SMITH FOR CHRIST

TEACHING THE WORD · LIVING IN THE LIGHT



DEEP DIVE

1 Corinthians

Chapter Three, Verses 1–23

God's Field, God's Building, God's Temple — infants who need milk, servants who plant and water, a foundation that cannot be moved, and a fire that tests every work

NASB 1995 | VERSE BY VERSE | FOUR VOICES | WITH DIAGRAMS

Paul tells a church proud of its wisdom that it is still in the nursery, takes the celebrity out of its preachers, and shows them a field, a building and a temple that all belong to God — with a fire coming that will test what every builder has put on the one foundation. Read through four teachers — **David Guzik**, **R.C. Sproul**, **C.H. Spurgeon** and **Matthew Henry** — with the Greek behind Paul's key words.

THE PASSAGE

1 Corinthians 3:1–23

infants · servants · foundation · temple · all yours

THE METHOD

Verse by Verse

Color-coded by teacher

WHAT'S INSIDE

Contents

Five movements from "infants in Christ" to "you belong to Christ"

—	**How to Read This Study** · *the four voices & their colors*	3
—	**Before the Passage** · *from the spiritual man of chapter 2 to the nursery of chapter 3*	3
I	**Still Infants** · *1 Corinthians 3:1–4 · infants and men of flesh*	4
II	**Servants in God's Field** · *1 Corinthians 3:5–9 · planting, watering, growth*	7
III	**One Foundation, One Fire** · *1 Corinthians 3:10–15 · the foundation and the fire*	9
IV	**You Are God's Temple** · *1 Corinthians 3:16–17 · the holy temple*	12
V	**All Things Are Yours** · *1 Corinthians 3:18–23 · wisdom, boasting, belonging*	13
VI	**The Passage in the Whole Bible** · *cross-references*	15
†	**At a Glance** · *the four voices side by side*	17
†	**Key Insights & Questions for the Table** · *discussion*	17
†	**Sources** · *where each voice comes from*	19



"Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" — 1 Corinthians 3:16

SECTION I · THE PASSAGE

1 Corinthians 3:1–23

God's Field, God's Building, God's Temple — The men are only servants, the foundation is Christ alone, the church is God's holy temple — and all things are yours

† How to Read This Study

This study walks 1 Corinthians 3 in 5 movements, in Paul's own order. Each movement opens with the full NASB 1995 text of those verses, marked with the Berean colors and shapes; then the Greek behind the key words; then the teachers, each in his own color — **David Guzik**, the pastor who walks the text verse by verse; **R.C. Sproul**, the theologian who presses every word for its doctrine; **C.H. Spurgeon**, the preacher who turns the doctrine into a call to the heart; and **Matthew Henry**, the Puritan commentator who gathers it into plain, practical counsel. The figures draw the argument so you can see where Paul is going. Read the Scripture first; then let each voice add its angle.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word
R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier Ministries
C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle
MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

HOW THIS STUDY IS MARKED
God — His character & actions
Command / instruction
Key repeated word
Sin / warning
Promise / blessing
Time / place / contrast

KEY VERSE · 1 CORINTHIANS 3:11

"For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

† Before the Passage

Chapters 1–4 are one long answer to a single report. "Chloe's people" had told Paul that the church in Corinth was splitting into camps: "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ" (1:11–12). Paul answered first with the cross, which turns the world's wisdom upside down (1:18–31), then with his own plain preaching (2:1–5), then with the wisdom God reveals by His Spirit (2:6–16). Chapter 2 ended with two kinds of men — the natural man who "does not accept the things of the Spirit of God" (2:14) and the spiritual man who "appraises all things" (2:15). Chapter 3 turns the lamp on the Corinthians themselves: for all their talk of wisdom, they are acting like neither. They are infants.

Paul planted the church himself on his second journey (Acts 18:1–11), staying a year and six months; Apollos, the eloquent Alexandrian "mighty in the Scriptures," came after him and watered (Acts 18:24–19:1). Paul writes from Ephesus (16:8), around A.D. 55, to a city famous for its orators, its philosophers and its pride. The

Corinthians had begun to treat their teachers the way the city treated its rhetoricians — as stars to follow and badges to wear.

So Paul paints three pictures, each one holier than the last. The church is **God's field**, where men only plant and water and God makes it grow (vv. 5–9); **God's building**, raised on the one foundation, Jesus Christ, with every builder's work to be tested by fire (vv. 10–15); and **God's temple**, the sanctuary where His Spirit dwells (vv. 16–17). The repeated word that drives the chapter is "God" — thirteen times in twenty-three verses, counting "God's" three times in verse 9. Paul keeps moving the spotlight off the men and onto Him.

Behind the chapter stand the Old Testament's pictures of God's people as His planting (Isaiah 5:1–7) and of the tested cornerstone laid in Zion (Isaiah 28:16); the gold, silver and stone David gathered for the house of God (1 Chronicles 29:2); and the temple where the glory of God dwelt. Paul ends with two quotations — Job 5:13 and Psalm 94:11 — that give God's verdict on the wisdom of the world, and then with the widest promise in the letter: "all things belong to you … and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God" (vv. 21–23).

