

Chapter Three

THE PROBLEM OF MINISTRY (3:1-23)

IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. Why is ministry a problem with Christians?
2. How can Paul address these jealous and strife-minded Christians as "brethren"?
3. Why does the discussion of survival or destruction of works arise here?
4. What is God's temple?
5. How does one become wise by becoming a fool?

SECTION 1

Commence With Spiritual Feeding (3:1-4)

3 But I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ. ²I fed you with milk, not solid food; for you were not ready for it; and even yet you are not ready, ³for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving like ordinary men? ⁴For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely men?

3:1-3a Babyish: It is of first importance to note that while in chapter two the contrast is between uninspired human beings (or *psychikos*, physical, finite man) and the inspired apostles (or *pneumatikos*, spirit-guided one), the contrast in chapter three is between Christians who are carnal or fleshly-minded (Gr. *sarkikois*) and the spiritual maturity they should have attained (*pneumatikois*). Chapter two deals with divine revelation *given* by God to some and not to others. Chapter three deals with spiritual maturation which all Christians may *attain* through study and practice of the written word of God. The use of different Greek words in the two chapters makes the difference apparent.

There is, course, an essential connection between the two chapters. Paul is connecting his claim (in chapters one and two) for the divinely inspired authority of his teaching to the spiritual problem (in chapter

three) of the Christians in Corinth. Had they fed themselves on apostolic revelation more than on Greek sophistries, they would not have the problems of immature, fleshly-minded attitudes toward Christian ministry.

There was something wrong with the "feeding" the Corinthian church was getting. "We are what we eat . . ." is an adage some apply to the physical person. The same principle holds true in the spiritual person. Jesus stated this principle very clearly in his great sermon on the Bread of Life (John 6:25-71). Unless a man feeds on the Bread of Life he will have no spirituality in him, and Jesus plainly said that his words were spirit and life (John 6:63). Jesus said his own "food" was to do the will of the Father who sent him (John 4:31-34). If Jesus found it necessary to feed his mind and life on the will of God, so must we! The explicit work of the Christian ministry is the feeding of the flock of God (see Acts 20:28-32; John 21:15-19; I Peter 5:2) to bring it to spiritual maturity (see Eph. 4:1-16; Col. 1:24-29; Heb. 5:11-13).

What is spirituality? Paul clearly defines spirituality as "setting the mind on the things of the Spirit" (see Rom. 8:5-8). Spirituality is *not* emotionalism. Spirituality is *not* measured by quantity of good deeds. Spirituality is fundamentally a *mind-set*. No matter how emotional we may become or how many religious ceremonies we perform, if our motives or our reasons for doing them are carnal (worldly) and selfish, we are not spiritual. Jesus called the very religious Pharisees hypocrites because their reasons for being religious were self-serving (cf. Matt. 6:1-8; 23:1-39).

If spirituality is setting one's mind on the things of the Spirit, where do we find the things of the Spirit in order that we may *set* our minds on them? That is precisely what Paul is talking about in I Corinthians, chapters 1 and 2—the *things* of the *Spirit* are revealed in the *teachings* of the *apostles*. The apostles have the mind of Christ and of God because they are the ones to whom the Spirit of God has revealed them! The things of the Spirit are *not* found innately in man's heart. The heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately corrupt (see Jer. 17:9). God has not put his mind in every man in some subjective way. God has put his mind in his Word in an objective way through the revelation given to the apostles. Now any man who wants to assimilate the mind of God into his mind may do so by assimilating the objective word of God. This assimilative process involves, of course, putting the *things* of the Spirit to practice in one's life. We cannot have Christ in us unless we *do* his commandments (I John 2:24; 3:24). But we cannot know what the will of God for us is until

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we read, understand and believe the revelation of God made to us in human language by the apostles.

Paul declared to the Corinthians that he had to address them as *infants* (Gr. *nepiois*) in respect to their spiritual maturation. It was clear to him that they were not *setting* their *minds* on the things of the Spirit because they were still thinking as worldly-minded people would. Paul does *not* mean that he was talking to non-Christians for he plainly calls them "brethren." He means simply that having made their initial commitment to Christ and having been baptized into him (cf. Acts 18:8), they did not feed themselves on God's word enough to bring them to a state of spiritual growth commensurate with their opportunities and privileges. They had not trained their faculties by practice and study of the apostolic message to be able to distinguish good from evil as well as they should (see Heb. 5:11-14). They were allowing their ways of thinking and living to be dominated more by the habits of their pre-Christian life than by God's will.

