CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

1 Corinthians Chapter 3 — Christ the Only Foundation

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

1 Corinthians Chapter 3 brings Paul's teaching on wisdom and division down to earth.

In Chapter 2, Paul described two kinds of people.

The person without the Spirit, who sees the things of God as foolishness.

And the person with the Spirit, who has the mind of Christ.

Now Paul describes a third kind of person.

A believer who has the Spirit but is still living like the world.

That was the Corinthians.

They had received God's Spirit.

But they were acting like infants.

They were jealous.

They were quarreling.

They were lining up behind Paul and Apollos like rival teams.

Paul answers with a series of pictures.

The church is **a field**, and God's servants are farmhands planting and watering.

The church is **a building**, and Jesus Christ is the only foundation.

The church is **a temple**, and God's Spirit lives within it.

Every picture says the same thing:

The church belongs to God.

Not to Paul.

Not to Apollos.

Not to any human leader.

God gives the growth.

God laid the foundation.

God will test the work.

God dwells in His people.

And so Paul ends the chapter with a stunning reversal.

The Corinthians were saying, **“I belong to Paul,”** or, **“I belong to Apollos.”**

Paul says, **“No. Paul and Apollos belong to you.”**

In fact, everything belongs to you.

And you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

The chapter moves through six movements:

- Spiritual Immaturity (verses 1–4).
- God Gives the Increase (verses 5–9).
- Christ the Foundation (verses 10–15).
- God's Temple (verses 16–17).
- True Wisdom Belongs to God (verses 18–20).
- Belonging to Christ (verses 21–23).

The central truth of 1 Corinthians 3 is:

Jesus Christ is the only foundation of the church, God alone gives the growth, and His people belong to Him, so there is no room for pride in human leaders.

I. MERE INFANTS IN CHRIST

1 Corinthians 3:1 — Not Spiritual, but Worldly

“And I, brothers and sisters, could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are worldly—mere infants in Christ.”

Paul speaks tenderly.

He still calls them **“brothers and sisters.”**

They are truly in the family of God.

They are **“in Christ.”**

But they are **“mere infants.”**

The Corinthians thought they were spiritual giants.

They were proud of their knowledge, their speech, and their gifts.

Paul tells them the truth.

They were acting like babies.

Paul uses the word **worldly**.

It describes people who are shaped by their human nature and by the values of the world around them.

The Corinthians had the Spirit.

But they were not living by the Spirit.

There is nothing wrong with being a baby.

Every believer begins that way.

The problem is staying a baby when you should have grown up.

Cross References

Hebrews 5:13

> Anyone who lives on milk is still a baby and does not yet understand the teaching about what is right.

1 Peter 2:2

> Like newborn babies, crave the pure milk of God's word, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.

Ephesians 4:14

> Then we will no longer be like children, tossed back and forth by the waves and blown around by every new teaching, by people's tricks and clever schemes to deceive.

Spiritual Principle

Having the Spirit and living by the Spirit are not always the same thing.

A believer can belong to Christ and still behave in worldly ways.

Key Truth

Spiritual maturity is not measured by how much you know.

It is measured by how much you look like Christ.

II. MILK, NOT SOLID FOOD

1 Corinthians 3:2 — “You Are Still Not Ready”

“I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.”

Paul uses a picture every parent understands.

A newborn cannot eat a steak.

It needs milk.

When Paul first came to Corinth, he fed them **milk**, the basic truths of the gospel.

That was right.

They were new believers.

But then Paul adds a painful sentence:

“Indeed, you are still not ready.”

Several years had passed.

They should have been eating solid food.

But they were still on milk.

Their growth had stalled.

This does not mean the gospel is only for beginners.

The cross is both milk and meat.

The problem was not the message.

The problem was their spiritual appetite and their worldly behavior.

Cross References

Hebrews 5:12

> By this time you should be teachers. Instead, you need someone to teach you the basic truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food.

1 Peter 2:2

> Like newborn babies, crave the pure milk of God's word, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.

Hebrews 5:14

> But solid food is for the mature, who by constant practice have trained themselves to tell the difference between good and evil.

Spiritual Principle

Time in the faith does not automatically produce maturity in the faith.

Application

Ask yourself: Am I growing?

Am I more like Christ this year than I was last year?

III. JEALOUSY AND QUARRELING

1 Corinthians 3:3 — The Evidence of Worldliness

“For you are still worldly. Since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?”