I

MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 3:1–4

Still Infants

Milk, not solid food — jealousy, strife and party slogans expose the flesh

> [1] *And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to* ⚠ *men of flesh*, *as to* 🕒 *infants in Christ*. [2] *I gave you* 🕒 *milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able,* [3] *for you are still* 🔁 *fleshly*. *For since there is* ⚠ *jealousy and strife among you, are you not* 🔁 *fleshly*, *and are you not* ⚠ *walking like mere men*? [4] *For when one says, "*⚠ *I am of Paul*," *and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men?*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 3:1–4

FIGURE · THREE KINDS OF MEN

1 COR 2:14–3:4 three kinds of men	THE NATURAL MAN 2:14	MEN OF FLESH 3:1–4 · "infants in Christ"	THE SPIRITUAL MAN 2:15
THE SPIRIT	has not received the Spirit (2:12, 14)	has the Spirit — called "brethren" (3:1)	has received the Spirit from God (2:12)
THE FOOD	God's things are foolishness (2:14)	milk, not solid food; "not yet able" (3:2)	wisdom spoken to the mature (2:6)
THE SIGN	cannot understand them (2:14)	jealousy and strife; "I am of Paul" (3:3–4)	appraises all things (2:15)
THE WALK	lives as what he is: a natural man	"walking like mere men" (3:3)	grows up to solid food (3:2)

Paul still calls the middle group "brethren" and "in Christ" — and will not let them stay there.

Fee, quoted by Guzik: "Remaining worldly is not one of the options."

Read down each column: Paul's natural man and spiritual man from chapter 2, with the Corinthians in between — they have the Spirit but are living on milk and acting like mere men.

σάρκινος ... σαρκικός

SARKINOS … SARKIKOS · "OF FLESH … FLESHLY" · G4560, G4559

Paul uses two related words a verse apart. In verse 1 the Corinthians are *sarkinois* (G4560), "men of flesh" — made of flesh, the stuff of ordinary human weakness. In verse 3, twice, they are *sarkikoi* (G4559), "fleshly" — marked by the flesh in character and conduct. Guzik draws the line this way: the first is "made of flesh," the second describes "the one who can and should do differently but does not." Infants cannot help being infants; these believers had been in Christ long enough to be eating solid food, and were still choosing the flesh. The KJV renders both words "carnal" (from Latin *caro*, flesh), which hides the shift.

νήπιοι ... γάλα

NĒPIOI … GALA · "INFANTS … MILK" · G3516, G1051

Nēpios (G3516) is a baby, literally one not yet able to speak — the opposite of the *teleioi*, "mature," of 2:6. "Milk" is *gala* (G1051) and "solid food" *brōma* (G1033). The verb in verse 2, "I gave you ... to drink," is *epotisa* from *potizō* (G4222) — the same verb Paul uses in verse 6: "Apollos *watered*." Paul nursed them; Apollos watered them; neither could make them grow up. Hebrews 5:12–14 uses the same milk/solid-food pair for believers who should by now be teachers.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik notes that Paul calls them "brethren" and "babes in Christ" — they are part of God's family, "and that is the problem." He takes the side of those who say there is such a thing as a carnal Christian, quoting Redpath: "The carnal Christian is a child of God, born again and on his way to heaven, but he is traveling third class." Paul names three kinds of men — natural, spiritual and carnal — and Guzik asks, "Which one are you?" Milk and solid food differ "one of degrees, not kind"; the real problem was spiritual "junk food," man's wisdom and eloquence, that spoiled their appetite. Their divisions proved the flesh, and Paul spared not even his own fan club. With Fee: "Remaining worldly is not one of the options."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier Ministries

Sproul does not take up 1 Corinthians 3 in the sermon we have, but in his 2006 sermon on Romans 8:1–9 ("Free from Indwelling Sin") he attacks the doctrine that has been built on the phrase: the idea that people can be in Christ while "their lives are still defined by carnality" and "The self is still on the throne of their lives." He calls it "a deadly theology" that "creates a false sense of security," and says flatly: "The idea of a carnal Christian is as far away from the Apostolic teaching as one can get." Here the teachers differ in emphasis. Guzik uses "carnal Christian" as a real category; Sproul refuses it as a settled state. Both agree Paul is not describing a place a believer may stay.

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

In his reading notes on this chapter (printed with his sermons as expositions), Spurgeon observes that the Corinthian church had people "of large education and great abilities," yet Paul could speak to them only as "Christian babies." "Their spiritual part had not grown strong." He is not scornful of milk — "How grateful we ought to be that there is milk" — but he will not let party spirit pass as maturity: there is "no greater symptom of mere infancy in true religion" than setting up the names of leaders. Unity and growth go together: "A united church, you may conclude, is a growing church." Of verse 4 he asks, "Where is your spiritual-mindedness if you so act?"

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

Henry begins with a sober truth: "Those who are sanctified are so only in part." The Corinthians were "very proud of their wisdom and knowledge," yet still babes, and he adds dryly, "It is but too common for persons of very moderate knowledge and understanding to have a great measure of self-conceit." A faithful minister must teach his hearers as they can bear, but babes are meant to grow, and "Christians are utterly to blame who do not endeavour to grow in grace and knowledge." Their quarrels over ministers were the proof: "Contentions and quarrels about religion are sad evidences of remaining carnality. True religion makes men peaceable and not contentious."

