote by a Frederick Shannon. "God leases the universe to all who can pay for it in the invisible coin of appreciation. Deity hangs a sign in the window of every star, on the breast of every sea, on the summit of every hill, on the leaf of every tree, on the face of every flower, on the peaks of history, on the souls of immortal men and women, and that sign reads, 'To Rent.' The only rental fee is the capacity to enjoy."

We have some cows behind my house. I talk to them all the time. I love a cow. I think a cow is the funniest creature God ever created. I love the look on their faces. They are out there just eating. They are always eating. Have you ever noticed that? They are always eating. Well, sometimes they are laying down.

I go home sometimes and they are all out in that field with their back ends towards me. I park the car, and nobody is around. I walk out there and say, "MMMooooOOO." When I do that every cow in that pasture looks up, turns around and looks at me. I will say, "Okay, guys, I have a few things I want to talk to you about." I will stand out in the back yard and talk to the cows. Now, I don't have to pay for them. I don't have to feed them, but I own them. All I have got to do is go out there, give them their call and they will come right to me. It is amazing. I just enjoy those cows and I don't have to fool with any of it. That is the beautiful thing.

That is, in a sense, how we own this world. God gives us an appreciation for it, an understanding of what is going on, how circumstances work and how He is in charge of all those things. But then Paul goes on and says, "or life or death." The word for "life" here is the word zoe. The word really means really, in the spiritual sense, the quality and essence of life. That is what it means. It never talks about the length of life. Life has been given to us, the quality of life. That is what he is saying.

Jesus lived on this earth 33 years. That is all the time that He had upon this earth. But look at what was written of Him. John 21:25 says, "And there are also many other things which Jesus did which if they were written in detail I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books which were written." That much went on in His life in 33 years. That is what he is talking about.

My wife told me the other day, "You have lived about 25 lives when you consider all the things that have gone on in your life." I thought about that as I was studying this. That is what he is saying. When Christ is your life, you have the quality and the essence of what He gives to you. It has been given to you if you will attach yourself to Him and walk by faith. You can understand that. You won't worry about when you are going to die because you will just take it a day at a time. Christ will overwhelm you with the joy in those days. To truly possess life you have got to be a possessor of the Giver of that life.

Philosophers argue about life and death all their life. Paul summed it up in one sentence in Philippians 1:21, "For me to live is Christ [zoe] and to die is gain." Philosophers say, "Golly, we have been teaching classes on that for 25 years and you said it in one sentence." Well, that is right because only believers have an understanding of this. We know that life belongs to us.

Galatians 2:20 reads, "I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Romans 6:23 says, "For



the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus.” Eternal life doesn’t start when I die. It is already going on, as a matter of fact. Eternal is eternal. He just grafts me into it and I become a part of eternal life.

Romans 5:10 tells us, “For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more having been reconciled, we shall be saved by HIS life.” Have you ever read Ian Thomas’ book, *The Saving Life of Christ*? You see, we are the possessor of His life, therefore, life is ours. It is a possession that we have. We possess life in its fullest quality when we live possessed by Christ.

Paul said, as we read a moment ago, “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” The believer knows that death is just from here to there. As I understand it, when Jesus wept at Lazarus’ death, it really means He shed a single tear. Physical death never bothered Him. What bothered Him was spiritual death when He wept over Jerusalem. Now that is when He wept. We cry over the wrong things, folks. Death has been given to us. It is just a door through which we enter into the presence of Christ. That is all it is. But we are scared of it.

I love 1 Corinthians 15:53-56. “For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’”

1Cor 15:56 continues, “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Death is our possession. Don’t ever fear it. It is the doorway through which we simply enter into the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. It never, ever, ever is an end to us. As a matter of fact, it is an ushering in of something which eye hath not seen nor ear heard of what God has for us.

Why do you want to get the cow when you can have the farm? In Christ, all things belong to you. Christ is God’s. Thank God He is. Thank God He is God. I am glad He is God, aren’t you? He is able to bring God to man and become man. He becomes a sympathetic high priest, by the way, because He understands what we deal with. But then, thank God He brought us to God. He drew us to God. And because He possesses all things, created them, owns them and sustains them, in Him we possess all things. So why in the world would you ever attach yourself to a little piece of what He possesses? Why don’t you attach yourself to the possessor and then in Him you will start understanding what is really yours. That is what Paul is saying.