Do not wonder that Paul still called them brethren. Spiritual maturation comes, like physical growth, slowly. We would not throw away a baby brother in our physical family because he did not grow into physical manhood overnight. But we do insist that a baby brother eat, learn, exercise and grow. And we make all kinds of personal sacrifices to see that he does. So must we tenderly feed and strengthen our spiritual brethren, no matter what stage of spiritual growth they may manifest. All of us are spiritually deficient when we compare ourselves to Christ, our Elder Brother. The leadership of the church cannot relax its dedication to the ministry of bringing all members to spiritual maturity in Christ. There may be many causes for Christian immaturity:

- a. Inadequate study of the Bible in the corporate worship of the church; superficial sermonizing, unhermeneutical Bible studies.
- b. Low expectations for individual growth. Teachers and preachers may not expect their Bible students to be able to think deeply. Expect the most from every brother.
- c. Failure of the church leadership to provide opportunities for all members to share in the Lord's work ("each part working properly . . ." Eph. 4:16).
- d. Failure of the church leadership to accept their call from Christ to exercise firm, but gentle and merciful, moral guidance to church members.
- e. Just plain unwillingness on the part of Christians to give up thinking and doing worldly things. If any one is willing to do Christ's will, he will mature (see John 7:17).

There was something seriously deficient in the process of Christian maturation within the Corinthian church. Whether it was the fault of those charged with the "feeding" or of those being "fed" (probably both) we are not certain. It is certain that it had to do with the teaching and believing of the most fundamental Christian doctrine of all—the resurrection of Jesus Christ (cf. comments on I Cor. 15:33). They were still infantile in their thinking. They were still acting like children, apparently able to be "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles . . ." (Eph. 4:14).

3:3b-4 Biased: The "party" spirit is a sign of spiritual immaturity. Only the carnal (worldly-minded) think of structuring the church in terms of human superiority and arrogance. Paul tells the Corinthian Christians they were behaving like "run-of-the-mill" (non-Christian) human beings who, through jealousy and strife, scheme and plot to promote their own fame and fortune.

Probably the most crucial issue Jesus had to deal with in his ministry on earth was the nature of the kingdom of God. Most people conceived of the kingdom as a place to establish worldly fame and to promote their own advancement. This involved jealousy and strife by:

- a. Mary, the mother of Jesus (John 2:3-4)
- b. Disciples of John the Baptist (John 4:25-30)
- c. Thousands of followers (John 6:15)
- d. The twelve apostles (Mark 9:38-41; Luke 9:49-50)
- e. The disciples wondering who is the greatest (Matt. 18:1)
- f. Jesus' own half-brothers (John 7:3-4)
- g. Those dining at the Pharisee's home (Luke 14:7-14)
- h. James & John (and their mother) asking Jesus for chief honors (Matt. 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45)
- i. Pharisees in their love for the places of honor in synagogue (Matt. 23:5-12)
- j. Twelve apostles at the Last Supper arguing about who would be greatest among them (Luke 22:24-28)
- k. Peter, refusing to let Jesus wipe his feet as a servant (John 13:5-11)

These instances do not take into account the multitude of inferences (from Acts through Revelation) that such jealousy and strife arose among the early churches. The life-style of the person whose highest hopes begin and end with this present world and a fleshly existence is one of immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party

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spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like (see Gal. 5:19-21). Those who belong to Christ have put such a life-style to death ("crucified" it). Christians, who believe there is a higher plane on which to live than bodily functions and who believe there is another world coming, live a life-style of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. They trust Jesus Christ that this is true and real because he lived such life-style to perfection on earth, was slain because of it, but rose from the dead to vindicate it forever.

Jesus' statement, "He who would be greatest among you, let him be the servant of all" (Matt. 20:27) is proven true by his resurrection from the dead. Those who say, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos" are not living in the light of Christ's truth.

SECTION 2

Consists In Spiritual Work For God (3:5-17)

5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. ⁸He who plants and he who waters are equal, and each shall receive his wages according to his labor. ⁹For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

¹⁰ According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and another man is building upon it. Let each man take care how he builds upon it. ¹¹For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²Now if any one builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—¹³each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

¹⁶ Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are.

3:5-9 Builders: All Christians are workers in God's field—builders on God's building. What are apostles? Workers, like every other Christian. They may have gifts from God diverse from ours to equip them for the special job to which God called them, but they are still only workers. Paul calls himself and Apollos *servants* (Gr. *diakonoï*, deacons, table-waiters). The apostles were merely messenger-boys, delivering God's revelation to mankind. They were sent into the world of the first century to serve, not to be served. Paul was a *planter* (Gr. *ephuteusa*) and Apollos was a *waterer* (Gr. *epotisen*) in God's field, God is the owner of the field and the Master of the servants. Everyone else is a planter, waterer, cultivator, or a reaper. Some are sent to sow and some to reap (John 4:36-38). Neither one is more important than the other. Since not even one apostle is superior to another, partisan loyalty to one human servant of God or another which creates jealousy and strife is senseless.

