

1 Cor. 3

Prayer:

Verse by verse: thanks to the Outline Bible which I consulted

3: 1-2: Paul's criticism

3:3-9: Paul's correction

3:10-15: works

3:16-17: you are God's temple

3:18-20: don't deceive yourselves

3:21-23: You belong to Christ as Christ belongs to God

1 Cor. 3:1-2:

1 Corinthians 3:1–2 (ESV)

Divisions in the Church

3 But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ²I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready...

thoughts, questions, discussion

- Notice the contrast in verse 1 "Paul is not able to speak to them as spiritual **but** as carnal.
- "Of the flesh"
- **ESV SB: of the flesh.** *The first instance of this phrase (v. 1) represents a Greek word (sarkinos) that means "characterized by the flesh" (cf. Rom. 7:14). The second instance (1 Cor. 3:3) represents a slightly different word (sarkikos) that means "made of flesh, fleshly" (cf. 2 Cor. 1:17; 10:4). Paul uses both terms here in the same way to express his disappointment in the Corinthians' behavior. "Flesh" takes different meanings in Scripture, but in Paul's letters it often refers to "unredeemed human nature" with all of its desires and characteristic behavior. Although the Corinthians are Christians indwelt by the Spirit, their divisive behavior shows that they are acting like the unbelieving world around them.¹*

¹ Crossway Bibles, [The ESV Study Bible](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2195.

Corinthian Correspondence: facilitated by Steve Rhodes

1 Cor 3

- Same contrast in verse 2: He gave them milk because they were not ready for meat. *But or indeed*, even now, they are not ready for meat.
- 1 Cor 2:15: those who are spiritual cannot understand things that are spiritual
- ESV SB: *Paul thinks it is unhelpful and dangerous to give advanced teaching to Christians who were morally and spiritually immature and proud.*²
- 1 Cor 14:37: If anyone thinks he is a prophet or is spiritual let him know that what I write to you is from the Lord
- Gal 6:1 you who are spiritual restore those in sin
- Heb 5:13 for the milk and meat metaphor

The IVP:

*Ancient writers often compared the unskilled in knowledge to babes who had to start out with the basics, with milk (Philo, Epictetus, etc.). If Paul intends the image to evoke all that it can, he portrays himself as mother or wet nurse (cf. 4:15; 1 Thess 2:7). Teachers always expected students to start with basics but also expected them to progress past basics.*³

1 Corinthians 3:3–9 (ESV)

³*for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?* ⁴*For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human?*

⁵*What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each.* ⁶*I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.* ⁷*So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.* ⁸*He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor.* ⁹*For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.*

Verses 3-9: questions or comments

² Crossway Bibles, [The ESV Study Bible](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2195.

Philo ***Philo**. A first-century Jewish philosopher committed to both Judaism and Greek thought; he lived in Alexandria, Egypt, and held a position of great influence and prestige in the Jewish community there.

Epictetus **Epictetus**. A first-century Stoic philosopher, originally a slave.

³Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (1 Co 3:1). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

- You are still living like the world and this is how Paul knows→there is jealousy and strife among you
- Rhetorical question?
- Paul is saying their behavior is unbecoming of a Christian.
- That is very applicable to us today.
- 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 (ESV)
- ⁴Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
- Paul says that they are behaving a human way.
- He will give specifics in verse 5.

The IVP:

3:4. *Greek culture sometimes divinized heroes into gods; some scholars have also claimed that initiates to some mystery cults were said to become gods. Later traditions divinized philosophers, and philosophers often claimed that people could be divinized by virtue, because they considered the soul a divine part within each person. Although some Jewish writers in the Greek world adopted the language of deification, the principle of one God generally kept Jews and Christians from following this concept that far (Gen 3:5). Here Paul says: If you follow humans, then you are not only not divine; you are not even following the Spirit of God.⁴*

- In verse 4 Paul gives more examples that are repeated from 1 Cor 1:12
- They are following people and not Christ.
- Verse 5: notice the repetition of rhetorical questions: we are mere men who God has used.

mystery cults ***Mystery cults.** A diverse group of Greek cults entered only by special initiation. The details of the initiation were to be kept entirely secret, although one could join a number of these societies. Apart from secrets and initiations, they varied widely in popularity, antiquity and appeal to different social classes.

Spirit of God **Spirit.** When capitalized in this commentary, it refers to the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit.

