

## I Corinthians 3:1-23

**Correct conception of God, builds His Church and clarifies service. Feb 4, 2007**

*<sup>1</sup>Dear brothers and sisters,<sup>[1]</sup> when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to mature Christians. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in the Christian life. <sup>2</sup>I had to feed you with milk and not with solid food, because you couldn't handle anything stronger. And you still aren't ready, <sup>3</sup>for you are still controlled by your own sinful desires. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your own desires? You are acting like people who don't belong to the Lord.*

Before we begin with Chapter 3, we must first go back to I Corinthians 2 to review the 2 classes of mankind presented by Paul.

*<sup>14</sup>But people who aren't Christians can't understand these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them because only those who have the Spirit can understand what the Spirit means. <sup>15</sup>We who have the Spirit understand these things, but others can't understand us at all.*

At your tables identify the 2 classes of mankind. Also describe some traits of each classification. There is a 3<sup>rd</sup> classification that we will study.

<b>Class 1: <u>Natural</u> man Also Carnal Man</b> verse 2:14	<b>Class 2: <u>Supernatural</u> man Also Spiritual Man</b> verse 2:15	<b>Class 3: <u>Unnatural or Carnal Christian</u></b> verse 3
Things of God are foolish in his eyes	Makes judgments about all things based on scriptural truth	Leans on the judgments others have taught, many things seem foolish
He does not understand spiritual things – without the Holy Spirit	Born again, Has the Holy Spirit	Born again, Has the Holy Spirit
Unregenerate – unable to reform	Regenerate – able to reform	Regenerate – able to reform, but does not seek to reform
2Cor 4:4 Satan has blinded them	God reveals things – eyes are opened through the Holy Spirit	Puts more emphasis on the teacher than on God
Tries to bring good to mankind based on “being good”	Brings God’s goodness to mankind through the preaching and teaching of The Word	Goodness may exist, but there is much strife, envy, gossip, arguing, and division. Identifies as belonging to a denomination or faction rather than belonging to Christ.

Application: How should we pray for Class 1? God will remove their blindness to see Him in truth. Recognize their distance from their creator.

Paul begins talking to the Corinthians about carnalities because they were not ready for spiritualities. Class 3 is those who were in the Church in Corinth who received Christ as

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Savior, but not Lord over their life. They had not yet had victory over the flesh and needed deliverance from the powers of the flesh. Paul describes these Christians as “mere infants” and required to be fed milk because they had not matured enough to receive the teeth needed to chew solid food.

Draw a representation of a “babe in Christ.” Share your art and discuss characteristics of a baby Christian with those at your table.

- Joy
- Innocent
- Everything is new and exciting
- Relief to be forgiven
- Sweet
- The beginnings of learning who Jesus is
- Don't yet know things will harm them

There is a natural progression of life that says babies grow up to be adults. Likewise, God intends for a “babe in Christ” grow in Him to become fully mature and bear fruit. The unnatural Christian or carnal Christian is one who hasn't grown up spiritually and lacks spiritual discernment, not because he doesn't have the Holy Spirit, but because he is not growing in grace and in knowledge of Christ through the Word of God.

Carnal Christians have ability, but no desire. A Carnal Christian motto: Do what comes naturally; let the flesh have its way.

Where do you see evidence of Carnal Christians in the church today?

V3 wherever there is strife, division, envy, bitterness, hatred, gossip

Examples:

- Identifying ourselves with a denomination rather than a follower of Christ. I'm a Methodist, I was born into a Methodist church, and my parents were Methodists.
- Not loving a brother or sister in Christ, gossiping about their divorce, the way their kids act, etc.
- Loosing your temper and trying to cover it up by saying to the person, “I'm just trying to be frank with you.”

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How should we pray for Class 3? Unity, spiritual growth, discernment, reform, loose the ties to the flesh.

