

**New Life Bible Study – Term Two**  
**Session Eight: 1 Corinthians 3:5-17**



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**Title: The Church of God United**

Last week, we discussed about the spiritual man versus the natural man. The way a person thinks and lives will show whether they have the Spirit and are growing in maturity in Christ. No one truly comprehends what is truly God's except by the Spirit of God.

The natural person does what comes naturally. The spiritual person does what comes supernaturally. The carnal/ fleshly person does what comes unnaturally.

Paul says in chapter 3: 1 - 4, that he could not address the Corinth as spiritual people but as people of the flesh or as infants in Christ. He says that fed them with milk, not solid food because they were not ready for it since they still of the flesh. They behave in human way with their jealousy and strife (conflict) that they want to follow Paul and another to follow Apollos.

The human wisdom that they have is not keeping them with the truth which is God's words and His ways.

**Key Text – I Corinthians 3: 5 – 17**

In one of the previous weeks, we saw about the division in the church but today we will be studying on the topic – The church of God united.

Paul uses three metaphors to describe the church of God in this passage that we just read.

**1. The church is God's field (3:5-9)**

Paul starts the passage with the question: What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? He himself gives the answers: Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task.

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They are the servants who came to serve you. Paul brings out a concrete of the prevailing order. He says that you are not the servants of Paul, or Apollos or Cephas or the apostles but they are your servants whom Jesus has assigned to each one so that you can come to believe in God.

Each one came with the gift that God has given them. God has assigned different things to each of them as the parts of the body as said in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

**a) We are servants who work together (3: 6 – 8)**

In verse 6 - 8, Paul focuses on how God used his servants in the church at Corinth. He compares them to a farmer.

He says I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. The one who plants and waters is anything (in others words, nothing). The one who plants and waters has a common purpose and they will be rewarded or receive their wages (ESV) according to their own labor.

We are working as God’s servants and working together as assigned by him. We are not in competition with one another. Paul brings the understanding of the unity in church rather than the division – I belong to Paul and you belong to Apollos.

**b) God is the Lord who gives the growth (3: 6-7)**

In God’s field, the Lord’s servants do their part by planting or watering faithfully. When a farmer plants a seed, and waters it, he really does not make it grow. The miracle of life does that. All the farmer can do is provide the right environment for growth, and trust for its growth. We do the same thing in ministering Jesus to other people. We can’t make them to grow spiritually. But only God makes things grow.

Matthew 9: 38 says he is the Lord of the harvest. Compared to God, Paul and Apollos amount to nothing. God is the one who makes us to grow. The Church is God’s field.

**2. The church is God’s building (3:9-15)**

Paul shifts from an agricultural image to an architectural image in verses 9 to 15. He switches the metaphor from a farmer to a builder.

**a) The foundation is Christ (3: 9-11)**

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In Verse 10, Paul says that by the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care.

Paul preached to them first, saw them being baptized. He laid the foundation. Someone is building on it. They choose how to build on it with care. He puts the responsibility on the builder. The builder needs to have God's spirit on how they build on the foundation.

Verse 11 says no one can lay the foundation other than what is laid which is the foundation of Jesus Christ. Paul preached the gospel of Jesus Christ, people came to faith, born again, baptized, the church is built.

**b) Our construction must be careful (3: 12 -13)**

According to verses 12 and 13 - The builder builds the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay and straw. Their work will be manifested on the Day of the Lord. The day of judgement will disclose the quality of each person's work because it will be revealed with fire.

Paul makes the church at Corinth understand that the apostles like Paul, Cephas or Apollos are the servants of God who came to serve them. Each ministers have different gifts and ministries. Uses them to plant and water the seed, the people. But God who is the supreme hero makes it to grow.

We have the responsibility to build on the laid foundation right because on the day of judgement we will be judged on what we have built – what we teach or preach. Our works will be burned with fire to test what sort of work we have built on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

**c) God's evaluation will be correct (3: 14 – 15)**

Wood, hay and straw will be burned by fire. But the work built with gold, silver and precious stones will survive. He is not talking about the materials but how strong and deeply we are building the foundation of Christ.

According to verses 14 and 15 – If anyone's work that he has built survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will experience loss but he

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himself will be saved but only as through fire. Just as there are degrees of punishment in hell (Matthew 11: 20-24), there will be degrees of reward in heaven.

Paul is writing to Corinth, don't judge so soon by external appearance whether the builder is good or bad or whom you want to follow causing the division but one day their work will be manifested by fire.

God uses individual servants to build his church and will judge each person's work. However, God remains responsible for the growth of the church.

**3. The church is God's temple (3:16 -17)**

Paul introduces the third metaphor to describe the Lord's church is that of God's temple.

**a) We are His sanctuary (3: 16)**

Paul raises a rhetorical question - Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple?

The Greek word naos was translated as temple refers to the temple's inner sanctuary. Christians are God's special holy creation. We are God's temple. What an amazing statement of identity we have in Christ.

**b) We have His Spirit (3:16)**

Being the temple of God, the Spirit of God lives in us. The sovereign God of the universe dwells in a small, insignificant people called the church which is the temple of God.

**c) We are special (3: 17)**

God loves and cares deeply his church which was bought by the precious blood of his son Jesus Christ. Therefore, those who minister it as his servants take great care in how they are treating it.

Paul warns strongly, if anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him. Galatians: 1:8 – 9 says <sup>8</sup>but even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! <sup>9</sup>As

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we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!

**d) We are sacred (3:17)**

Paul concludes this section - for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.

Through faith in the crucified Christ, the church is separated from the world onto him for the purity of life and devotion. We belong to him. We together are the temple of God. If anyone defiles the unity of the church, God will discipline that person and will bring judgment on them.

**Memory Verse:** I Corinthians 3: 17

If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple (NIV).

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What role has the Lord currently given you to serve the church? Are you serving in that role well?
2. Do you think it would have been easy for Paul or Apollos to be jealous of the other's role? Why or why not? Have you ever been jealous of another's role? Why should you be joyful about where God has placed you?
3. How does verse 17 function as both a warning and a blessing?
4. Should Christians be motivated in ministry by the reward(s) God promises? Why and why not?
5. What is God saying to you today and what are you going to do about it?
6. Who can you tell what you have learned here over the next week?

**References**

Akin D, L and Merritt J, Christ- Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in I Corinthians (B & H Publishing Group, Tennessee, 2023)