Now Paul gives the proof.

How did he know they were still worldly?

Jealousy and quarreling.

Jealousy is resentment over what someone else has.

Quarreling is the fighting that grows from it.

The Corinthians did not lack gifts.

They lacked love.

Paul asks:

“Are you not acting like mere humans?”

In other words, they were acting like people who did not know God at all.

Believers are new creations.

They are supposed to live differently.

But in Corinth, the church looked just like the city.

Cross References

Galatians 5:20

> The works of the flesh include worshiping idols, witchcraft, hatred, fighting, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, arguments, and splitting into groups.

James 3:16

> Wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there will be disorder and every kind of evil.

Romans 13:13

> Let us live decently, as people who live in the daylight—not in wild parties and drunkenness, not in sexual sin and shameless living, not in fighting and jealousy.

Spiritual Principle

The clearest sign of spiritual immaturity is not a lack of knowledge but a lack of love.

Spiritual Warning

Jealousy and quarreling are not small faults; they are marks of the flesh.

IV. “I FOLLOW PAUL”

1 Corinthians 3:4 — Worldly Loyalties

“For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being worldly?”

Paul returns to the problem he named in Chapter 1.

The church was divided into fan clubs.

“I follow Paul.”

“I follow Apollos.”

This was exactly how the world behaved.

In Corinth, people attached themselves to famous teachers and speakers.

They boasted about whose teacher was better.

The Corinthians had brought that habit into the church.

Notice that Paul names himself first.

He is not defending his own fans.

He is rebuking them.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 1:12

> One of you says, “I follow Paul.” Another says, “I follow Apollos.” Another says, “I follow Cephas.” And another says, “I follow Christ.”

1 Corinthians 3:21

> So stop bragging about human leaders. Everything belongs to you.

Titus 3:9

> But stay away from foolish arguments, debates about family histories, quarrels, and fights about the law, because they are useless and worthless.

Spiritual Principle

Making heroes out of human leaders is a sign of worldly thinking, not spiritual maturity.

Application

It is good to be grateful for those who taught you.

It is wrong to use them to compete with other believers.

V. ONLY SERVANTS

1 Corinthians 3:5 — What Is Apollos? What Is Paul?

“What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants through whom you came to believe—as the Lord assigned to each his task.”

Notice how Paul asks the question.

Not **“Who** is Apollos?” but **“What** is Apollos?”

He is not asking about their names or reputations.

He is asking about their role.

And the answer is simple:

“Only servants.”

The word Paul uses describes a servant who waits on tables.

It is a humble word.

Paul and Apollos were not the source of the Corinthians' faith.

They were the means **“through whom”** the Corinthians believed.

And each one did the task **“the Lord assigned.”**

The Lord was the One giving assignments.

Paul and Apollos were simply obeying.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 4:1

> So people should think of us as servants of Christ and as those trusted with the secret truths of God.

2 Corinthians 3:6

> He has made us able to serve a new covenant—not one of written rules but of the Spirit. The written law brings death, but the Spirit gives life.

Acts 18:27

> When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the believers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who had believed by God's grace.

Spiritual Principle

God's servants are instruments, not idols.

Key Truth

Every task in God's kingdom is assigned by the Lord.

No one should boast about the job God gave them.

VI. PLANTING AND WATERING

1 Corinthians 3:6 — “But God Made It Grow”

“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.”

Paul now uses a farming picture.

Paul planted.

He was the first to bring the gospel to Corinth and start the church.

Apollos watered.

He came later and helped the believers grow through his teaching.

Both jobs were needed.

But neither one could make a single seed sprout.

“But God made it grow.”

In the original language, the planting and watering are described as completed actions.

The growing is described as something God kept on doing.

Paul and Apollos did their work and moved on.

God kept giving life.

Cross References

Isaiah 55:10

> The rain and snow come down from the sky and do not go back without watering the earth. They make it sprout and grow, giving seed to the farmer and bread to eat.

John 4:37

> So the saying is true: “One person plants, and another person harvests.”

Acts 18:24

> Meanwhile, a Jew named Apollos, who was born in Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a gifted speaker and knew the Scriptures very well.

Spiritual Principle

We can plant and water, but only God can give life.

Application

Do your part faithfully.

Then trust God with the results.

VII. ONLY GOD

1 Corinthians 3:7 — The One Who Makes Things Grow

“So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.”

