

Approximately Expository 30 minutes



★ “Growing Up in Christ”

1 Corinthians Chapter 3

Opening Prayer:

Father God, we come before You in the name of Jesus. We thank You for Your living Word. Holy Spirit, speak to us clearly today. Reveal areas where we need to grow. Remove pride. Remove immaturity. Help us to build our lives on the right foundation. And Lord, if anyone today does not know You, draw them by Your Spirit and save them. We surrender this time to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Historical Setting:

Corinth was wealthy, educated, and competitive. It loved influence, power, and recognition. Public speakers gained followers. Philosophers built schools of thought. Loyalty to leaders was common.

When Paul planted the church in Corinth (Acts 18), **many** came to faith in Jesus. But the culture they came out of **followed them into the church.**

They began aligning themselves behind personalities:

- . “I follow Paul.”
- . “I follow Apollos.”

Instead of growing spiritually, they were acting like the culture around them divided, prideful, competitive.

So in chapter 3, Paul addresses spiritual immaturity and explains what it means to grow up in Christ.

★ 1. Spiritual Infancy vs. Spiritual Maturity (1 Corinthians 3:1-4)



(NIV)

1 Corinthians 3:1-4 Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. ³ You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? ⁴ For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings? ¹

Paul writes:

“Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the

¹ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 1 Co 3:1–4.

Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ.” (v.1)

Notice something important they were **in Christ**, but they were infants.

- Spiritual birth had happened.
- Spiritual growth had not.

Verse 2:

“I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it.” (v.2)

Milk is necessary for babies.
But if a grown adult still drinks only milk something is wrong.

Paul says they were still worldly.

Verse 3:

“For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly?” (v.3)

How does Paul define immaturity?

- . Jealousy
- . Strife
- . Division
- . Personality loyalty

  When believers compete instead of cooperate, it **reveals immaturity**.

 Church, spiritual maturity is not measured by:

- . How long you've attended church
- . How much Bible knowledge you can quote
- . How gifted you are

   It is measured by Christlike character.

★ 2. Servants, Not Celebrities

(1 Corinthians 3:5-9):



(NIV)

1 Corinthians 3:5-9

⁵ What,

after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul?

Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to

each his task. ⁶ I planted the seed,

Apollos watered it, but God has been

making it grow. ⁷ So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is

anything, but only God, who makes

things grow. ⁸ The one who plants and

the one who waters have one purpose,

and they will each be rewarded

according to their own labor. ⁹ For we

are co-workers in God's service; you are

God's field, God's building.²

Paul asks:

“What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe...” (v.5)

² [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 1 Co 3:5–9.

Leaders are servants.

Verse 6:

“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.”

This is powerful.

Ministry has roles.

But growth comes from God.

Verse 7:

“So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.”

God deserves the glory.

In our culture today, ministry can become personality-driven. But the true work belongs to the Lord.

Verse 9 says:

“For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.”

The church belongs to God.

- Not to a pastor.
- Not to a board.
- Not to a personality.
 - God’s field.
 - God’s building.
 - God’s work.

  I am going a little deeper in this section. Paul moves from the picture of children growing up in a family to the picture of plants growing in a field. **The church is God’s field, and those who minister are workers caring for it.**

Paul planted the seed when he brought the gospel to Corinth and established the church. Later, Apollos watered what Paul had planted by teaching and encouraging the believers. Each had a different

assignment, but both served the same Lord.

 **Paul planted. Apollos watered. But God made it grow.**

  Think about a garden. One person may prepare the soil, another may plant the seed, and someone else may water it. Their work matters, but none of them can create life inside that seed.    In the same way, ministers can preach, teach, and encourage, but only God can produce spiritual growth.

That is why it made no sense for the Corinthians to divide themselves into competing groups behind Paul and Apollos. **These men were fellow servants, working toward the same goal.** They were not rivals competing for followers.

Paul explains that the one who plants and the one who waters share a common

purpose, and each will be rewarded according to their labor. Their responsibility was to serve faithfully. The glory for the growth belonged to God.

Church, we need to remember this when we talk about pastors, evangelists, and Bible teachers. We can appreciate the people God uses without turning them into celebrities or allowing our preferences to divide us. The question is not, “Which teacher do I like best?” but, “**Am I growing in Christ through the truth being taught?**”

👉 And we must examine our own hearts. Jesus’ parable of the sower reminds us that the **condition of the soil** affects how the seed is received. 🤔 Are our hearts open to God’s Word, or have pride, bitterness, and stubbornness made us resistant to it?

