

## Topic

Dependence on God's wisdom

## Theme

God expects believers to depend on God' s wis­ dom for spiritual growth and faithful service.

## Desired Learner Response

The learner will purpose to depend on God's wis­ dom for spiritual growth and ministry.

Materials

* Resources 1, 2, and 5
* Visuals 2 and 3
* Gold wedding ring
* Hay, leaf, or grass

**Back to the Basics**

## Scripture Focus

1 Corinthians 3

## Summary

Paul exposed team church's carnality. They failed to use God's wisdom to grow spiritually, which leadto their emphasis on personalities instead of Christ. Paul explained servant ministry to them and then exalted God's wisdom as the only option for growing spiritually and ministering faithfully.

#### Outline

1. Paul Exposed Corinth's Carnal Ministry (3:1-4)
   1. Reasons for carnality (3:1, 2)
   2. Results of carnality (3:3, 4)
2. **Paul Explained Servant Ministry (3:5-17)**
   1. Build on the right Man (3:5-11)
   2. Build with the right materials (3:12- 13)
   3. Build with the right motive (3:14-17)

**Ill. Paul Exalted God's Wisdom (3:18- 23)**

1. Man's wisdom is foolish (3:18- 20)
2. God's wisdom causes flourishment (3:21-23)

#### Memory Verse

*"For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building"*

*(1 Corinthians 3:9).*

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**GETTING STARTE D** .. ·· \_

### Building with the Best

Many followers of false religions will use the absolute best materials and craftsmanship in building structures dedicated to their gods. Budd hists, for ex­ ample, use lots of gold in their temples to Buddha. Obviously, their sa crifice and service to their gods is in the end worthless. Their building efforts will amount to nothing in eternity.

**VISUAL:** Dis p lay vis ual 2 to s how an ornate pagan struct ure from Bangkok, Thailand. Dis p lay vis ual 3 to show a si mple hut made of grass and mud .

**ASK:** Ho w lo ng would you expect ea ch of these struct ures to last ?

The Bible passage for today metaphorically compares the process of building a structure to a believers' service for God. Some believers*build* th eir *structure* with gold, silver,and precious stones, and others *build* with wood, hay,and stubble. Paul's point is that God wants our lives to count for something that will last for eternity.

We will learn how we can serve God in a way that *builds* with gold, silver, and precious stones instead of wood, hay, and stubble so that our lives will count for eternity to the glory of God .

### With This Ring

Before class, twist a piece of hay, grass, or leaf into the shape of a wedding band. As class begins, have a few couples share their engagement stories.

**ASK:** Lad ies , what did t he gold ring co mm un ic ate to you about your fut ure hus ba nd's inte ntio ns?

**ASK:** Me n, what sac rifices d id you make to be able to a ffo rd a gold ring? Disp la y the wedding band made of hay.

**ASK:** Ladies, how would you feel if you had re ce ived this ring from your fut ure h usba nd?

Gold co mmunicates dedication because it takes sacrifice to get it. Givin g up a piece of hay to make a ring requires no sacrifice at all.

The lesson for today presents a meta phor that compar es gold to hay. God de­ sires the type of dedicatio n and sacrifice that is worthy of gold.

# SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

### Paul Exposed Corinth's Carnal Ministry (3:1-4)

* + 1. **Reasons for carnality (3:1, 2)**

First Corint hians 2 ended with the truth that the believer has the *mind of Christ*

(2:16). The Holy Spirit gives the believer the ability to understand spiritual things so accurately that his understanding aligns with Christ's understanding of truth. As noted at the end of the previous lesson,that amazing truth should drive be­ lievers to study God's Word diligently. But not all believers take advantage of such an opportunity.The church at Corinth was filled with believers who had never learned to grow spiritually and serve God faithfully.

Paul told the Corinthian Christians he could not speak to them as *spiritual*

people (3:1),or believers who had learned to live according to God's wisdom and under the control of the Spirit. Instead, they were *carnal* (3:1), a word mean ing *of the flesh* (cf. Rom. 8:12, 13). They lived according to human wisdom and were the re­ by acting like lost Greeks.

**READ:** John 3:5, 6. **ASK:** What two categories of peop le are ident ified in these verses? (0 3) *Those who are in the flesh and those who are in the Spirit.*

**READ:** 1 Corint hians 3:1. **ASK:** What does Paul imp ly by comparing the Corinthi ­ ans to bab ies?(04) *That they were believers whohad never grown upspiritually*

Although at least five years had passed since Paul first preached in Corinth, the Corinthian believers were still in their spiritual infancy. Paul had to feed them *milk,* meaning basic spiritual principles, because they could not digest *meat,* meaning spiritual truths for maturing believers (1Cor. 3:2). A five-year stretch as a baby, physically or spiritually, is not normal.