Paul draws the conclusion.

Compared to God, the planter and the waterer are **“nothing.”**

This does not mean their work has no value.

Paul will speak of their reward in the next verse.

It means they are not the source of the growth.

All the credit belongs to God.

So why were the Corinthians boasting about Paul and Apollos?

That was like praising the watering can instead of the One who sends the rain.

Cross References

Zechariah 4:6

> Not by strength, and not by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of Armies.

John 15:5

> I am the vine; you are the branches. If you stay joined to Me and I to you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from Me you can do nothing.

Psalm 127:1

> Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders work for nothing. Unless the LORD guards the city, the guards stay awake for nothing.

Spiritual Principle

All true spiritual growth is the work of God.

Key Truth

The church does not grow because of great leaders.

It grows because of a great God.

VIII. ONE PURPOSE, EACH REWARDED

1 Corinthians 3:8 — Rewarded According to Labor

“The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor.”

Paul and Apollos were not rivals.

They had **“one purpose.”**

They were working on the same field for the same Master.

The Corinthians were setting them against each other.

But the workers themselves were united.

Then Paul adds an encouraging truth.

Each one **“will be rewarded according to their own labor.”**

Notice it says **labor**, not success.

God rewards faithfulness, not results.

The one who plants and never sees the harvest will not be forgotten.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 15:58

> So, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Don't let anything move you. Always give yourselves fully to the Lord's work, because you know that your work for the Lord is never wasted.

Revelation 22:12

> Look, I am coming soon! I am bringing My reward with Me, and I will repay each person for what they have done.

Matthew 16:27

> The Son of Man is going to come in His Father's glory with His angels, and then He will reward each person for what they have done.

Spiritual Principle

God rewards faithful labor, not visible success.

Application

If you serve where no one notices, keep going.

God notices, and He will reward you.

IX. GOD'S FIELD, GOD'S BUILDING

1 Corinthians 3:9 — Co-Workers in God's Service

“For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.”

Look at how often Paul uses the word **God** in this verse.

God's service.

God's field.

God's building.

Everything belongs to God.

Paul and Apollos are **“co-workers in God's service.”**

They work together, and they work for God.

The church is **“God's field.”**

It is not Paul's field or Apollos' field.

The church is also **“God's building.”**

This second picture prepares the way for the next section, where Paul talks about foundations and builders.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 6:1

> As God's co-workers, we urge you not to receive God's grace and then let it go to waste.

Ephesians 2:20

> You are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone.

1 Peter 2:5

> You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices that please God through Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Principle

The church belongs to God, and every worker serves under Him.

Key Truth

No pastor owns the church.

No member owns the church.

The church is God's.

X. A WISE BUILDER

1 Corinthians 3:10 — "Each One Should Build with Care"

"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 now moves from farming to construction.

He calls himself a **"wise builder."**

The word is where we get our word **architect**.

He was the master builder who laid the foundation of the church in Corinth.

But notice how he begins:

"By the grace God has given me."

Paul does not take credit.

Even his skill as a builder was a gift of grace.

Then he says, **“someone else is building on it.”**

Others would teach and lead the church after Paul.

And Paul gives a warning to all of them:

“Each one should build with care.”

It matters how you build.

It matters what you teach.

It matters what you add to God's building.

Cross References

Romans 15:20

> My goal has always been to preach the good news where Christ was not yet known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation.

Matthew 7:24

> So everyone who hears My words and does them is like a wise man who built his house on rock.

Luke 6:48

> He is like a man building a house who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When the flood came and the river crashed against that house, it could not shake it, because it was built well.

Spiritual Principle

Everyone who serves in God's church is accountable for how they build.

Application

Every teacher, leader, parent, and believer is building something.

Build with care.

XI. THE ONLY FOUNDATION

1 Corinthians 3:11 — Jesus Christ

“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

This is the heart of the chapter.

There is only one foundation for the church.

Jesus Christ.

Not a preacher.

Not a philosophy.

Not a tradition.

Not a personality.

Paul says no one **“can”** lay another.

Anything else is not a foundation at all.

And notice the phrase **“already laid.”**

The foundation is finished.

No one needs to add to it.

No one is allowed to replace it.

Our job is not to lay a new foundation.

Our job is to build faithfully on the one God has laid.

Cross References

Isaiah 28:16

> So this is what the Lord GOD says: “Look, I am laying a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a solid foundation. Whoever trusts in it will never panic.”