👉 Let us receive His Word with humble hearts, serve alongside one another, and trust God to bring the growth.

★ 3. The Foundation and the Building
(1 Corinthians 3:10-15):

  (NIV) ***1 Corinthians 3:10-15 ¹⁰ By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each***

person's work. ¹⁴ If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.³

Paul now shifts to a building illustration.

“By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder...” (v.10)

Verse 11:

“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

There is only one foundation.

- Not good works.
- Not religion.
- Not church membership.
- Not moral behavior.

³ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 1 Co 3:10–15.

👉 Jesus Christ.

Now here's the sobering part ... verse 12-13:

“If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is...”

There will be a testing.

Verse 13:

“The fire will test the quality of each person's work.”

This speaks of the believer's evaluation before Christ not for salvation, but for reward.

What we build with matters.

- Gold, silver, costly stones = **eternal value.**
- Wood, hay, straw = **temporary value.**

  As we look at this even closer... This passage teaches that Christ will one day evaluate the work of believers. But Paul's immediate focus is on those **who teach and lead** the local church.

He compares the church to a building and its leaders to builders. By God's grace, Paul laid the foundation when he brought the gospel to Corinth. **That foundation is Jesus Christ.** Apollos and other teachers then built on that foundation by helping the believers grow in their faith.

Each leader is responsible for how he builds. His teaching and ministry should remain faithful to Christ and strengthen the church. That is why Paul warns, **“Each one should be careful how he builds”** .(v.10)

Verse 14:

If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward.⁴

This first builder uses materials that last gold, silver, and precious stones. These represent ministry that is faithful to Christ and has lasting spiritual value.

This worker's goal is to honor Jesus and help people grow in their faith. Rather than focusing on numbers or seeking people's praise, the worker cares about the spiritual strength of the church.

  Wise builders teach God's Word faithfully, pray for those they serve, and depend on the Holy Spirit. They trust God to produce growth as they carry out the work He has given them.

When Christ evaluates their ministry, the work that has lasting value will endure, and they will receive a reward.

⁴ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 1 Co 3:14.

 **What matters is building faithfully on the foundation of Jesus Christ.**

Verse 15:

“If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved...”

- Salvation is secure in Christ.
- But rewards depend on faithfulness.

The second builder uses materials that will not survive the fire....wood, hay, and straw. This pictures a Christian worker who focuses on gathering a crowd but neglects the deeper work of helping people grow in Christ.

  In this kind of ministry, success is measured mainly by attendance and numbers. Little attention is given to whether people understand the gospel, have trusted Jesus as Savior, or are learning to follow Him.

 **A growing crowd does not necessarily mean a spiritually growing church.**

When Christ evaluates this worker's ministry, whatever has no lasting value will be lost, just as wood, hay, and straw are consumed by fire. The **worker will still be saved because salvation rests on Jesus Christ**, but there will be no reward for the work that is burned up.

   **Paul's warning is clear: we must build faithfully, helping people trust Christ and grow in His Word.**

  Church, ask yourself:
What are you building with?

Are your motives eternal?
Or temporary?

★ 4. You Are God's Temple

(1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

  (NIV) **1 Corinthians 3:16-17** ¹⁶ *Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?* ¹⁷ *If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.* ⁵

Paul now raises the stakes:

“Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?” (v.16)

In Corinth, temples dominated the skyline.
People revered sacred buildings.

Paul says you are the temple.

God's Spirit lives in believers.

⁵ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 1 Co 3:16–17.

Verse 17:

“If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person...”

Division, corruption, and false teaching damage the church.

👉 God takes His church seriously.

The presence of the Holy Spirit should produce:

- . Reverence
- . Unity
- . Purity
- . Growth

🔍👁️ As we look even closer into this passage we see Paul now gives a serious warning about a different kind of worker....**one who damages the church instead of building it up.** In verse 17, he warns that God will judge anyone who destroys His temple, the church.

A person can do great harm through

- pride,
- selfish ambition,
- false teaching,
- or division.

Instead of helping believers grow together in Christ, that person weakens their faith and pulls the church apart. 👉 **God takes this seriously because the church belongs to Him.**

This should lead us to pray for those who teach and lead the church. Their responsibility is great: they are called to teach God's Word faithfully, care for His people, and build on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

But the congregation also has a responsibility. When we form competing groups around our favorite preachers, we contribute to the very division Paul is correcting. When we receive God's Word

humbly, put it into practice, and work for the spiritual good of others, we help strengthen the church.

