

Discovering God's Wisdom

STUDIES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Lesson 3 1 Corinthians 3

Searching the Scriptures for hidden treasure

"I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure." Psalm 119:162

In chapter 2, Paul spoke of two types of people: those with the Holy Spirit and those without. Those with the Spirit are believers; those without the Spirit are non-believers. In our chapter this week we again see two types of people, but this time Paul is speaking of two types of *believers*: those who are *controlled* by the Spirit and those who are not. Paul calls the one who is controlled by the Spirit *spiritual* and the one who is not *carnal* or *fleshly*. The Corinthian church, according to Paul, is carnal, controlled by their flesh.

First Day: Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

1. In verses 1-3, through his words to the Corinthian church, Paul gives us a *picture* of the carnal Christian. List the things that describe this type of Christian:
2. What example does Paul again point to as evidence that this church is carnal? v. 4
3. People love to have heroes. We love to make celebrities. But Paul and Apollos weren't celebrities. What word did Paul use to describe his position among the Corinthians? v. 5

The word for ministers here—*diakonos*—is translated *servants* in the NASB. The people at Corinth were looking at Paul and Apollos as celebrities—but in actuality they were their servants!

4. In Matthew 20:25-28 Jesus gives us the concept of servant-leadership.
 - a. What perspective does He give the one who desires to lead?
 - b. How was Jesus our example in this?
5. Paul and Apollos each had a task in regard to the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 3:6).
 - a. What was Paul's job? (What does this mean?)
 - b. What was Apollos' job? (What does this mean?)
 - c. Who caused the growth in this church? Explain this principle. (You may see John 15:4-5.)

Making It Personal... (Answer only one.)

- ❖ *For the person in leadership:* From what you have studied today, how will you look at your position? Are there any changes you may need to make in your leadership perspective as a result of today's lesson?

- ❖ *For the person who would like to be a leader:* What insight has today's lesson given you into what it is to be a leader? Is there anything you can do now to prepare yourself for leadership?

Paul simplifies the concept of leadership. He shows us that leaders are fellow workers in the service of God. God is the one who accomplishes the work. Oswald Chambers gives us a clue as to our part in the process. He says, "*Put yourself in the place where God's Almighty power will come through you.*" That makes it pretty simple!

Digging Deeper

In Romans 7:14-25, Paul, using himself as an example, gives us a picture of the carnal Christian. Read this passage and answer these questions:

- ❖ Describe the struggle.

- ❖ Have you been here? Are you here now? Look up these verses for the answer to the dilemma:
Romans 7:25a
Romans 8:6
Galatians 5:16
John 15:4-5

- ❖ Do your best to summarize today's passage in a couple of sentences.

Pearl of Great Price

"I say then: 'Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.'"
Galatians 5:16. This is your memory verse—begin memorizing it today!

Second Day: Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

In verse 9, Paul ended with the principle that he and Apollos were fellow workers in the service of God. The analogy he was drawing, at that point, was of the Corinthian church being a field (God's field) and of he and Apollos being the farmers of that field. Paul finishes his thoughts in verse 9 by changing metaphors. Now he will look at the church as a building (God's building). Both metaphors point to the fact that the Corinthian church belonged to God and that God was their ultimate leader.

1. In verse 10, Paul calls himself a wise master builder who, by the grace of God, laid a foundation among the Corinthians. What was the foundation he laid? v. 11 (You may also see 1 Corinthians 2:2.)

2. In Matthew 16:16, what was the testimony of Peter concerning Jesus Christ?
 - a. What did Jesus say about Peter's words?
Matthew 16:17
Matthew 16:18a
 - b. Some have taken this to mean that *Peter* would be the foundation of the church. How does 1 Corinthians 3:11 disprove this theory?
 - c. What do you think it was in this Matthew passage (16:15-18) that Jesus was referring to when He said, "*Upon this rock I will build My church?*"

3. Paul gives a strong warning to the leaders of the Corinthian church and to those in church leadership today. What is his warning? v. 10b
 - a.. How does verse 12 help you understand the concept of building carefully?
 - b. Is verse 12 referring to the quantity of Christian work, or the quality? What does this mean to you?
 - c. In this chapter, Paul is speaking to carnal Christians, controlled by their flesh, versus spiritual Christians, controlled by the Holy Spirit. How does this thought help you to understand the different ways one can approach Christian work?

Making It Personal...

4. According to verse 13, every one's work will eventually be tested, revealing its quality. The word for "reveal" speaks of *taking off the cover*. On the Day of Judgment, the cover will be taken off and things will be seen as they really are.
 - a. In regard to both your Christian service and your walk with the Lord, what are your motives:
 - ✓ To be seen by others?
 - ✓ To be pleasing to God?
 - b. When you consider serving others, where is your heart:
 - ✓ Love for God and for His body?
 - ✓ Fear of not doing enough or not being accepted by God?

- c. Upon whom are you dependant for your service and for your personal Christian growth:
 - ✓ Yourself?
 - ✓ God's Spirit?