1 Peter 2:6

> For Scripture says: “Look, I am laying a chosen and precious cornerstone in Zion, and whoever trusts in Him will never be put to shame.”

Ephesians 2:20

> You are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone.

Spiritual Principle

Anything not built on Christ will not stand.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

A church may change its methods, but it must never change its foundation.

XII. BUILDING MATERIALS

1 Corinthians 3:12 — Gold, Silver, Costly Stones, Wood, Hay, or Straw

“If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw,”

Paul now speaks about the materials builders use.

He lists two groups.

Gold, silver, and costly stones.

These are valuable, lasting, and able to survive fire.

Wood, hay, and straw.

These are cheap, temporary, and easy to burn.

Paul is speaking first about the work of teachers and leaders in the church.

What are they building into people's lives?

Truth that lasts?

Or ideas that look impressive but will not survive?

But the principle applies to every believer.

Every life is building something on Christ.

The question is not only **whether** we build.

It is **what** we build with.

Cross References

Isaiah 54:11

> You poor, storm-tossed city, with no one to comfort you, I will rebuild you with beautiful stones and lay your foundations with sapphires.

Malachi 3:3

> He will sit like someone refining and purifying silver. He will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver, so that they will bring offerings to the LORD in the right way.

2 Timothy 2:20

> In a large house there are not only dishes made of gold and silver, but also ones made of wood and clay. Some are for special use, and some are for ordinary use.

Spiritual Principle

What we build on Christ matters for eternity.

Key Truth

Wood, hay, and straw are easier to find and quicker to build with.

Gold and silver cost more.

Lasting work usually costs something.

XIII. TESTED BY FIRE

1 Corinthians 3:13 — The Day Will Bring It to Light

“their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work.”

Paul speaks of **“the Day.”**

This is the day when Christ returns and every believer's work is judged.

On that day, nothing will be hidden.

Each person's work **“will be shown for what it is.”**

Notice the word **quality**.

The fire tests what kind of work it was, not how much there was.

A huge pile of straw burns up in a moment.

A small piece of gold comes out shining.

God is not impressed by size.

He tests what is real.

Cross References

Malachi 4:1

> "Look, the day is coming, burning like a furnace. All the proud and everyone who does evil will be like straw. That coming day will set them on fire," says the LORD of Armies. "It will leave them neither root nor branch."

2 Peter 3:10

> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done on it will be exposed.

1 Peter 1:7

> These trials prove that your faith is real. Your faith is worth far more than gold, which perishes even though fire tests it. Real faith will bring praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Spiritual Principle

God will judge the quality of our work, not just the quantity.

Application

Ask yourself: Will what I am building survive the fire?

XIV. A REWARD FOR WHAT LASTS

1 Corinthians 3:14 — The Builder Will Receive a Reward

"If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward."

Here is good news.

Work that is built with gold, silver, and costly stones will survive.

And the builder **"will receive a reward."**

Salvation is a free gift.

We cannot earn it.

But rewards are given for faithful service.

The Bible does not tell us everything about these rewards.

But it does tell us that God sees, remembers, and honors faithful work done for Him.

Cross References

Matthew 25:21

> His master said, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You were faithful with a few things, so I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's joy.”

2 John 1:8

> Watch yourselves, so that you do not lose what we have worked for, but receive your full reward.

Revelation 22:12

> Look, I am coming soon! I am bringing My reward with Me, and I will repay each person for what they have done.

Spiritual Principle

Salvation is by grace, but faithful service will be rewarded.

Key Truth

The greatest reward is to hear the Master say, **“Well done.”**

XV. SAVED, BUT AS THROUGH FIRE

1 Corinthians 3:15 — Suffering Loss

“If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.”

Here is a sobering truth.

Some believers will see their work burned up.

They built on Christ, but they built with wood, hay, and straw.

They **“will suffer loss.”**

They will lose the reward they could have had.

But notice:

“Yet will be saved.”

Their salvation is secure, because it rests on Christ, not on their work.

This verse is not about paying for sins after death.

Christ paid for sin fully on the cross.

It is about the testing of a believer's work.

Paul's picture is of a man escaping from a burning house.

He gets out alive, but everything he built is gone.

Cross References

Jude 1:23

> Save others by snatching them out of the fire. Show mercy to others, but be careful, hating even the clothing stained by sinful living.