II
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 3:5–9

Servants in God's Field

Paul planted, Apollos watered, God caused the growth — the workers are nothing, God is everything

> 5 *What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as △ the Lord gave opportunity to each one.* 6 *I planted, Apollos watered, but △ God was causing the growth.* 7 *So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but △ God who causes the growth.* 8 *Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but ☆ each will receive his own reward according to his own labor.* 9 *For we are △ God's fellow workers; you are ◷ God's field, God's building.*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 3:5–9

FIGURE · FIELD, BUILDING, TEMPLE

GOD'S FIELD 1 Corinthians 3:5–9	GOD'S BUILDING 1 Corinthians 3:9–15	GOD'S TEMPLE 1 Corinthians 3:16–17
		
Paul planted, Apollos watered — **God caused the growth**	Paul laid the foundation, another builds on it — **the foundation is Christ**	you (plural) are God's sanctuary — His Spirit **dwells in you**
each receives his own reward for his own labor (v8)	*the fire will test the quality of each work (v13)*	*destroy the temple, and God destroys you (v17)*

ONE PEOPLE, THREE PICTURES — EACH MORE SACRED THAN THE LAST

Every picture belongs to God ("God's field, God's building … a temple of God") — none belongs to Paul or Apollos.

The same people pictured three ways — each picture belongs to God, each names what God does, and each ends in a warning that grows sharper.

διάκονοι

DIAKONOI · "SERVANTS" · G1249

Paul asks "*What* then is Apollos?" — not "who" — and answers with a job description: *diakonoi* (G1249), servants, the word for one who waits on tables and runs errands for another. They are servants "through whom you believed," not the One in whom you believed. And each did only what "the Lord gave" him (v. 5) — even the opportunity to serve was a gift.

ηὔξανεν

ĒUXANEN · "WAS CAUSING THE GROWTH" · G837

The tenses carry the theology. "I planted" (*ephyteusa*, G5452) and "Apollos watered" (*epotisen*, G4222) are aorists — finished acts, each man's turn done. But "God was causing the growth" is the imperfect *ēuxanen*, from *auxanō* (G837): continuous action, God at work the whole time. The NASB's "was causing" brings out what the KJV's "gave the increase" leaves flat. Verse 7 then uses present participles: the one planting, the one watering, God who keeps giving growth.

συνεργοί

SYNERGOI · "FELLOW WORKERS" · G4904

Our "synergy." "We are God's fellow workers" (v. 9) can be read as "fellow workers belonging to God" (working together under Him) or "fellow workers with God" (the KJV's "labourers together with God"); the genitive "God's" is repeated three times in the verse — God's workers, God's field (*geōrgion*, G1091, tilled land), God's building (*oikodomē*, G3619). Either way the emphasis falls on God: the workers, the field and the building all belong to Him. The wage in verse 8 is *misthos* (G3408), pay, matched to *kopos*, toil — not to results.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik puts it simply: Paul and Apollos "are through whom you believed, not on whom you believed," and he borrows Maclaren's jab: "So what was the use of fighting which of two nothings was the greater?" A farmer cannot make a seed grow; he can only provide the conditions and trust the miracle of life. Some are frustrated because they want to water when God called them to plant: "Real fruitfulness in ministry happens when we are peacefully content with what God has called us to do." He notes the aorists of planting and watering against the imperfect of God's growth. Reward is "not given according to gifts, talents, or even success, but according to their own labor" — and "God wants you as His working partner."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier Ministries

In his 2009 devotional "Becoming a Witness," keyed to 1 Corinthians 3:6, Sproul uses Paul's farming picture to free ordinary Christians from the idea that only evangelists serve Christ. "All evangelism is witness, but not all witness is evangelism." Not every believer has the gift of the evangelist, but every believer is called to bear witness, and much of that witness is simply being the church: "We witness by being the church, the people of God." Gifts differ — "Some of us can plant. Some of us can water." The outcome is not ours to produce: "When we plant and water, God will bring an increase."

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon preached verses 6–9 as "Farm Laborers" (No. 1602, 5 June 1881). He warns against forming parties around favorite preachers — "Do not make too much of us" — and urges, "Let your mind be set upon the Master and not upon the servants." Then he turns the field over: "The church is God's farm by choice and purchase," enclosed, tilled and guarded by Him, and so it ought to yield a harvest. God ordinarily works through laborers, who are blessed by the labor and must divide the tasks by their gifts while sharing one aim. Yet only God gives the increase, in conversion and in perseverance — which calls for unity, humility and earnest prayer.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

Henry's cure for the Corinthian "humour" is to remember that ministers "are but ministers, mere instruments used by the God of all grace." "We should take care not to deify ministers, nor put them into the place of God." Paul was fitted for planting, Apollos for watering, "but God gave the increase," and so "Paul and Apollos are nothing at all in their own account, but God is all in all." Faithful ministers may differ in lesser things yet are one in design, and God rewards by faithfulness, not by fame: "Those that work hardest shall fare best." "You are God's husbandry," he paraphrases, "and therefore are neither of Paul nor of Apollos."