*<sup>4</sup>When one of you says, "I am a follower of Paul," and another says, "I prefer Apollos," aren't you acting like those who are not Christians?*

*<sup>5</sup>Who is Apollos, and who is Paul, that we should be the cause of such quarrels? Why, we're only servants. Through us God caused you to believe. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us. <sup>6</sup>My job was to plant the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God, not we, who made it grow. <sup>7</sup>The ones who do the planting or watering aren't important, but God is important because he is the one who makes the seed grow. <sup>8</sup>The one who plants and the one who waters work as a team with the same purpose. Yet they will be rewarded individually, according to their own hard work.*

In verses 4-8 there is a concern over factionalism.

- Faction: A group of persons forming a cohesive contentious minority within a larger group; conflict within an organization.

The real question is, "who were they to be following?" Jesus

Apollos and Paul were God's instruments used to bring these men and women to Christ!

Paul was stating – "You are not following Christ, you are acting like the unnatural man.

Apollos and I are merely tools in God's garden shed to grow the church. The important thing is not who the teacher is, but whether or not God is using him". We are workers, but God is the one who makes things grow. We are on the same team. We are to have the same purpose in our work to plant and water, and it is up to God to make the seed germinate and grow into a fully mature plant. V7-9 The one purpose for the work is to build the Church of God.

Paul is saying that God rewards us for the work we do, not for the results. God gets the credit for the results.

*<sup>9</sup>We work together as partners who belong to God. You are God's field, God's building--not ours.*

We are co laborers with God We Christians are God's husbandry. We are the field and the building not the work and efforts of Paul and Apollos.

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*<sup>10</sup>Because of God's special favor to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful.*

*<sup>11</sup>For no one can lay any other foundation than the one we already have--Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup>Now anyone who builds on that foundation may use gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw. <sup>13</sup>But there is going to come a time of testing at the judgment day to see what kind of work each builder has done. Everyone's work will be put through the fire to see whether or not it keeps its value. <sup>14</sup>If the work survives the fire, that builder will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup>But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builders themselves will be saved, but like someone escaping through a wall of flames.*

The church is the building of God on a solid foundation of Jesus Christ. When we came to Christ, we came with no works, nothing, to receive everything. A Day is coming when the building will be tested. How will the church be tested? It will be tested by fire.

What do you think Paul was intending us to understand when he used the metaphor of Gold, Silver, precious stones, wood, hay and straw combined with this "fire"?

- Precious metals and stones are not destroyed by fire
- " " " " are purified by heat/fire
- Wood, hay, and straw are organic and over time deteriorate and are highly flammable
- Wood, hay and stubble are the things we have done to build the church in which we feel are necessary for us to do, because God can't possibly do it himself. Are the intentions to gain personal status? Are the intentions to do something good where others can see? Are they programs that are focused solely on personal delights – activities that promote human interests – singing in the choir simply because I think I have a great voice and think others should hear it, and by the way I know there are others whose voices are almost as good as mine, and we do sing about Jesus – sometimes. Teaching a class simply because I want to impress others with my scholarly capabilities, etc. And these things are used by our intent to "build the church."

We will be rewarded for the works that survive the test of fire. God does so impartially for each one of us. How are you building the church? What kinds of materials are you using to

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build the church? What is your personal intent in the work that you do? Is for your own personal interest or is it to bring God the glory and honor He so deserves?

Our works may fail, but God looks at the Heart or intent. And as I have been learning more recently, I should be seeking to work for a reward from God.

<sup>16</sup>*Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you? <sup>17</sup>God will bring ruin upon anyone who ruins this temple. For God's temple is holy, and you Christians are that temple.*

There are 2 Greek terms used for temple.