- d. Are you building predominantly with gold, silver, and precious stones, or wood, hay, and straw? Note any changes you might need to make in your *thinking* in order to have the proper perspective in your Christian life and service.

Digging Deeper

- ❖ On that day when our works will be tested by fire, it is probable that most of us will suffer some loss, but we will also be rewarded! Look up the following verses which speak of heavenly reward:

Matthew 16:27

Matthew 25:21, 23

1 Corinthians 4:5b

Colossians 3:23-24

Ephesians 6:8

Hebrews 11:6

- ❖ Do your best to summarize today's passage in a couple of sentences.

Third Day: Read 1 Corinthians 3:16-23

Later in his letter to the Corinthians, Paul speaks to them of the fact that they are *individually* indwelt by God's Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). But here in 1 Corinthians 3:16 the word he uses for *you* is plural. Paul is speaking here of the collective church at Corinth. The very nature of the *church* is that it is the dwelling place of God.

One commentator said, "*Corinth boasted many pagan temples and shrines, but there was only one temple for God—the Corinthian Christians were it!*" (Life Application Bible Commentary)

1. What difference might it have made for this divisive, celebrity-oriented church to realize that, as a body, they were the dwelling place of God?

The Amplified Bible translates 1 Corinthians 3:16 this way: "*Do you not discern and understand that you [the whole church at Corinth] are God's temple (His sanctuary), and that God's Spirit has His permanent dwelling in you [to be at home in you, collectively as a church and also individually]?*"

2. What will happen to the one who defiles God's temple, the church? v. 17
 - a. Why?

In verses 18-20, Paul returns to the theme of *wisdom*, tying his thoughts to that which has gone before. We realize that it was the *worldly wisdom* of this *worldly church* that was in danger of defiling it. Remember again Paul’s warning in verse 10, “*Be careful how you build* (NASB).” The Corinthians weren’t being careful at all. They were trying to build on the foundation of Jesus Christ with worldly methods and worldly wisdom (wood, hay, and straw).

3. What is God’s appraisal of worldly wisdom?

verse 19

verse 20

4. In verse 21 Paul says, “*Therefore...*” Therefore *what*?

a. Why? v. 21b

5. If you, in Christ, are the temple of the Holy Spirit, what does Paul (or Apollos, or Cephas, or anyone else) have that you don’t have? Explain.

a. List the things that Paul says belong to this Corinthian church (and to you as a Christian): v. 22

It’s interesting to see things turned around from the way the Corinthians had been looking at them. They didn’t belong to the church leaders they were following, those leaders belonged to them! Paul and Apollos were *their* servants, as was every other thing pertaining to life—servants of the Christian.

b. How does Paul express this same wonderful idea in Romans 8:38-39?

Making It Personal...

The Amplified Bible translates 1 Corinthians 3:22-23 this way: “*Whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas (Peter), or the universe or life or death, or the immediate and threatening present, or the [subsequent and uncertain] future—all are yours.*”

6. How do the thoughts of Paul in verses 21-23 and Romans 8:38-39 give you hope and courage as you live in this uncertain world and time?

Digging Deeper

❖ Do your best to summarize today’s passage in a couple of sentences.

❖ See if you can summarize the heart of this entire chapter.

Fourth Day:

Deeper Discoveries

This portion of the lesson will take a closer look at some of the words in the chapter. You will need to have your tools—or resources at hand: more than one Bible translation, a dictionary or Bible dictionary, concordance, atlas, and encyclopedia. (If you don't have all of these, simply use what you do have to enrich your learning.)

Using the tools you have at hand, do some digging into the following terms. Start with your dictionary (or Bible dictionary), and then look up the references to add to your understanding. If you have additional resources, you may want to keep digging (making notes in the margins). After you've completed the investigative process, write a definition in your own words. Your investigation in today's lesson will lay the groundwork for tomorrow's study, so be as thorough as you can in your research.

Carnal (3:1)

How does the dictionary define **carnal**? _____

What does the Bible have to say? Romans 7:14-15; 1 Peter 2:11; James 4:1-3; 2 Corinthians 10:3-4

❖ Write your own definition: _____

Babes (in Christ) (3:1)

Dictionary definition: _____

What does the Bible have to say? Luke 10:21; Matthew 21:16; 1 Peter 2:2a; Ephesians 4:14

❖ Write your own definition: _____

Milk (3:2)

Dictionary definition: _____

What does the Bible have to say? 1 Peter 2:2-3; Hebrews 5:12-13 _____

❖ Write your own definition: _____

Solid food (Meat) (3:2)

Dictionary definition: _____

What does the Bible have to say? Hebrews 5:13-14; John 4:32-34; Isaiah 55:1-2 _____

❖ Write your own definition: _____

Reward (3:8, 14)

Dictionary definition: _____

What does the Bible have to say? Matthew 5:11-12; 6:1, 2, 5; Mark 9:41; Luke 6:35;
2 John 7-8; Revelation 22:12 _____

❖ Write your own definition: _____

Fifth Day:

Heartsearch

Are you walking worthy of your high calling? Are you applying the wisdom of God to your daily life? Get ready for some self-discovery! This portion of the lesson will give you the opportunity to examine your heart, express your mind, and experience your lesson, by applying what you are learning to everyday circumstances.