III
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 3:10–15

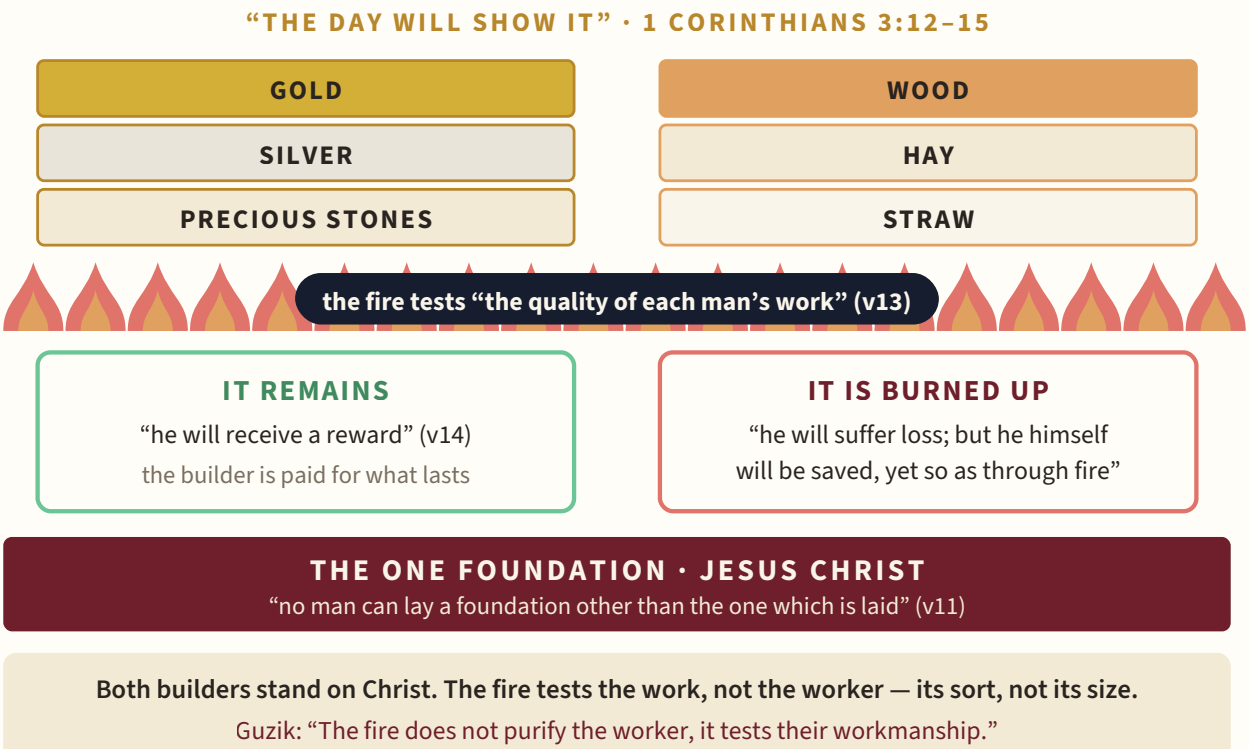
One Foundation, One Fire

Christ is the only foundation — and the day will show what sort of work each man built on it

10 *According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it.* 11 *For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* 12 *Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,* 13 *each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.* 14 *If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.* 15 *If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*

1 CORINTHIANS 3:10–15

FIGURE · THE BUILDING AND THE FIRE



Two builders on the same foundation: on the day, the fire shows what sort of work each built — one is rewarded, the other loses his work but is saved, as one escaping a fire.

ἀρχιτέκτων … θεμέλιον

ARCHITEKTŌN … THEMELION · "MASTER BUILDER … FOUNDATION" · G753, G2310

Architektōn (G753), our "architect," is the chief builder who sets out the work and lays the foundation — and Paul says he did it "according to the grace of God which was given to me." *Themelios* (G2310) appears three times in three verses (vv. 10, 11, 12). Verse 11 is emphatic: no one "can" (*dynatai*) lay another, because one is already "laid" (*keimenon*, lying in place). The builders' freedom is not in the foundation but in what they "build upon" it (*epoikodomeō*, four times in vv. 10–14).

δοκιμάσει … φανερόν

DOKIMASEI … PHANERON · "WILL TEST … EVIDENT" · G1381, G5318

Dokimazō (G1381) is the assayer's word — to test metal by fire and approve what passes. The fire tests *hopoion estin*, "of what sort it is" (KJV), which the NASB renders "the quality." Each work will become *phaneron* (G5318), visible, out in the open; "the day" will "show it" (*dēlōsei*, make plain) because it is "revealed" (*apokalyptetai*) with fire. The present tense — "is revealed" — treats that day as certain. Compare 4:5: the Lord "will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness."