1. *Heron* – refers to the entire temple complex, the temple Mount, temple porches, courts, etc.
2. *Naos* – Refers to the inner sanctuary, the holy place

In both of these terms, there is a picture or vision we are to see that this is the place God resides. This is where God comes into a personal relationship with each man. God reveals himself to man through the temple. To Paul the church was the very temple of God because it was the society in which the Spirit of God dwelt. Now the temple can be both the body of believers and the individual believer. Why is this so important in this passage? Our life and our bodies are the dwelling place of God. We must care what we do with this temple because:

- We can defile/destroy/ruin the temple of our God
  - i. Physically – wrong food, no exercise, too much partying, gluttony, drugs, vile habits
  - ii. Mentally – subjecting ourselves to abuse, drug abuse and addiction, pornography, depression that we never get help for, being the abuser to gain power...
  - iii. Spiritually – Putting things into our lives that are vile causing us to be totally distracted from God – and I choose to do so.
- I bring Christ into the relationships I have and the actions I take. So, if I am spending money on a prostitute – I take Christ with me and I defile his temple. If I become a drug addict – I take Christ with me. If I cheat on my expense report – I take Christ with me. If I start gossip about someone in my congregation - I take Christ with me. If I am bitter with a Christian Brother or and sister because

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I feel I have been mistreated in some way – I take Christ with me. If I am envious of the status of my elder, because I really know what kind of person he is – I take Christ with me.

Paul was trying to provide these Corinthian's a wake-up call to look at their actions. If Christians are doing things to destroy the love and unity in the body of Christ, we are destroying the church and hence God's temple. God's temple is sacred – it is a holy temple, and I am that temple. So I must think on the things and work I do with that temple.

*<sup>18</sup>Stop fooling yourselves. If you think you are wise by this world's standards, you will have to become a fool so you can become wise by God's standards. <sup>19</sup>For the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God. As the Scriptures say,*

*"God catches those who think they are wise  
in their own cleverness."*

*<sup>20</sup>And again,*

*"The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise,  
that they are worthless."*

*<sup>21</sup>So don't take pride in following a particular leader. Everything belongs to you: <sup>22</sup>Paul and Apollos and Peter ; the whole world and life and death; the present and the future. Everything belongs to you, <sup>23</sup>and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.*

Paul is now pinpointing the root cause of the dissension and destruction of the Church. It was the worship of intellectual, worldly wisdom. Job 5:13, Psalm 94:11 are quoted here. The Corinthians assessed the worth of different teachers and leaders. Greeks loved to be intellectual and hence developed a pride about their human minds. This worldly wisdom caused them to criticize the way in which a message was delivered, how correct the rhetoric was, the weightiness of the oratory, the worth of the arguments. They would rather focus on all these things rather than “the Message”. The trouble with this type of intellectual pride in the Church was two fold.

1. It caused Disputes – one would take the message and not we quiet and admire, but one must take the message then talk about it and criticize it. There was no desire to

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have your own opinion contradicted. One could never be humble enough to learn; it must always be laying down the law.

2. Intellectual pride is typically exclusive. It looks down on others rather than sit down beside them. The outlook of this pride is that all who do not agree with it are wrong.

Paul urges the man who would be wise to become a fool or humble enough to learn. No one can teach a man who thinks that he knows it all already.

In verse 22, there is a lyric of passion and poetry. These people were seeking to give themselves over into the hands of some man. This identification with a person is the acceptance of slavery by those who should be kings. We as Christians must give our selves over to Christ and the teaching of the Holy Spirit. We should not be limited by the teachings of one person for the purpose of building his temple, quite simply because the teachings of one person are too narrow and the focus becomes the person not Christ.

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❖ **Identify the 2 classes of mankind. Also describe some traits of each classification.** There is a 3<sup>rd</sup> classification that we will study. We will complete the 3<sup>rd</sup> column together.

Class 1: verse 2:14	Class 2: verse 2:15	Class 3: verse 3:3

Application: How should we pray for Class 1?

Class 3 is those who were in the Church in Corinth who received Christ as \_\_\_\_\_, but not \_\_\_\_\_ over their life.

