

# Sermon Notes

## BUILDING UPON CHRIST IN GOD

*1 Corinthians 3: 1-23*

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### 1) Fruitlessness at Corinth (vv. 1-4) — The Problem

- Recall: Schisms and divisions (1: 10-17) in the church of Corinth
- They have real practical consequences: result in believers not edified, ministry not done, the lost not evangelized. After all, the Corinthians were too busy posturing (in modern millennials is called “virtue-signaling”) and fighting each other
- To be divided shows the childish behavior and understanding of the Corinthians
  - There are just behaving like “mere men” (v. 4) — what the world does — fighting for supremacy, one-upmanship
  - Thus, Paul has to give them “milk” — food befitting those immature in the faith
  - This “milk” does not indicate that what Paul is proclaiming is basic and simple truths, only for a new believer to go through, and not for those who have been believers for a long time.
    - NO! “Milk” is nourishing, refers to foundational teachings
    - The “mature” Corinthians must likewise have thought themselves very spiritual, yet Paul rebuked them as immature
    - Paul is bringing them back to the foundations in order that they might go back to the basics and right what they have gotten wrong, which had led them to this path of strife and sin
  - Thus, where we might see fruitlessness and failure, it is always good to go back to the basics, the foundations, to see if perhaps we have gotten something wrong
  - **Application:** If we personally feel fruitless, perhaps it is time to re-examine our lives and ministry according to the basics of the Christian faith and life? Do not assume you already know the Gospel message and don’t have to listen to it again. Listen to it, and delight yourself again in remembrance of God’s grace towards you, that he saved you from your sin and His wrath

### 2) God’s foundation for ministry (vv. 5-17) — The solution

- Foundation is apostolic, founded on the teachings of the Apostles
  - Thus, it is founded on Scripture, which in the NT Epistles is the words of the teachings of the Apostles written down.
  - Paul as the skilled “master builder” — the architect
- Foundation is Christ (v.11)
  - Built upon Christ
  - Christ-centered, focused on the Gospel
  - Hope of the Gospel (1:5-9), which is that God will raise us up in glory at the end
- How should we build upon this foundation? The method
- Just like building a building, our service and ministry are like various materials we use to build upon the foundation of the faith

- In the analogy: Some materials will last, some wouldn't
  - Gold, silver, precious stones will last
  - Wood, hay and straw wouldn't
  - What do they refer to? Certainly everyone who is doing ministry sincerely thinks he is serving God? The Corinthians were fighting over which teacher is the best teacher of the Christian faith
    - Thus, some service is actually done rightly, others are done wrongly
    - Both on same foundation
    - Gold, silver, precious stones: Done according to God's way
    - Wood, hay, straw: Done wrongly
- But only on the Day of Judgment it will be revealed (v. 13)
  - There is no division in the list between gold, silver, precious stones, and wood, hay straw. Thus it is not as if certain materials are chosen, others are not, but rather the imagery is that all the materials may be present
  - Only in that last day will we know what is the nature of our service and ministry
  - Whether we built truly or falsely upon Christ
- **Side note:** 3:10-15 is not about the RC doctrine of purgatory
  - Judgment of one's work, not the person. The person will surely be saved
  - Only on last day, not a long period beginning with one's physical death
- Right and wrong ministry; Approved vs unapproved ministry
  - This is not about salvation (v. 15; "suffer loss," but "will be saved")
  - We must do ministry only by God's way
  - Only ministry done according to God's way will endure the test
    - Note: it does not mean that those that seem to last will endure. E.g. JW, Mormonism
    - The real test is not the test of the passage of human time, but the what will happen on the Last Day
  - What does the Scripture say about what we wish to do?
- In the Corinthian church, we see one problem of unapproved ministry
  - The Corinthians attacking each other, destroying God's temple (vv. 16-7)
  - Instead of recognizing how all who serve Christ truly serve in differing capacities
    - "[Paul] planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (v. 6)

### 3) The glorious bounty of God for our good (vv. 18-23) — God's aid

- The mystery of the foolishness of God
  - "catches the wise in their craftiness" (v. 19)
    - Citation of **Job 5:13**, which interestingly enough is not a saying by Job, but a saying by Eliphaz, one of Job's critics
      - He is not necessarily wrong in what he says, just wrong application to Job's situation
    - God's knowledge as foundation, not our own thoughts (1:18-31)
- The thoughts of the wise are futile (v. 20)
  - The "soulish" thoughts (2:14), the "wisdom of the world" (1:21)
  - Greek better translated as "Futile," alludes to Ecclesiastes — "Vanity of vanities" (same word μάταιος in the LXX)
  - Citation of Ps. 94:11 — "the futile thoughts of man"

- **Ps. 94:8-11**
  - compared with the knowledge of God's law and covenant mercy
- BUT for those who live by the Spirit,
  - All things are yours
  - You do not fight with each other in factions, but acknowledge what God has done and receive all for your good
  - You stand firm in the rich blessings of God upon you, the indwelling of the Spirit for your good (2:15-16)
  - And then all things rebound to God for His glory (v. 23 — “all Christ's is God's)
  - **Application:** So use your gifts, according to God's method of ministry, to serve him. What do you have? Use it according to Scripture, and serve, not for salvation, but to glorify the God who loves you and saves you