1 Peter 4:18

> And, “If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will happen to the ungodly and the sinner?”

Zechariah 3:2

> The LORD said to Satan, “The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Isn't this man a burning stick pulled out of the fire?”

Spiritual Principle

It is possible to be saved and still waste a life.

Spiritual Warning

Do not be satisfied with only getting into heaven.

Live a life that leaves something lasting for God's glory.

XVI. GOD'S TEMPLE

1 Corinthians 3:16 — The Spirit Dwells in Your Midst

“Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?”

Paul now uses a third picture.

The church is **God's temple.**

Corinth was full of temples to false gods.

The Jews had the temple in Jerusalem.

But Paul says the true temple of God in Corinth was not a building of stone.

It was the people of God.

In this verse, the word **“you”** is plural.

Paul is speaking about the church as a whole.

God's Spirit lives among His gathered people.

This makes the church holy.

And it makes the divisions in Corinth very serious.

They were tearing apart the very place where God lives.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 6:19

> Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and whom you received from God? You do not belong to yourselves.

2 Corinthians 6:16

> What agreement can God's temple have with idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God said: “I will live with them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be My people.”

Ephesians 2:22

> In Him you also are being built together to become a home where God lives by His Spirit.

Spiritual Principle

God's people together are the dwelling place of God.

Key Truth

When believers gather, they are not just an audience.

They are a temple.

XVII. GOD'S TEMPLE IS SACRED

1 Corinthians 3:17 — A Solemn Warning

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

This is one of the strongest warnings in the letter.

To **destroy** God's temple means to ruin the church.

People can do this through division, false teaching, pride, and sin.

God takes this very seriously.

“God will destroy that person.”

Paul uses the same word twice.

The one who destroys will be destroyed.

Why?

“For God's temple is sacred.”

The church is holy because God lives in it.

To attack the church is to attack the place where God dwells.

This warning should make every believer careful about how they treat the church.

Cross References

Jeremiah 7:14

> So what I did to Shiloh I will now do to this house that bears My name, the temple you trust in, the place I gave to you and your ancestors.

Ezekiel 5:11

> "So as surely as I live," declares the Lord GOD, "because you have made My holy place unclean with all your disgusting idols and practices, I Myself will cut you off. I will not look on you with pity or spare you."

Revelation 11:18

> The nations were angry, but now Your anger has come. The time has come to judge the dead, to reward Your servants the prophets, Your holy people, and those who respect Your name, both small and great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.

Spiritual Warning

God defends His church.

No one can harm what God calls holy without answering to God.

Application

Guard the unity of your church.

Your words can build up God's temple or tear it down.

XVIII. DO NOT DECEIVE YOURSELVES

1 Corinthians 3:18 — Become a "Fool" to Become Wise

"Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become "fools" so that you may become wise."

Paul returns to the subject of wisdom.

He begins with a warning:

"Do not deceive yourselves."

The greatest danger is not being fooled by others.

It is fooling yourself.

Some in Corinth thought they were wise **"by the standards of this age."**

Paul tells them the way forward is to become **"fools."**

He means they must be willing to look foolish to the world by humbly accepting the message of the cross.

Only then will they become truly wise.

The door to God's wisdom is humility.

Cross References

Galatians 6:3

> If anyone thinks he is something when he is really nothing, he is fooling himself.

Proverbs 3:7

> Don't think of yourself as wise. Respect the LORD and turn away from evil.

1 Corinthians 1:20

> Where is the wise person? Where is the expert in the law? Where is the great debater of this age? Hasn't God shown that the wisdom of this world is foolish?

Spiritual Principle

Humility is the beginning of true wisdom.

Application

Be willing to look foolish to the world in order to be faithful to God.

XIX. FOOLISHNESS IN GOD'S SIGHT

1 Corinthians 3:19 — “He Catches the Wise in Their Craftiness”

“For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: “He catches the wise in their craftiness.””

In Chapter 1, Paul said the cross looks foolish to the world.

Now he turns it around.

The world's wisdom looks foolish to God.

Paul quotes from the book of Job.

The crafty think they are clever.

But God catches them in their own schemes.

Like a hunter whose trap catches himself.

Human cleverness cannot outsmart God.

Cross References

Job 5:13

> He catches the wise in their own clever plans, and the schemes of the crafty are quickly ruined.

James 3:15

> That kind of wisdom does not come down from heaven. It is earthly, unspiritual, and comes from the devil.