⁴Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (1 Co 3:4). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

- Most all about being a minister: Rom 15:16; 2 Cor 3:3, 6; 4:1; 5:18; 6:4; Eph 3:7; Col 1:25; 1 Tim 1:12⁵
- Verse 6 a great agricultural metaphor. **Notice the other metaphor in verses 10ff.** Here we have a repetition of metaphors.
- Paul planted, Apollos watered. God provided the growth. That is a reminder for all of us.
- Verse 7: God is the one who really matters
- Verse 8: one because we are all working for the Lord?
 - Heb 6:10 reward for labor
- Witherington:
- *Verse 8 stresses the unity of Paul and Apollos. They are one in purpose and one in being only servants. They work together to the same end, and so should not be pitted against one another, which would amount to a nullifying of the work of both men.*
- *Paul believes that Christians are rewarded for the good work that they do in the Lord, but he does not say what the reward is (v. 8b). The future tense of “receive” suggests that it will be an eschatological reward at the day of judgment (see below).⁶*
- *Paul and Apollos are coworkers of God (v. 9). While the idea of possession is implied here (Paul and Apollos belong to God), this is not the whole point since the metaphor makes evident that they work with God as well (cf. 2 Cor. 6:1). They are his servants (diakonoi) just as the Corinthians are God’s field or building.⁷*

1 Corinthians 3:10–15 (ESV)

¹⁰According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. ¹¹For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— ¹³each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Verses 10-15: questions, comments, thoughts

- Notice the building metaphor. These metaphors are common in the New Testament

⁵New American Standard Bible : 1995 update. 1995 (Ge 1:1). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

⁶ Ben Witherington III, [*Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 132.

⁷ Ibid, 132–133.

- Why do we have to be careful how we build?
 - Explained in verse 11: the foundation must be Jesus Christ
 - In Romans 15:20 Paul talks about not wanting to preach on someone else's foundation. Romans was written after 1 Cor. in Corinth Paul had experienced people coming in and messing up his foundation. Unintentionally I am sure, but they still messed it up.
 - Galatians was written prior to 1 Cor and Paul had a similar problem, people known as Judaizer, or another cult came in and messed up Paul's foundation. They told people they had to observe the law.
- In verses 12-15 our works are compared to material. If our works are not in the foundation of Jesus Christ, then they will be like straw that burns up really easily.
 - Witherington says that neither Peter nor Apollos were in Corinth at this time. Peter might have been in Corinth and some of the Jews might have liked him a lot.
 - Apollos might have unintentionally hurt Paul by a different rhetorical skill (page 130)
 - *Paul is calling the whole Corinthian congregation "God's building." Collectively they are God's temple, in which God's Spirit dwells, though Paul is also willing to say that an individual Christian's body is God's temple as well (6:19). One of the great challenges to understanding Paul's thought is the relationship between the one and the many: Paul affirms both, holding them in tension. To be a Christian is to be a member of the body of Christ, not an isolated saved individual. At the same time, Paul holds individuals responsible for their behavior, expecting the community to discipline them.*⁸
 - You may get to Heaven but still smell like smoke!
 - **Read 2 Cor 5:10 about Christ judgment seat also Matt 5:12**
 - We will be judged by our works, and this could also be referring to the motives of our work and whether we are missional.
 - Heb 6:10: God remembers our work
 - 1 Cor 4:5 deals with the idea that when the Lord comes He will bring things to light
 - The idea of already but not yet in New Testament
 - In Thessalonica the concern of loved ones who had died before the rapture

⁸ Ben Witherington III, [*Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 133.

- Psalm 66:10 the idea of the refiners fire.
- The idea of sanctification, holiness (Romans 12:1-2)
- **Jude 23 should be read**
- **JUDGMENT SEAT**
- JUDGMENT SEAT
- (*bema*, "a raised place," "platform," "tribune," Matt 27:19; John 19:13; see GABBATHA; Acts 12:21 margin (text "throne"); 18:12,16 ff; 25:6,17): In Greek law courts, one *bema* was provided for the accuser, another for the accused; but in the New Testament the word designates the official seat of a judge, usually of the Roman governor; also of the emperor (Acts 25:10); then of God (Rom 14:10), of Christ (2 Cor 5:10). The word *kriterion*, "a tribunal," "bench of judges" (James 2:6) occurs also in 1 Cor 6:2-4, and is there translated in the Revised Version margin by "tribunals." See also JUDGE. (from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright (c)1996 by BibleSoft)

1 Corinthians 3:16–17 (ESV)

¹⁶Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Verses 16-17: questions, comments

- 1 Cor 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21f; Romans 8:9: all have to do with the Spirit of God dwelling in us
 - The Greek word for temple could be translated sanctuary. It carries the idea of the inner place of the sanctuary where God was thought to dwell
 - Witherington: In v. 16 Paul calls the Corinthian Christians God's naos in Corinth. The naos was that part of an ancient temple where the god was thought to dwell—the sanctuary proper.¹⁵ Paul does not use hieron, which was a broader term that would include the temple precincts. Remarkably, Paul believes that even these badly mixed-up Christians are still God's temple where God still dwells.⁹
 - **The GK word for "you" is plural**

¹⁵ The noun comes from the verb *naiein*, which means "to dwell."

⁹ Ben Witherington III, [*Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 134.