❖ **Draw a representation of a “babe in Christ on the back side of this sheet.” Share your art and discuss characteristics of a baby Christian with those at your table.**

Characteristics:

- Innocent

There is a natural progression of life that says babies grow up to be \_\_\_\_\_. Likewise, God intends for a “babe in Christ” grow in Him to become \_\_\_\_\_ mature and bear fruit. Carnal Christians have \_\_\_\_\_, but no \_\_\_\_\_. A Class 3 motto: Do what comes naturally; let the flesh have its way.

Examples of Class 3 Christianity in the church today:

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How should we pray for Class 3?

Verses 4-8 Paul says God rewards us for the \_\_\_\_\_, not for the \_\_\_\_\_. Our works may \_\_\_\_\_, but God looks at the \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_.

I bring Christ into the \_\_\_\_\_ I have and the \_\_\_\_\_ I take.

\_\_\_\_\_ pride in the Church causes \_\_\_\_\_ and is typically \_\_\_\_\_.

Application on your own:

Read 2Peter 1:5-13. What do these verses say is necessary for us to grow to maturity?

Read 2Cor 5:10. How should the promise of this judgment alter the way you live today?

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But for right now, friends, I'm completely frustrated by your unspiritual dealings with each other and with God. You're acting like infants in relation to Christ, capable of nothing much more than nursing at the breast. Well, then, I'll nurse you since you don't seem capable of anything more. As long as you grab for what makes you feel good or makes you look important, are you really much different than a babe at the breast, content only when everything's going your way? When one of you says, "I'm on Paul's side," and another says, "I'm for Apollos," or "I trust Matt Heard more", or "Billy Graham is the closest thing to God I know," aren't you being totally infantile?

Who do you think Paul, or Apollos, or Matt or Billy is anyway? Servants, all of them, servants who waited on you as you gradually learned to entrust your lives to our mutual Master – the Lord Jesus Christ. We each carried out our servant assignments. I planted the seed, Apollos watered the plants, Matt allowed you to kick the tires before trying it out, Billy preached to the masses, but don't you see??? God made you grow. It's not the one who plants or the one who waters who is at the center of this process but God, who makes things grow. Planting and watering and selling a thought and preaching to the masses are menial servant jobs at minimum wages. What makes them worth doing is the God we are serving. You happen to be God's field in which we are working. I want to care for you like you were my own, but you are God's and I am also part of the field for he is causing me to grow.

Or, to put it another way, you are Gods house. Using the gift God gave me as a good architect and builder, I designed blueprints; Apollos is putting up the walls, Matt is texturing the walls and Billy is outside painting. Let each laborer who comes on the job take care to build on the foundation! Remember, there is only

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one foundation, the one already laid: Jesus Christ. Take particular care in picking out your building materials. Eventually there is going to be an inspection. If you use cheap or inferior materials, you will be discovered as one who takes short cuts. It will all point back to you. The inspection will be thorough and rigorous. You won't pass inspection with some of your short cut methods and cheap materials. If your work passes inspection, fine; if it doesn't, your part of the building will be torn out and started over. But you yourself won't be torn out; you'll survive – but just barely. You will come through smelling like you've been at the fire auction.

You realize, don't you, that you are the temple of God, and God himself is present in you? No one will get by with vandalizing God's temple, you can be sure of that. God's temple is sacred – and you, remember, are the temple. Be mindful of spiritual, mental and physical destruction that you willingly choose.

Don't fool yourself. Don't think that you can be wise merely by being up-to-date with the intellect of this time. Be God's fool – that's the path to true wisdom. What the world calls smart, God calls stupid and insignificant. It's written in Scripture,

He exposes the artful deception of tricksters.

The Master sees through the smoke screens of the know-it-alls.

I don't want to hear any of you bragging about yourself or anyone else. Everything is already yours as a gift – Paul, Apollos, Peter, the world, life, death, the present, the future – all of it is yours, and you are privileged to be in union with Christ, who is in union with God.

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