Romans 1:22

> They claimed to be wise, but they became fools.

Spiritual Principle

No one can outsmart God.

Key Truth

What the world calls wise, God may call foolish.

What the world calls foolish, God may call wise.

XX. THE THOUGHTS OF THE WISE ARE FUTILE

1 Corinthians 3:20 — The Lord Knows

“And again, “The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.””

Paul adds a second Scripture, this time from Psalm 94.

“The Lord knows.”

God sees every thought.

He knows every plan.

And He calls the thoughts of the worldly wise **“futile.”**

The word means empty, useless, like a breath that vanishes.

The Corinthians were impressed by human wisdom.

God was not.

Cross References

Psalm 94:11

> The LORD knows people's thoughts. He knows they are only a breath.

Psalm 144:4

> A human being is like a breath. His days are like a passing shadow.

Isaiah 40:17

> All the nations are like nothing before Him. He thinks of them as less than nothing, as empty and worthless.

Spiritual Principle

Human wisdom without God is a breath that quickly disappears.

Application

Do not build your life on ideas that will vanish.

Build it on the word of God, which lasts forever.

XXI. NO MORE BOASTING

1 Corinthians 3:21 — “All Things Are Yours”

“So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours,”

Paul draws his conclusion.

“No more boasting about human leaders!”

The Corinthians were boasting in Paul or Apollos.

Paul says stop.

Then he gives the reason, and it is wonderful.

“All things are yours.”

The Corinthians were making themselves small.

Each one was claiming one leader.

Paul says, **“Why settle for one? God has given you everything.”**

When you belong to Christ, you do not need to boast in any human being.

You are already rich beyond measure.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 1:31

> So, as Scripture says, “Whoever brags should brag about the Lord.”

Jeremiah 9:24

> But whoever brags should brag about this: that he understands and knows Me—that I am the LORD, who shows faithful love, justice, and righteousness on the earth. These are the things I delight in, says the LORD.

Romans 8:32

> God did not hold back His own Son but gave Him up for all of us. So won't He also, along with Him, freely give us everything?

Spiritual Principle

Boasting in people makes us poor; belonging to Christ makes us rich.

XXII. ALL ARE YOURS

1 Corinthians 3:22 — Paul, Apollos, Cephas, the World, Life, and Death

“whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours,”

Paul now lists what belongs to the believer.

Paul, Apollos, and Cephas.

The Corinthians said, **“I belong to Paul.”**

Paul says, **“No, Paul belongs to you.”**

God's servants are gifts to the whole church.

The world.

Believers will one day inherit it with Christ.

Life and death.

Life is for serving Christ.

Death is the doorway into His presence.

The present and the future.

Today and tomorrow are both in God's hands for the good of His people.

Nothing can ultimately be against those who belong to God.

Cross References

Romans 8:38

> I am completely sure that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, neither things now nor things to come, nor any powers—

Romans 14:8

> If we live, we live for the Lord. If we die, we die for the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

Philippians 1:21

> For me, living means living for Christ, and dying means gaining even more.

Spiritual Principle

In Christ, everything—even death—serves the good of God's people.

Key Truth

The believer does not belong to the world.

The world, in a sense, belongs to the believer.

XXIII. YOU ARE OF CHRIST

1 Corinthians 3:23 — Christ Is of God

“and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.”

Paul ends the chapter with the most important truth of all.

All things are yours.

But you are not your own.

“You are of Christ.”

You belong to Him.

Not to Paul.

Not to Apollos.

Not to yourself.

And then:

“Christ is of God.”

This does not mean Christ is less than God.

Paul has already called Him the Lord of glory.

It means that in His work as Savior, the Son came from the Father and lives to glorify the Father.

Everything flows to the glory of God.

The chain is complete:

All things belong to you.

You belong to Christ.

Christ belongs to God.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 11:3

> But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:28

> When everything has been placed under Christ, then the Son Himself will also place Himself under God, who put everything under Him, so that God may be all in all.

Galatians 3:29

> If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring and heirs of what God promised.

Spiritual Principle

Our greatest identity is not who we follow but whose we are.

Key Truth

The Corinthians said, **“I belong to Paul.”**

Paul answers, **“You belong to Christ.”**

That is the end of every division.

XXIV. SIX GREAT LESSONS FROM 1 CORINTHIANS 3

1. Spiritual Maturity Matters

The Corinthians had the Spirit, but they were still acting like infants.