ζημιωθήσεται … σωθήσεται

ZĒMIŌTHĒSETAI … SŌTHĒSETAI · "WILL SUFFER LOSS … WILL BE SAVED" · G2210, G4982

Zēmioō (G2210) is to forfeit or be fined — the word Jesus used for losing one's soul (Matthew 16:26). What is forfeited here is the work and its reward (*misthos*, v. 14), not the man: "he himself will be saved" (*sōzō*, G4982), "yet so as through fire" (*hōs dia pyros*) — like a man who gets out of a burning house with nothing but his life. The verb for "burned up" (*katakaēsetai*) means consumed entirely.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik starts where Paul starts — with grace: being God's fellow worker rests on "God's undeserved favor," not merit. Paul laid the only foundation, Jesus Christ; "one can build unworthily on the one foundation." Gold, silver and precious stones recall the materials David gathered for the temple (1 Chronicles 22:14, 16; 29:2); precious stones are "fine stone materials like marble and granite," and human wisdom mixed in is like layering straw with marble. The fire tests what sort, not how much: "Moody wisely said that converts ought to be weighed as well as counted." "The fire does not purify the worker, it tests their workmanship" — so it has nothing to do with purgatory. The text applies first to leaders, then to every servant of God.

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier Ministries

Sproul's 2009 devotional "Building on a Sure Foundation," keyed to 1 Corinthians 3:10–11, is not an exposition of the fire but a lesson in first principles. He tells how Descartes doubted everything until he reached what he could not doubt — "He could not doubt that he was doubting" — and built from there. Sproul's point for the Christian: "When assailed by doubt, it is time to search diligently for first principles that are certain." "We build upon the foundation of what is sure," and that, he says, "affects the whole structure of apologetics. … It is a matter of order." For Paul the sure first principle is a Person already laid in place.

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon preached verse 11 as "The One Foundation" (No. 1494, 14 September 1879). The church, the gospel, the sinner's hope and the Christian life must all rest on Christ alone: "The best masonry must crack and fall if the groundwork is unstable." Christ is not one foundation among several — "It is not a question of comparison, but of monopoly" — and "Jesus is the sum and substance, crown and glory of the gospel." In his exposition of verses 12–15 he urges that "what little we do we ought to aspire to do for eternity," because "Time tries everything," and of the man whose work burns: "as a man flies out of a burning house, but all his work is gone."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

Henry calls Christ "the chief corner-stone" and warns, "Those that build their hopes of heaven on any other foundation build upon the sand." On it some build the pure truth of the gospel; others mix in "their own fancies and inventions." "Gold and dirt must not be mingled together." The day will make every work manifest, and he finds comfort as well as warning: a man who held the foundation but built stubble may still be saved — "This may help to enlarge our charity," for "nothing will damn men but wickedness." He gives three reasons the text cannot teach purgatory, which he calls "certainly hay and stubble": the fire is figurative, it tries works, and it tries apostles too.

IV
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 3:16–17

You Are God's Temple

The sanctuary where God's Spirit dwells — and the warning to anyone who would ruin it

> [16] *Do you not know that △ you are a temple of God and that △ the Spirit of God dwells in you?* [17] *If any man destroys the ⟳ temple of God, ⚠ God will destroy him, for △ the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 3:16–17

ναός

NAOS · "TEMPLE, SANCTUARY" · G3485

Paul could have said *hieron* (G2411), the whole temple complex with its courts and porches. He says *naos* (G3485), the inner sanctuary itself — the house where God's presence dwelt. The "you" is plural throughout ("you [all] are a temple of God … that is what you [all] are"): the congregation together is God's dwelling. "Dwells" is *oikei*, makes His home. In 6:19 Paul applies the same word to each believer's body; here the church is in view. "Do you not know" (*ouk oidate*) is one of Paul's favorite rebukes in this letter — ten times in chapters 3, 5, 6 and 9.

φθείρει … φθερεῖ

PHTHEIREI … PHTHEREI · "DESTROYS … WILL DESTROY" · G5351

The same verb, *phtheirō* (G5351), twice: if anyone ruins God's temple, God will ruin him. The word means to corrupt, spoil, bring to ruin — the KJV has "defile … destroy" for the one Greek verb, as Henry notes ("the same word is in the original in both clauses"). The punishment fits the crime exactly. And the reason is given: the temple of God is *hagios*, holy — set apart for God.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik notes that Paul will later call each believer's body a temple (6:19–20), but here "his emphasis is on the church as a whole." And he will not let us treat it as a figure of speech: "When Paul calls the church a temple, don't think he is using a picture. The physical temple was the picture; God's dwelling in us is the reality." The word *naos* means the actual sanctuary, "the place of the deity's dwelling," not the general temple area (*hieron*). What makes the church a temple is that the Spirit of God dwells in it, and so the warning is severe: God's temple is holy, and "it matters to God how we treat His holy temple."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier Ministries

Asked why Christians indwelt by the Holy Spirit cannot live perfect lives (a question answered in his "Tough Questions" devotional series), Sproul answers that the problem is never the Spirit's power: the Spirit gives the believer power to obey God's commands, and when we fail it is not for any lack of power, ability or willingness in the indwelling Spirit. Yet he admits that no one in fact lives a perfect life, because we are not yet fully cleansed and face sin constantly. He does not cite 1 Corinthians 3 there, but his answer fits verse 16: a temple indwelt by God has every resource for holiness, and no excuse.

