

Notes on 1 Corinthians 3

Relevant background for Chapter 3:

1) Greek citizens had centuries of developing secular ideas through debate and intellectual competition to gain influence in society. 2) Paul had spent 18 months preaching in Corinth where an assembly was formed. Now, 3 years later he was writing to them to exhort them.

v. 1-4: **The results of carnality and conflicts:**

v. 1: Lack of spiritual development

- carnal – although saved, their attitudes, interests and aims are limited to this world
- could not understand as spiritual believers,
- remained as babes in spite of the passage of time.

v.2: Inability to benefit from Paul's knowledge and instruction,

v. 3: Marked by practicing the same principles as men of the world

- envying <zelos> - wanting to deprive others of what they have - Vine. (Note results of Ephraim's spirit of envy)

- strife (1 Cor. 14 – in exercise of gift) and divisions – (1 Cor. 1 – followers of men)

v. 4: A misguided continuing party spirit was focused on the Lord's servants. (Solution: 1 Pet. 3:8)

v. 5-8: **Unity of servants labouring in a husbandry:**

v. 5: What are Paul and Apollos?

- had a role in bringing the gospel and the will of God to them
- they are only servants who had received a ministry from the sovereign Lord

v.6: Differences in their roles during Corinth's development

- Paul planted – He brought the gospel to people who did not know the message
- Apollos watered – He gave further teaching to the believers on how to live in the world
- God gave the increase – without the working of God there can be no growth

v. 7: Planting and watering are not unique but the giving of life is

- Paul says he and Apollos should not receive attention for they are not important
- Paul says the glory should go to God, he gave the increase

v. 8: Paul and Apollos worked together as one in their service to Corinthians

- Paul says servants working together should function as one
- Paul indicates that each servant is responsible for their service and will receive their own reward.

v. 9: Transition from the efforts of the servants in a husbandry to the principles of a building

- Paul and Apollos laboured as journeymen under God (see Darby's translation)
- the assembly at Corinth was a husbandry and a building.

v. 10-15: **Accountability for building into the assembly** (Teachers first then others)

v. 10: Paul's role in the assembly/ church at Corinth

- the church/assembly is a spiritual house not a physical building.
- Paul laid the foundation (examples of foundations) – the Lord Jesus Christ

- others would build upon the foundation – including those in Corinth (especially teachers and leaders.) Builders must do so with the greatest care and understanding.
- v. 11: It would not be a church/assembly unless it was built on the Lord Jesus Christ
 - it rests on this foundation by faith.
- v.12: Different materials can be built into the assembly by teachers and others:
 - precious, durable, difficult to provide, small (gold, silver, precious stones)
 - common, perishable, easily obtained, bulky (wood, hay, stubble)
- v.13: Testing of the materials in the Day of the Judgment Seat of Christ
 - man does not judge the value of his work – God does
 - day and the fire will make the materials manifest
 - fire of divine judgement will try what has been added to test what type it is.
- v. 14: Those whose work that endures the fire will receive a reward (will include crowns and place in the kingdom) (Crowns: rejoicing; incorruptible crown; righteousness; shepherd’s crown; blessing for overcomers (Rev.2,3)) – purpose of rewards - 2 Thess.1:10
- v. 15: Those whose work is burned suffer loss
 - Paul is careful to clarify this has nothing to do with eternal security but loss of reward
 - here we have an assessment for service; elsewhere assessments for motives for conduct (Rom. 14:10-12); motives for service (1 Cor. 4:5); and conduct.

v. 16-17: The assembly as a temple: preserving its holiness

- v. 16: The importance of the assembly as <naos> - the holiest part of the temple and the dwelling place of the Spirit of God
- v. 17: Preserving the holiness of the temple
 - to defile the temple would bring about God’s judgment on the individual. Some suggest this may be the work of natural men or false brethren (Gal. 2:4).

V. 18-20: God’s wisdom is much greater than the world’s wisdom

- v. 18: the contrasts of the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God
 - learning spiritual wisdom requires unlearning the wisdom of the world
- v. 19: the wisdom of God is far superior in its content and results. (Job 5:13 – Lord reverses the outcome of natural wisdom to accomplish his purpose)
- v. 20: the wisdom of this world is empty and filled with pride and its own importance (Psa. 94:11)

v. 21-23: Corinthians have everything – there was no need to contend and compete

- v. 21: To try to glory in man was misdirected, given that the God of all wisdom had given them everything. Furthermore, no man has anything except by the will and power of God.
- v. 22: The scope of what they have been given: - the benefits of all of the Lord’s servants, the world, the benefits of life and death, the things of the present and the future – they are theirs to be held in balance and to use for God’s glory.
- v. 23: The great regulator: their linkage to the eternal and the divine – they are Christ’s and Christ is God’s. There should be no boasting on their part – they are the Lord’s sheep, servants, disciples, friends, brethren because of His grace. We can claim the same blessings and benefits.

RGL (01/02/14)