Principle:

Jealousy and divisions are marks of immaturity; true growth comes by living in the Spirit.

2. God Gives the Increase

Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God made it grow.

Principle:

Human leaders are servants, but only God produces lasting growth.

3. Christ Is the One Foundation

No one can lay any other foundation than Jesus Christ.

Principle:

Everything built apart from Christ will not stand the test of eternity.

4. We Are God's Temple

God's Spirit dwells among His people.

Principle:

Believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and God takes His temple seriously.

5. True Wisdom Is God's Wisdom

The wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight.

Principle:

The wisdom of this world will fail, but the wisdom of God endures forever.

6. We Belong to Christ

All things are ours, but we are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

Principle:

All things are ours in Him, but ultimately we are His possession, and He belongs to God.

XXV. THREE PICTURES OF THE CHURCH

In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul uses three pictures to describe the church.

The Church Is God's Field

Workers plant and water.

God gives the growth.

Lesson: **No worker can take credit for the harvest.**

The Church Is God's Building

Christ is the only foundation.

Builders must choose their materials carefully.

Lesson: **Every builder will be tested.**

The Church Is God's Temple

God's Spirit dwells among His people.

The temple is holy.

Lesson: **Whoever harms the church answers to God.**

Key Truth

Each picture shows that the church belongs to God.

The church is God's field to grow, God's building to stand, and God's temple to dwell in.

XXVI. THREE KINDS OF PEOPLE

Chapters 2 and 3 describe three kinds of people.

The Person Without the Spirit

Does not accept the things of God.

Sees them as foolishness.

Needs to be born again.

The Person Who Lives by the Spirit

Has the Spirit and walks in the Spirit.

Discerns spiritual things.

Grows toward maturity.

The Worldly Believer

Has the Spirit but lives like the world.

Is marked by jealousy and quarreling.

Remains an infant in Christ.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Every believer has the Spirit, but every believer must choose to walk by the Spirit.

XXVII. THE TESTING OF OUR WORK

Verses 10–15 teach important truths about the coming Day.

Who Is Tested?

Those who have built on the foundation of Christ.

What Is Tested?

Not our salvation, which rests on Christ.

Our work—what we have built on Him.

How Is It Tested?

By fire, which reveals the quality of each person's work.

What Are the Results?

- Work that survives receives a reward.
- Work that burns brings loss.
- The builder who belongs to Christ is still saved.

Key Truth

We are saved by grace through faith, but we will give an account for how we have built.

XXVIII. WHAT 1 CORINTHIANS 3 TEACHES ABOUT JESUS

The Foundation

He is the only foundation that has been laid.

The Owner of His People

"You are of Christ." Believers belong to Him.

The Coming Judge

The Day of His return will reveal the quality of every work.

The Son Who Glorifies the Father

“Christ is of God.” His work as Savior leads to the glory of the Father.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christ is the beginning of the church as its foundation and the goal of the church as its Lord.

XXIX. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why does Paul call the Corinthians “infants in Christ”?

They were truly believers, but they had not grown up.

Their jealousy and quarreling showed that they were still acting in worldly ways.

Question 2

What is the difference between milk and solid food?

Milk is the basic teaching of the gospel for new believers.

Solid food is deeper teaching for those who are growing.

The Corinthians should have been ready for solid food, but they were not.

Question 3

How did Paul know the Corinthians were still worldly?

There was jealousy and quarreling among them.

They were acting like people who did not know God.

Question 4

What does Paul mean when he calls himself and Apollos “only servants”?

They were not the source of the Corinthians' faith.

They were simply the instruments God used.

Each did the task the Lord gave him.

Question 5

What does “I planted, Apollos watered, but God made it grow” teach us?

Different servants have different jobs.

All of them are needed.

But only God can give life and growth.

Question 6

Does God reward success or faithfulness?

Paul says each will be rewarded according to his own labor.

God rewards faithful work, even when the results are not seen.

Question 7

Why is Jesus Christ the only foundation?

He alone saves.

The church was built on Him and cannot be built on anything else.

Any other foundation will fail.

Question 8

What do the building materials represent?

Gold, silver, and costly stones represent work that is true, faithful, and lasting.

Wood, hay, and straw represent work that is shallow, worldly, or temporary.

Question 9

If a believer's work is burned up, does he lose his salvation?

No.