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

In his exposition Spurgeon is moved by the plain fact of verse 16: “What a wonderful fact it is! Within the body of the saint, God dwells, as in a temple.” He presses the question Paul asks — “Do you know it?” — and grieves over how some “injure their bodies or utterly despise them.” Of verse 17 he hears a builder’s warning: “If any man should pull down that which Paul built for God,” God will deal with him — the church Paul built for God is not a thing to tear down for a party’s sake.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

Henry thinks the warning may aim at false teachers in Corinth who taught licentious doctrines suited “to the taste of this lewd city,” which would corrupt and destroy the church — doctrine too deadly to be counted mere hay and stubble. He allows it may also be read “as an argument against their discord and factious strifes.” The temple may mean the church together or each believer: “Christian churches are temples of God,” and “Every Christian is a living temple of the living God.” As the old temple was set apart for God’s service, “So all Christians are separated from common uses, and set apart for God and his service.”

V
MOVEMENT

1 CORINTHIANS 3:18–23

All Things Are Yours

Become a fool to be wise; boast in no man — for all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ

18 *Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise.* 19 *For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, “He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS”;* 20 *and again, “THE LORD KNOWS THE REASONINGS of the wise, THAT THEY ARE USELESS.”* 21 *So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you,* 22 *whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you,* 23 *and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.*

1 CORINTHIANS 3:18–23

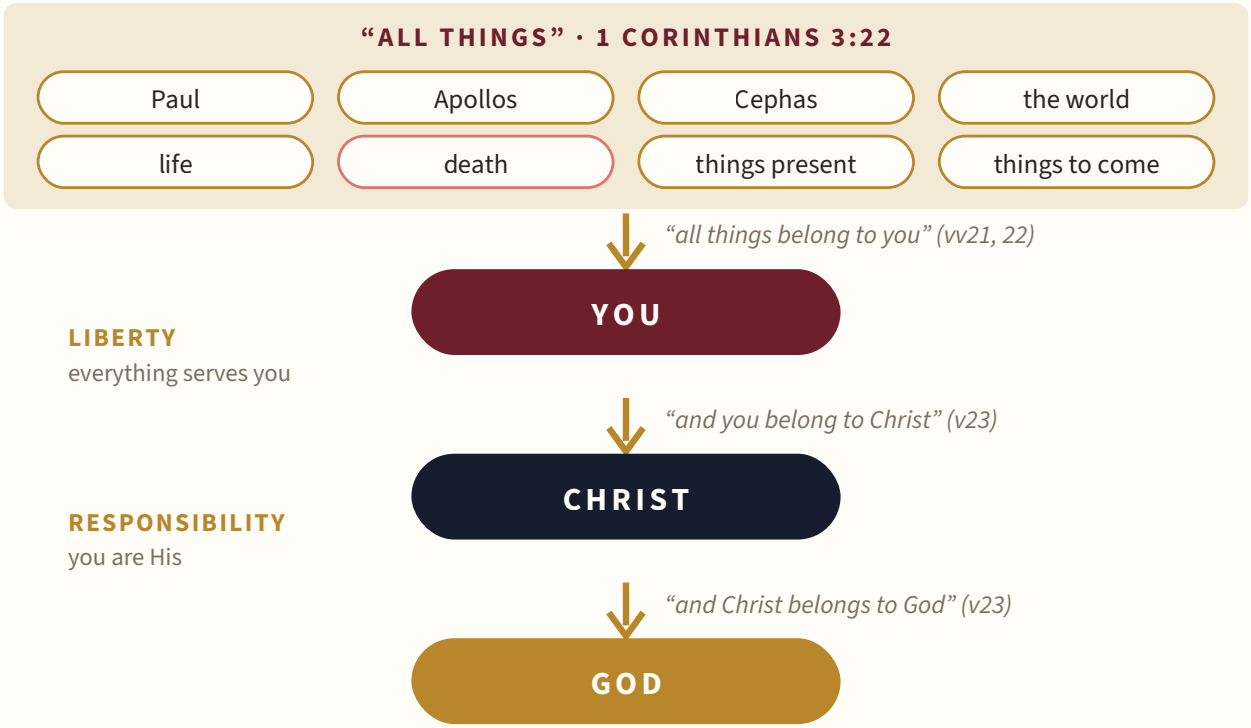
“He captures the wise by their own shrewdness, And the advice of the cunning is quickly thwarted.”

JOB 5:13

“The LORD knows the thoughts of man, That they are a mere breath.”

PSALM 94:11

FIGURE · THE CHAIN OF BELONGING



Guzik: "All are yours: This is Christian liberty. And you are Christ's: This is Christian responsibility."

Follow the arrows down: everything belongs to the believer, the believer belongs to Christ, and Christ belongs to God — so no one has reason to boast in men.