**ASK:** How doe s a five -year-old's know led ge and behavior differ from a baby's know ledge and behavior? (05) *The baby is nearly helpless and depends onothers to feed him. The five-year-oldis rather independent and able to feed himself so he might grow physically*

**ASK:** How should the know ledge and behavior of a Ch ri stian, five years old in the Lord, diffe r from the knowledge and behavior of a new convert? (0 6) *The Christian who is five years old in the Lord should possess understanding of some of thedeeper truths ofScripture, show the ability to apply them, and exhibit the fruit of theSpirit as* a *result.*

The Corinthians sinned against the knowledge that Paul had imparted to them during the year and a half he spent with them (cf. Acts 18:11). His personal minis­ try gave them a tremendous opportunity to mature spiritua lly.Yet many of them squandered the opportunity and thereby remained babes in Christ. They needed to submit to the Spirit in order to mature as believers.

### Results of carnality (3:3, 4)

The Corinthian Christians' carnality was evident not only in their lackof spiritual knowledge and growth but also in their bickering. Paul indicted them for their carnali­ ty, charging: *There* is *among you envying, and strife,and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?* (3:3). As we saw earlier (1:11,12), the Corinthians formed factions around personalities (3:4). Some screamed, *We follow Paul!* Others shouted, *Apollos* is *our man!*

Forming factions withinthe church was the result of the Corinthians' carnality. They were saved out of Greek culture, but they never stopped living like Greeks in that they exaltedand followed human leaders. They perceived diffe rencesin Paul, Apollos, and others, aligned themselves according to those perceived diffe rences, and then claimed superiority in the church because of their alignment. That is exact­ ly what the Greeks did. Theyalignedthemselves according to philosophers and then claimed intellectual superiority based on theirchosen philosopher.

Members of one faction within team church became envious when another faction grew or seemed to have strong reason to claim superiority. In trying to change the balanceof power, they caused trouble in the church. Church became a competition between teams rather than a place to grow stronger as one team.

Jersey Confusion

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**RESOURCE:** Disp lay resource 2 to review that the be lievers in Corint h w ere essenti all y p u tt ing on diff erent jerseys and playing against each other when

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**ASK:** How likely would you be to join a church known for envy and strife? (Q7)

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**READ:** Ephesians 4:1- 3. **ASK:** What can believersdo to safeguard church unity? (Q8) *They need to live according to theSpirit.*

Churches todaystill have problems with carnality. How carnality expresses itself in the church is different because we live in a different culture, but the solu­ tion for the carnal church is always the same. The church needs to submit to the Spiritand grow according to God's wisdom as found in God's Word.

### Paul Explained Servant Ministry (J:5-17)

Paul continued by explaining what it means to serve God in a church. He clar­ ified again his role and then pointed the church to Christ, the only Man on which they should build their ministry.

* + 1. **Build on the right Man (J:5-11)**

Paul used two metaphors to communicate to the carnal Corinthians. He wanted to be abundantly clear so they might be able to digest his teaching and grow in their spiritual understanding and practice. Perhaps we could say that the metaphor s represented different kinds of *strained fruits and vegetables* to help the Corinthians believers move from *baby food* to *solid food.*

Paul opened this section with a planting metaphor. The Corinthians were familiar with agriculture. They cultivated fields and grew grapes in the lands below their city.

Paul referred to himself a nd Apollos as workers in God's field. They were si mply the human instruments God had used to prepare a spiritual harvest in

Corinth. Paul had planted the gospel seed; Apollos had watered it; but God made it grow (3:5, 6). Paul's point is that neither he nor Apollos were good foundat ions for building a church ministry.

**READ:** 1 Corint hians 3:7. **ASK:** How do the workers in God 's fie ld compare to God? (Q9) *The workers are powerless to bring fruit from their labors. Only God can bring about growth and lasting results.*

Paul's line of reasoning also showed how silly it was for factions to follow either him or Apollos. The people in the factions claimed to be followers of common field laborers. Only fools would take pride in being the follower of a common laborer.

Paul and Apollos had worked as one in God's field. They were a team, and both would receive rewards for their faithful service (3:8). Paul assured the Corin· thian believers that he and Apollos were coworkers with God, and the Corinthians were the field in which they labored for God (3:9a).

Switching to a construction metaphor in middle of verse 9, Paul compared the Corinthian church to a building. *Ye are God's building,* he wrote. The illustration is based on the idea that a building project demands teamwork. Architects, engi­ neers, contractors, foremen, and crew members must cooperate, each contributing his skills where they will do the most good. Not one of them has the freedom to make major decisions or act independently. And all of them work for God, the building's owner.