Paul says he will suffer loss, but he will still be saved.

His salvation rests on Christ, not on his work.

What he loses is the reward.

Question 10

What does it mean that the church is God's temple?

God's Spirit lives among His gathered people.

That makes the church holy.

Those who harm the church will answer to God.

Question 11

Why must a person become a “fool” to become wise?

He must humbly accept the message of the cross, even though the world calls it foolish.

Pride blocks true wisdom.

Humility opens the door to it.

Question 12

What does “all things are yours” mean?

Believers do not need to boast in one human leader.

In Christ, God has given them every servant, every gift, and every blessing.

Even life, death, the present, and the future serve their good.

And above all, they belong to Christ.

XXX. PERSONAL APPLICATION

1 Corinthians 3 asks several important questions.

Am I Growing Up in Christ?

Or am I still living on milk?

Is There Jealousy or Quarreling in My Heart?

These are signs of worldliness, not spirituality.

Am I Following a Person or Following Christ?

Leaders are servants, not masters.

Am I Doing My Part and Trusting God for the Growth?

I can plant and water.

Only God can make it grow.

What Am I Building With?

Will my work survive the fire?

How Do I Treat God's Temple?

Do my words build up the church or tear it down?

Do I Think I Am Wise?

Am I humble enough to learn from God?

Do I Remember Whose I Am?

I belong to Christ.

XXXI. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Build on the Rock, Build to Last”

Every person is building something.

A family.

A career.

A ministry.

A reputation.

A life.

Some build quickly with whatever is easy.

Some build slowly with what is costly.

From the outside, both buildings may look impressive for a while.

But a day is coming when fire will test every work.

Then the difference will be clear.

What was built on Christ with truth, faithfulness, and love will shine.

What was built for show, for pride, or for self will be gone.

This creates a powerful principle.

It is not enough to be on the right foundation.

We must also build the right way.

Principle:

Build your life on Christ, and build with what will last forever.

XXXII. FINAL APPLICATION

1 Corinthians Chapter 3 was written to a church that had stopped growing.

They had the Spirit.

They had gifts.

They had great teachers.

But they were still infants.

They were jealous.

They were quarreling.

They were boasting in men.

Paul did not answer them by choosing a side.

He pointed them to God.

God gives the growth.

God laid the foundation.

God will test the work.

God lives in His temple.

God owns His people.

1 Corinthians 3 therefore reminds us:

Never stop growing.

Never make heroes of God's servants.

Never build on any foundation but Christ.

Never treat God's church lightly.

Never forget that you belong to Him.

The church does not stand on great leaders.

It stands on:

One foundation.

One Spirit.

One God who gives the growth.

And one Lord to whom we all belong.

The same truth still unites:

Tell people that Christ is the only foundation.

Tell people that God gives the growth.

Tell people that the church is God's holy temple.

Tell people that everything is theirs in Christ.

And until the Day comes:

Grow up in Christ.

Serve faithfully.

Build with care.

Boast only in the Lord.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for calling us Your field, Your building, and Your temple.

Thank You for the servants You have sent to plant and water in our lives.

Thank You that You alone give the growth.

Thank You that Jesus Christ is the one sure foundation, already laid.

Thank You that Your Spirit dwells among Your people.

Thank You that all things are ours in Christ, and that we belong to Him.

Forgive us for the times we have stayed spiritual infants when we should have grown.

Forgive us for jealousy and quarreling.

Forgive us for boasting in people instead of boasting in You.

Forgive us for building with wood, hay, and straw.

Help us grow up in Christ.

Give us an appetite for Your word.

Help us serve faithfully, whether we plant or water.

Teach us to build with care, using what will last forever.

Make us humble, so that we may become truly wise.

Help us treat Your church as holy, because You live among us.

Guard our words, so that we build up Your temple and never tear it down.

Prepare us for the Day when every work will be tested.

And may we hear our Master say, “Well done.”

“You are of Christ, and Christ is of God.”

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”
— 1 Corinthians 3:11

Central Truth

Jesus Christ is the only foundation of the church, God alone gives the growth, and His people are His holy temple who belong to Christ, so there is no room for pride in human leaders.

1 Corinthians 3 in One Sentence

Paul tells a jealous and divided church to grow up, to see its leaders as servants of the God who gives the growth, to build carefully on Christ the only foundation, to honor the church as God's holy temple, and to remember that all things are theirs because they belong to Christ.