μωρός … πανουργία

MŌROS … PANOURGIA · "FOOLISH … CRAFTINESS" · G3474, G3834

Mōros (G3474), our "moron," is the word of 1:18–27, where the cross is "foolishness" (*mōria*) to the world. The way to wisdom runs through being counted a fool. The world's wisdom is *panourgia* (G3834), literally "ready to do anything" — cleverness without scruple, the same word for the serpent's craftiness in 2 Corinthians 11:3. God "catches" (*drassomenos*, grabs with the hand) the clever in it. Paul's Greek of Job 5:13 is his own, not the Septuagint's; and in Psalm 94:11, where the Psalm says the LORD knows "the thoughts of man," Paul writes "of the wise," applying the verse to his point. Their reasonings (*dialogismous*) are *mataioi* (G3152), "useless," empty — the Psalm's "a mere breath."

καυχάσθω

KAUCHASTHŌ · "LET … BOAST" · G2744

A present imperative with "no one": let no one keep boasting in men. *Kauchaomai* (G2744) is to glory, to brag, to rest one's confidence in something — the word of 1:31, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD." Paul's reason turns the slogans of verse 4 inside out: you said "I am of Paul"; in fact Paul is yours (*panta hymōn*, "all things are yours"), and you are not Paul's but Christ's (*hymeis de Christou*).

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik hears a little sarcasm in "if anyone among you seems to be wise in this age" — "Of course the Corinthians considered themselves wise in this age!" The cure is to renounce "all worldly wisdom, all humanism," even if it means being called a fool. God has already weighed the world's wisdom and found it foolish and futile: "Will we agree with God's evaluation or not?" Then the boasting: Paul and Apollos belong to you; the whole universe is yours in Christ. "Why, even death is 'ours'; it is our servant, not our master!" — like the angel who led Peter out of prison (Acts 12). "All are yours: This is Christian liberty. And you are Christ's: This is Christian responsibility."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier Ministries

In his Tabletalk article "Wisdom and Knowledge," not on this chapter but on what Scripture means by wisdom, Sproul shows why Paul can call the world's wisdom foolish. Biblical wisdom is not abstract cleverness but "a practical understanding of how to live a life that is pleasing to God," and it begins with the fear of the Lord. So the fool is not the unintelligent man: "The fool is the person who has no reverence for God." "A person can have unbounded knowledge and not have wisdom." That is the Corinthian danger exactly — brilliant, eloquent, well-read, and irreverent toward the God who catches the wise in their craftiness.

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon's exposition has a warning — "Men are poor things to glory in. … The best of men are men at the best" — and a remedy: "Treat them as bees do flowers, and gather honey from them all." "Consciousness of ignorance is the vestibule of knowledge." In his sermon "The Christian's Glorious Inventory" on verses 21–23 (Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, vol. 44) he reads the list as a deed of possessions — ministers, the world, life, death, things present, things to come — and exults: "Death, thou art mine!" "Death is ours, then, so we will not fear it," for "It is the gate to endless joy." Yet "Life is not mine without Christ": the title deed is that we are Christ's.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

Henry traces conceit to its root: "self-flattery is the very next step to self-deceit," and "He who would be wise indeed must learn of God." Ministers are not to be set up against one another; all are given "for the common benefit of the church." Then he opens the inventory: the world stands for the saints' sake; "Life is yours, that you may have season and opportunity to prepare for the life of heaven; and death is yours, that you may go to the possession of it. It is the kind messenger that will fetch you to your Father's house." But the title is held on one ground only: "All things are ours, upon no other ground than our being Christ's."

VI
THEME

CROSS-REFERENCES

The Passage in the Whole Bible

From the stone laid in Zion to the living stones of the church — where 1 Corinthians 3 reaches back and forward

> *"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes in it will not be disturbed."*
>
> ISAIAH 28:16

> *"having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,"*
>
> EPHESIANS 2:20

> *"you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."*
>
> 1 PETER 2:5

> *"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food."*
>
> HEBREWS 5:12

> *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."*
>
> 2 CORINTHIANS 5:10

> *"Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God."*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 4:5

> *"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?"*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 6:19

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik links the testing of verses 13–15 to 2 Corinthians 5:10 — "When our work is tested before the Lord, we will be rewarded according to what remains" — and pictures the builder whose work burns arriving with "no crown to give to Jesus, for His glory" (Revelation 4:10–11).

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · 1 Cor. completed after 1714

Henry reads the foundation of verse 11 through Ephesians 2:20 — "even Jesus Christ, the chief corner-stone" — and the temple of verse 16 through Ephesians 2:22: the churches "are built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit."

SECTION II · STUDY HELPS

At a Glance

Four voices, one chapter

Four teachers, one chapter. Guzik walks the text and keeps the categories clear; Sproul — who did not preach this chapter verse by verse — speaks here through a sermon, devotionals and an article that touch its themes; Spurgeon preaches the foundation, the farm and the inventory; Henry gives Puritan counsel line by line. They differ most on the "carnal Christian": Guzik keeps the category, Sproul rejects it as a settled state.