Watching Your Diet!

Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 for review.

One of the signs of spiritual maturity is the ability to share truth with others. Not all Christians have the gift of teaching, but all are called to share what they learn from the Word of God with those around them. Is it hard for a child to share? You bet it is—they have to be taught how to do it. But sadly, some Christians are saved for many years and still have not learned *how* to share their faith with others. Instead of helping others to grow, they are in need of learning *again* the simple teachings of the Christian life. Instead of going on to maturity, they have remained in the childhood stage.

One of the ways to tell a mature Christian from one who is not so mature is by watching how they handle their *spiritual diet*. Do they regulate their scriptural feedings on a consistent daily basis, or do they just gorge themselves occasionally? Do they have a balanced diet based on the whole counsel of God or one that is picky, based on what seems palatable at the moment, throwing out the rest simply because it isn't quite to their immediate liking? God's Word asks the question: "*Why spend your money on food that does not give you strength? Why pay for food that does you no good? Listen, and I will tell you where to get food that is good for the soul!*" (Isaiah 55:2 NLT) Real *soul food* is nourishment for the soul resulting in growth and overall health to the body. It consists of a daily, well-planned, and balanced diet based upon the *whole counsel* of God.

It is right to give a new baby time to grow and for that one, milk is fine. Hebrews 5:12-14 speaks of what we might call the *baby food diet*: "*the first principles of the oracles of God,*" as being milk, necessary for those not yet ready for solid food. But after a time, a developing child needs to cut their teeth on something solid, for only those who have teeth can enjoy meat. A mature adult can still make use of milk—still learn from the basic fundamentals of the Christian faith—but we must not stop there, it won't satisfy us!

As we begin to grow in the Word through application of the Scriptures to our daily lives, we also begin to exercise our "spiritual senses." We gain understanding and discernment in our use of the Word. A tiny baby lacks discernment and cannot tell right from wrong or good from harmful. An immature believer will listen to a preacher and not be able to tell whether or not they are hearing sound doctrine.

1. According to Psalm 34:8, how do we begin to use our spiritual senses?
2. How satisfying is God's Word to our taste buds? Psalm 119:103
3. What other *senses* have been given to us to help us spiritually? Matthew 13:16

As we feed on God's Word and apply it to our daily lives, our spiritual senses are exercised and become strong. Paul referred to this growth process as exercising ourselves toward godliness.

4. Look up 1 Timothy 4:6-8 and note what Paul is saying about your *nourishment* and *exercise*.

5. At what stage would you consider yourself in your growth as a Christian?
New babe Toddler Young Adult Mature Believer
 - a. Does *milk* or *meat* best represent your current spiritual diet? (In other words, do you live more on Bible stories or Bible doctrine?)

The ability to discern between good and evil is a vital part of growing to Christian maturity. The nation of Israel in Moses' day lacked discernment and failed to inherit what God had promised and provided for them. The Corinthian believers were in danger of making a similar mistake.

It is impossible to stand still and remain stationary in the Christian life: we are either *growing forward* and *enjoying* God's blessings, or we are going backward and wandering about aimlessly. Which are you doing?

6. Proverbs 24:30-34 gives a clear picture of the person who is lazy and does not use the resources God has given. What warning is there for you here?

7. According to Hebrews 6:1, what are you encouraged to do?
 - a. How does 2 Timothy 3:14-15 add to this?

Heartsearch: Briefly look back over your *entire lesson* before filling in the following.

❖ *Examine your heart*

What has God put His finger on through your study and brought to light in a new way? (What did you learn about yourself?)

❖ *Express your mind*

What change has this week's study brought about in your thought process? What difference will this make in how you view your current circumstances?

❖ *Experience your lesson*

What nugget of wisdom from your lesson do you plan to apply to your life?

Sixth Day:

Laying Up Treasure

*“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.
For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Matthew 6:19-21*

The highest calling of the believer, and the most important way to lay up treasure in heaven, is through intercessory prayer. You will want to give thoughtful consideration to what you record on this page, as it will be the basis for your prayer during group time. The format for this day of your lesson is based upon the ACTS method of prayer: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. In addition to these four, there is space provided for you to keep track of answered prayers, people and things you want to pray for in the coming week, and also a place to write out this week’s Scripture verse from memory.

Using the lesson as your focal point, write out your prayer for each of the following:

I praise God for (an aspect of His marvelous character) _____

I confess to God that I _____

I thank God for _____

I am asking God _____

Praise for answered prayer: _____

People/things I want to pray for this coming week: _____

Pearl of Great Price: _____

Notes