  **A church's true strength is not measured by its size, reputation, or popularity. Christ sees the quality of what is being built.**

Earlier, in   (NIV) **1 Corinthians 2:5 so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.⁶**

Paul taught that our faith should rest on God's power rather than human wisdom. Now, in chapter 3, he warns us against boasting about human leaders.

We can be thankful for a pastor or teacher without making that person the center of our faith. If God uses someone to help us understand His Word, we should appreciate that servant and give God the glory. **The**

⁶ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 1 Co 2:5.

servant is a gift; the Lord is the source of the blessing.

Paul closes this section by reminding the Corinthians that they belong to Christ. They do not need to compete over which leader they follow. Paul, Apollos, and the other faithful workers all serve for their benefit under the same Lord.

Throughout this chapter, Paul has used three pictures to help us understand our place in the church:

- **We are members of God's family.** We need spiritual nourishment so that we can grow toward maturity.
- **We are God's field.** We receive His Word and depend on Him to produce growth and fruit.
- **We are God's building.** Christ is our foundation, and our teaching, service, and conduct should strengthen the church.

Church, each of us has a part to play. Our words, attitudes, and actions can encourage others and promote unity....or cause harm and deepen division.

Let us respect and pray for our leaders, receive their teaching as it faithfully follows God's Word, and keep our loyalty firmly rooted in Jesus.

Appreciate God's servants. Give God the glory. Help build His church.

★ **5. True Wisdom (1 Corinthians 3:18-23):**

  (NIV) **1 Corinthians 3:18-23** ¹⁸ **Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become "fools" so that you may become wise.** ¹⁹ **For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's**

sight. As it is written: “He catches the wise in their craftiness”; ²⁰ and again, “The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.” ²¹ So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, ²³ and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God. ⁷

Paul returns to wisdom.

“Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become ‘fools’ so that you may become wise.” (v.18)

  Humility is the doorway to true wisdom.

Verse 19:

⁷ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 1 Co 3:18–23.

“For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight.”

Human pride resists surrender.
But surrender is where transformation happens.

Verse 21-23:

“So then, no more boasting about human leaders! ... you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.”

- Our identity is not in leaders.
- It is not in labels.
- It is not in church affiliations.

 We belong to Christ.

Application for Today:

Chapter 3 asks us three major questions:

1. Are you growing spiritually?
2. What are you building your life with?

3. Are you living as God's temple?

Spiritual growth requires:

- . Feeding on the Word
- . Walking in the Spirit
- . Rejecting jealousy and division
- . Living with eternity in view

The world says:

- Compete.
- Promote yourself.
- Build your brand.

The gospel says:

- Serve.
- Glorify God.
- Build for eternity.

★ **Invitation to Be Born Again**

- Maybe someone listening today realizes something important.

- Maybe you've been around church - but never truly surrendered to Christ.
- Maybe you've tried to build your life on success, money, morality, or religion - but not on Jesus.

Paul says clearly:

“No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (v.11)

👉 If your foundation is not Jesus, everything else will crumble.

- Jesus died for your sins.
- He rose from the dead.
- He offers forgiveness and eternal life.

To be born again means:

- . Admit you are a sinner.
- . Turn from your sin.
- . Trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior.
- . Receive Him by faith.

- When you do, He becomes your foundation.
- His Spirit comes to dwell in you.
- You become God's temple.
- You begin growing spiritually.

If you are ready, call out to Him right now.



Let us Pray...

Lord Jesus, I need you thank you for dying on the cross for my sins.... I opened the door of my life and receive you as my savior and Lord.... Thank you for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life.... Take control of the throne of my life.... Make me the kind of person you want me to be.... Amen.

If you mean that from your heart, He will save you.



(NIV)

Romans 10:10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.⁸



Closing Prayer:

Father God, thank You for Jesus - our only foundation. Thank You that You desire for us to grow beyond spiritual infancy. Help us to build with eternal materials. Help us to guard unity. Help us to live as Your holy temple.

And Lord, for anyone who has just surrendered their life to You, fill them with Your Spirit. Establish them firmly

⁸ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Ro 10:10.

on You Lord. Begin the work of transformation.

May we be a church that grows up in Christ, builds for eternity, and boasts only in You.

**We love You. We praise You.
In Jesus' mighty name, Amen.**



Matthew 28:19-20