THE MOVEMENT	GUZIK · the text	SPROUL · the doctrine	SPURGEON · the heart	HENRY · the counsel
I · Still infants	Carnal Christians are real — traveling third class; remaining worldly is not an option.	The "carnal Christian" as a settled state is a deadly theology and a false security.	Christian babies; no greater sign of infancy than setting up leaders' names.	Sanctified only in part; quarrels about religion are sad evidence of carnality.
II · God's field	Through whom, not on whom; two nothings; be content with your task.	Some plant, some water; we witness by being the church; God gives increase.	God's farm by choice and purchase; set your mind on the Master, not the servants.	Do not deify ministers; God is all in all; the hardest workers fare best.
III · Foundation and fire	Temple materials; weighed, not counted; the fire tests workmanship, not purgatory.	Build on first principles that are certain — the foundation of what is sure.	Not comparison but monopoly; time tries everything; escaping a burning house.	Gold and dirt not mingled; enlarge our charity; purgatory is hay and stubble.
IV · God's temple	Not a picture but the reality; naos, the sanctuary; God cares how we treat it.	The indwelling Spirit never lacks power for obedience; our failures are ours.	Within the saint God dwells as in a temple — do you know it?	A living temple of the living God, set apart from common uses.
V · All things yours	Agree with God's verdict on wisdom; death is our servant; liberty and responsibility.	The fool has no reverence for God; knowledge is not wisdom.	Men are poor things to glory in; death is ours; the title deed is Christ.	Self-flattery leads to self-deceit; death is the kind messenger home.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:1–23 · A COMPARATIVE READING

† Key Insights to Carry

- **The chapter keeps moving the spotlight to God.** "God" appears thirteen times in twenty-three verses (counting "God's" three times in v. 9). The men plant, water and build; God gives growth, owns the field, tests the work and dwells in the temple. THE TEXT
- **Made of flesh is one thing; fleshly is another.** *Sarkinos* (v. 1) and *sarkikos* (v. 3): the first is human weakness, the second a chosen pattern. The Corinthians had been in Christ long enough to be eating solid food. THE GREEK
- **Where the teachers part ways.** Guzik uses "carnal Christian" as a real category ("traveling third class"); Sproul calls it, as a settled state, "a deadly theology." Both agree Paul is describing a condition to leave, not a place to live. GUZIK
- **Men take turns; God never stops.** "Planted" and "watered" are aorist — done. "Was causing the growth" is imperfect — God working all along. The same verb (*potizō*) is used for Paul nursing them (v. 2) and Apollos watering (v. 6). THE GREEK
- **Paid for labor, not results.** "Each will receive his own reward according to his own labor" (v. 8). Guzik: not according to "gifts, talents, or even success." Henry: "Those that work hardest shall fare best." THE TEXT
- **Not comparison, but monopoly.** Spurgeon: Christ is not the best foundation among several — "It is not a question of comparison, but of monopoly." No man "can" lay another. SPURGEON

- **The fire tests the work, not the worker.** It tests "what sort," not how much — Moody: converts should be "weighed as well as counted." Guzik and Henry both reject reading purgatory here: the fire tries works, falls on one day, and tests apostles too. HENRY
- **Naos, not hieron.** Paul calls the church the sanctuary itself — the dwelling of God — and the "you" is plural. Guzik: "The physical temple was the picture; God's dwelling in us is the reality." THE GREEK
- **The punishment matches the crime.** One verb, twice: whoever ruins (*phtheirō*) God's temple, God will ruin. Division and false teaching are not small things in God's house. THE TEXT
- **The slogans turned inside out.** They said "I am of Paul." Paul answers: Paul is yours — and you are Christ's. Guzik: "All are yours: This is Christian liberty. And you are Christ's: This is Christian responsibility." THE TEXT

† Questions for the Table

1 **If someone watched how I handle conflict in the group, would they call me spiritual, or say I'm "walking like mere men"?**

Paul's proof of the flesh was not doctrine but jealousy and strife.

3:1-4; Gal 5:19-21

2 **Whose name have I been wearing like a badge — a preacher, a sponsor, a program, my own way of doing things?**

Through whom you believed, not on whom you believed.

3:4-5; 1:12

3 **Where am I frustrated because I want to water when God called me to plant — or want to make the growth happen myself?**

Planting and watering are done; growth is God's continuous work.

3:6-8

4 **What am I building on Christ right now with gold, silver and stone — and what with wood, hay and straw?**

The fire tests what sort, not how much.

3:10-15; 2 Cor 5:10

5 **How does it change the way I treat my brothers at this table to know that together we are God's temple?**

Whoever ruins God's temple, God will ruin.

3:16-17; 1 Pet 2:5

6 **What would it mean for me to believe this week that even death belongs to me because I belong to Christ?**

Henry: death is "the kind messenger that will fetch you to your Father's house."

3:21-23

1 Corinthians 3 takes the celebrity off the preacher and puts the glory back on God. The men only plant, water and build; God gives the growth, lays the foundation in His Son, tests every work by fire, and lives in His people as in a temple. Boast in no man — all things are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

Teaching the Word. Living in the Light. — Smith For Christ

† Sources

Each teacher's section summarizes the pages below in our own words; short quotations are verbatim from them. Matthew Henry died in 1714 having reached Acts; his *Commentary* on 1 Corinthians was completed after his death by Simon Browne from his notes and method, and is cited under his name as it is published. Henry's Commentary and C.H. Spurgeon (1834–1892) are in the public domain; Guzik and Sproul are summarized — consult each author's own work.

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