- *You are God's temple* refers here to the church, since the pronoun *you* is plural in the Greek text. (In 6:19 the same imagery is used in a different context to refer to the individual believer.)¹⁰

1 Corinthians 3:18–20 (ESV)

¹⁸ *Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.* ¹⁹ *For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness,"* ²⁰ *and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."*

Verses 18-20: thoughts, questions, comments

- Witherington: *In vv. 18ff. Paul returns to the language of inversion and paradox. The kingdom's coming has turned things upside-down: Human wisdom is foolishness, what seems foolish to common sense is God's wisdom, leaders are servants, the poor are exalted. Vv. 19 and 20 simply stress that the so-called wisdom of the world is not wisdom in God's eyes and that God will catch a person who is found living by his or her own cunning.*¹¹
- Isa 5:21: woe to those who are wise in their own eyes
- This goes back to 1 Cor 1:20 and the end of 1 Cor 2
- Contrast between foolish and wise
- Verse 19: from Job 5:13
- Verse 20 Psalm 94:11

1 Corinthians 3:21–23 (ESV)

²¹ *So let no one boast in men. For 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 Christ's, and Christ is God's.*

Verses 21-23: thoughts, question, comments

- I see unity emphasized
- Piper:
- But notice that in the list of things that belong to us is death. That's in the list: "All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death." Death is yours. This

¹⁰ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), 1 Co 3:16.

¹¹ Ben Witherington III, [Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 135.

means that you do not get all your blessings in this life, but that death itself belongs to you as a gift, as a doorway to infinite, eternal, immeasurable blessing. Death becomes your servant because of Christ's triumph over death. The apostle John heard a voice from heaven saying, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord" (Revelation 14:13). Why is that? Paul answers in Ephesians 1:3: God "has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing" — every blessing that heaven can conceive for the eternal happiness of God's people will be ours.¹²

- Witherington on verse 21: *Paul makes the most striking inversion or reversal of expectations of all: The leaders all belong to the Corinthians! "We are yours," says Paul, even Peter. But this is so only in Christ, and Paul hastily adds that the Corinthians are Christ's. Only in him do they have all that is listed in v. 22.*¹⁷ *It is fruitful to compare this doxologically prompted list to the one at the end of Romans 8. Since all things are now Christ's, in him they belong to believers as well, though at present this is so mainly in principle, and only in part is it a present experience.*¹³
- Witherington continues: *Verses 22 and 23 speak of possession. The leaders belong to the body of Christ, the body belongs to Christ, and Christ belongs to God. Christ is functionally subordinate to God, just as the leaders serve the followers and are functionally subordinate to them, though they are also ontologically equal with them. This is not a discourse on the nature of Christ, but it does show that Christ is ranked under God (cf. ch. 15). Christ is God's Messiah: He belongs to the heavenly Father.*¹⁴
- **ESV SB: let no one boast in men.** *Arrogance is at the root of the divisiveness in Corinth (4:6, 18). The Corinthians need to learn that they ultimately belong to God, not to the leader who baptized them (1:13–17), who was himself only fulfilling God's purposes (3:7, 11; 4:1). They should, therefore, boast only in God (1:29, 31).*¹⁵

¹² https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-does-it-mean-to-be-blessed?utm_campaign=Daily%20Email&utm_medium=email&_hsmi=155018590&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-9bjGUKAGYnuOdXUbpHn_ZHGk0UA41sJGtZqmN9vsHR8f5PT-zvXitNpKNWV9G1t4YYObA_UxooMkZglr1rFtRku9ktqg&utm_content=155018590&utm_source=hs_email

¹⁷ It has often been noted that there is a certain similarity between Paul's way of speaking here and elsewhere and the Stoic way of putting such matters. But the differences are perhaps more significant. For instance, as Lightfoot, *Notes*, p. 195, points out, the phrase "everything is yours" is spoken not to the wise of the world, to whom all virtues belong, but to those who are in Christ, namely to the fools that Paul has mentioned in ch. 1. Furthermore, for Paul this dominion over everything comes not by isolation and concentration on self, but by the negation of self. "All things are the believer's; but they are only his, in so far as he is Christ's, and because Christ is God's" (Lightfoot, p. 195).

¹³ Ben Witherington III, [*Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 135.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁵ Crossway Bibles, [*The ESV Study Bible*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2195.

THE IVP:

3:21–23

All Things Are the Corinthians' Anyway

This passage would make good sense to ancient readers. Even Paul and Apollos are given to them by God; why follow just Paul or Apollos, when they should follow the God who gives everything? God's people would take possession of the world to come (Zech 8:12; Rom 4:13); at present they are heirs of the world and children of the God who rules it.

Stoic and Cynic philosophers often praised “having nothing” (see comment on 2 Cor 6:10) while emphasizing that the whole world belonged to them, so they could take whatever they needed. They often cited the proverb “Friends share all property in common” and claimed that because they were friends of the gods, who owned everything, everything was theirs.¹⁶

Stoic **Stoicism**. The most popular form of Greek philosophy in Paul's day. Although most people were not Stoics, many Stoic ideas were widely disseminated. For more detail, see comment on Acts 17:18.

Cynic **Cynic**. One type of antiworldly philosopher who expressed independence from social needs by begging. Cynics owned only the barest necessities (e.g., cloak, staff, begging purse) and often greeted passersby with harsh, antisocial words.

¹⁶Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (1 Co 3:18). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.