God owns both the field and the building (3:9), meaning the Corinthians

belonged to God. As the owner, God would make His field productive and His building tall and strong in accordance with the Corinthians' level of submission to the Spirit. The more they submitted to the Spirit, the more productive and stronger they would become.

Paul gave some focus to the building metaphor by drawing attention to the

importance of a building's foundation (3:10), the part of a building that provides stability and strength. The stability of a church's ministry also depends upon its foundation. If it is built on the Rock, Christ Jesus, it will endure and enjoy God's blessing. If it is built on any other man, it will fail.

Paul told the Corinthians that he and other leaders were simply builders, but Jesus Christ was the church's foundation (3:10). Paul had laid the foundation by introducing Christ to the Corinthians (cf. Rom. 15:20), but Paul was not their foundation. Christ alone is the foundation upon which the believer can rest his salvation (3:11). And once confident that his life is set upon that foundation, a

believer's potential for service and growth is virtually limitless. Paul counseled the Corinthians to utilize God's wisdom in building a glorious superstructure that will testify to the strength of Christ, their foundation.

**ASK:** What might be some evidence that a church is being built onChrist? (Q 10) *Its members are active and united in purpose; its efforts are fruitful in that people are being saved and discipled.*

* + 1. **Build with the right materials (3:12-13)**

Paul emphasized the importance of using the right quality of materials in God's building. A Christian can build with either *gold, silver,* and *precious stones* or with *wood, hay,* and *stubble* (3:12). The first class of materials is valuable; the second is in­ ferior. The first endures; the second expires. Paul's point is that all building activity is not profitable activity. Quality counts in erecting God's building.

Paul is talking specifically about the Corinthian leaders and members *(God's building,* 3:9) building each other up (cf. Eph. 4:11- 16).The gold, silver, and precious stones represent God's wisdom. The wood, hay, and stubble represent human wis-

dam. Work based on God's wisdom is done for God's glory and in His s trength. The Corinthians had predominantly been using the latter set of materials. They minis­ tered in their own strength and for personalglory. Paul made sure they understood the eternal consequencesof building with such *flammable* products.

God designed the Judg­ ment Seat of Christ for church age believers. It will take place in Heaven following the Rapture.

**ASK:** When have you regretted using inferior building materials? What were the consequences? (Ql 1)

Christ, the foundation of the church, will inspect each believer's part in His building proje ct (1 Cor. 3:13). The Judgment Seat of Christ is the setting for such inspection (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10). The penetrating gaze of Christ will test the quality of a believer'sbuilding mate rials. He will *burn up* any *flammable* materials, leaving

only the part of the building that was constructed of gold, silver, or precious stone.

**READ:** 1 Corinthians 3:13. **ASK:** How accurat e do you think Christ 's judg­ ment will be? (Ql 2) *Perfectly accurate. There will be no fooling Christ.*

### Build with the right motive (3:14-17)

If a person's building mater ials pass inspection, then he will be eligible for reward (1 Cor. 3:14) . If the materials burn up, then the believer will suffer loss of re­ ward (3:15.) This does not mean the believer will lose hissalvation. Paul assured: *If any man's work shall be burned .* . . *he himself shall be saved; yet so asby fire* (3:15 ). Salvation does not depend upon our record of service but on the Savior's redeem­ ing grace. Our sins were covered at Calvary.

**ASK:** Is it possible to perform Christian service in a sinful way? Explain. (Ql 3) *Yes. A believercould do a good work but havesinful motives. A believer's motives are often hidden to everyone but God. God cannot be fooled.*

**ASK:** What are some wrong motives a believer might have for serving the Lord? (Ql 4) *A desire to be recognized; a desire for power; a desire for control; a desire to escape guilt .*

A sma ll quantity of gold, silver, and precious stones carries more value than a large quantity of wood, hay, and stubble. A ton of hay sells for less than an ounce of gold. Stubble is comple tely worthless. Obviously, rewa rds are based on the value of our works instead of the vastness of our works. It is better to do a few thing s faithfully and well for the Lo rd's glory than to do many things for

our own glory. Even little acts of se rvice prompted by the Spirit will be rewarded, whe reas big, showy deeds performed in the fles h will suffer loss (cf. 1 Cor.4 :1-5 ; Gal. 6:7-9).

**READ:** 1 Corint hian s 9:25; 1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20; 2 Timothy 4:7, 8; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4. **ASK:** What rewards are mentioned in these verses? (Ql 5) *The incorruptible crown, thecrown of rejoicing, thecrown of righteousnes,sthe crown of life, and the crown ofglory. See also Rev. 2:10 on the crown of life.*

Let us not miss the impact of this profound illustration that Paul used. By

building on the glorious foundation of Jesus Christ, we may construct out of our lives a spa rkling tower that will shine through the darkness of this world, embla­ zoned with the reflective glory of eternity. In eternity, that building will be trans­ lated into crowns we can use for all eternity as a mean s of glorifying God.

**RESOURCE:** Display reso urce 5 to rev ie w the impo rtance of building wit h th e right mater ials whe n se rving Go d.

To emphasize the importance of building on Jes us Christ, Paul compared the structure to a temple dedicated to God (3:16). The Spirit indwelt the temple. The Spirit also dwells in the church and in each individual believer who makes up the church. The church is the focus of God's activity in this age. He indwells and works through the church.

**READ:** 1 Cor inth ians 3:1 7. **ASK:** What warning did Paul give to le ade rs who might try to direct the c h urch to build on anyone but Jesus Chr ist ? (Ql 6) *He said God would destroy such leaders. Their efforts will prove fruitless.*

* 1. **Paul Exalted God's Wisdom (3:18-23)**
     1. **Man's wisdom is futile (3:18-20)**

Paul stated that people who depend on human wisdom for salvat ion and ministry think they are wise when they are actually deceived instead (3:18). Paul called on them to become *fools* so that they might become wise. He means that from the world's perspective they need to become what appears to be foolish in or­ der to become truly wise. The Greeks considered trusting in Jes us for salvation and serving Him to be incredibly foolish decisions. But from God's perspective, those who make such decisions are wise.

**READ:** 1 Corint hians 3:19, 20 . **ASK:** What does God thi nk of t hose who ap­ pear wise fro m the wo rld 's pers pective? (Ql 7) *God is threatenedby neither their ways nor their thoughts.*

* + 1. **God's wisdom causes flourishment (3:21- 23)**

Paul called on the Corinthians to live counterculturally by not seeking a mere man as an object of their boasting (3:21). Paul, Apollos, and Cephas were all part of the same team. They served Corinth and the rest of the Body of Christ so Christ's church might be edified. But none of them could rightly serve as the foundation for a church ministry.

Paul instructed team church to view him, Apollos, and Cephas as gifts from God for their growth in the Lord. In fact, God uses all Creation and the full range of life circumstancesto work all things for the good of His church and for His glory (3:22).God's wisdom provides the church with all it needs to flourish.

**READ:** 1 Co rinthians 3:21, 22 . **ASK:** Make a stateme nt summar izing how

i mpo rt ant t he chu rch is to God . (Q l 8) *The church is so important to God tha t He uses all His resources so His church might flourish.*

God uses all His ministers and resources to further His people because they all belong to Christ, and Christ in turn belongs to the Father (3:23). Both Christ and the Father have a vested interest in each believer. That means they both have a vested interest in our church. They care about this ministry, so they provided us with God's wisdom that we might grow and flourish.

# MAKING IT PERSONAL

### Build with Fireproof Materials

Paul's challenge to church leaders to be building according to God's wisdom is applicable to all believers. Each one of us is respons ible to contribute to the church's ministry. Christ will judge each of us for our parts in His building project.

**ASK:** I mag ine your work before Christ 's testing gaze. Will you be disappointed or enco urage d by what He dete rmines is wort hy of rewa rd? (Q l 9)

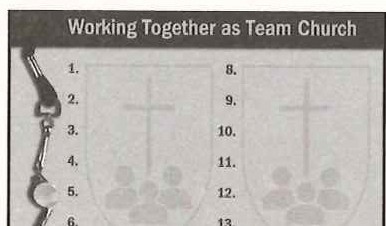
**ASK:** What actions might you need to take to ensure yo u are build ing wit h fire p roof build ing mate ria ls ? (Q20) *Check your motives for serving God; endeavor to glorify God above all else; focus on edifying others.*

### Rely on God's Wisdom

Underlying Paul's instructions to team church is the need to know and follow God' s wisdom. That means we need to be familiar with the Bible, the source of God's wisdom for team church.

**ASK:** What so urces of wis d o m compete for your devot io n? (Q21)

**ASK:** Ho w mig ht you devote yourse lf to God 's wis d o m found in His Word?



7.

(Q22)

### Summary and Memory Verse

Use resource 1 to review the response for this lesson: Depend on God's wisdom for growth and ministry.

Encourage your learners to memorize 1 Corinthians 3:9. Give them an opportu­ nity to quote the verse in class next week.