The Greek tenses in verse 6 point to an interesting emphasis. The verbs used for "planted" and "watered" are aorist tense while the Greek verb for *gathering* (*euxanen*) is imperfect. Aorist means a single action completed in the past, while imperfect shows continuous past action. It could be translated thus: At one time in the past Paul planted in Corinth, and later Apollos watered there; but God was making growth occur all along during that time. It is also of importance to notice in verse 7 that the strong adversative conjunction in Greek, the word *alla*, puts emphasis on the contrast. Verse 7 might be translated "He who plants is nothing, he who waters is nothing, *but (alla)* God who *is giving growth* (Gr. *auxanon*, present participle) *is everything.*" One planted, some watered, and each was the same as the other—nothing without God for their labors produced only because God made it to be so!

Verse 8 is a reaffirmation of what Jesus taught in the gospels. All Christian servants are equal—they are all servants. Each servant will receive his wages according to *faithfulness*. Servants do not receive wages according to amount produced for producing is God's doing—God gives the increase. The servant is responsible only to faithfully use the tools over which he has been given a stewardship. The servant is not responsible for the amount of the crop.

Paul wants to discuss with Corinth the problem of pride as a factor contributing to the schismatism in the church. The attitude of servanthood is part of the answer to division in the church. Involvement, increased work-load or busyness will *not* produce Christian unity. There can only be real unity when Christians are emptied of self and willingly take the form of servants (Phil. 2:1-11).

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3:10-11 Boss: The apostle uses two figures of speech (verse 9) to illustrate the work of ministering the gospel. It is farming and building. Paul called the Corinthian Christians God's *field* (Gr. *georgion*, from which we get the name *George*, and the word *farmer*) and he called them God's *building* (Gr. *oikodome*, house, edifice). Paul called himself a "masterbuilder" working along with his co-laborers erecting God's building, the church. The Greek word *architekton* is the word from which our English word *architect* originates. However the use of the word by the ancient Greeks indicates the word had a wider application than our English word architect. Literally the word comes from, *arche*, master, superior—and *tekton*, artificer, skilled craftsman. In the context of this chapter Paul exhorts Christians, "Let each man *take care* how he builds. . . ." The ministry of the gospel demands the best skill in selection and use of "building materials." Paul refers to his own extreme care, as if he were a master technician, using precisely and exactly the right "material" for the foundation of the church in Corinth. Paul used Jesus Christ and him crucified as the foundation.

But the main thrust of this passage is that Paul used the "material" he was told to use by the "Boss" (God). Paul writes, "According to the grace given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation. . . ." The RSV translates, "According to the commission of God given me. . . ." but the Greek word is *charin* which is translated *grace* or *gift*. Of course, Paul often refers to his being called by God to be an apostle (a builder of God's church) using the word "grace" (see Rom. 1:5; I Cor. 15:10; I Tim. 1:12-16, etc.). What Paul is stressing here is that he exercised all the skill he had to follow the orders (or instructions) of God who was gracious enough to employ him as a builder on His building.

Immature, spiritual babies were not ready to really add to the "building" of God in Corinth which Paul had begun. Paul's foundation was the sure and solid rock of God's revelation that Jesus was the Christ. That was what God told Paul to lay as a foundation for the church. Paul did not vary from the instructions of the "Boss." Ignorant (I Cor. 10:1) and unskilled (in the revelation of God) Christians must not disregard the divinely revealed Word (blueprint) of the Owner concerning the building of the church. All Christians who wish to involve themselves in building the Lord's church must train themselves (see Heb. 5:11-14), lest they attempt to lay a foundation other than Jesus as the Christ, or lest they build upon that foundation with unenduring materials.

There is only one foundation upon which the church is built—Jesus as the only Anointed of God (and all that implies as to Jesus' deity), (see Matt. 16:13-19; Eph. 2:20; I Peter 2:4-8). To try to build on any other foundation is vain (cf. Ps. 127:1). Actually, God laid (past tense) his Son, the Messiah-Servant, as the foundation of his new covenant people (the church) long before Paul was born. God laid the promises of the Servant as the foundation in the Zion of the Old Testament (see Isa. 28:16; Ps. 118:22-23; Matt. 21:42). The Jews, for the most part, rejected Jesus as the Messiah and thus rejected the foundation-stone of God. The very foundation-stone God sent became a stone of destruction falling upon those who rejected him!

3:12-17 Building: Paul had laid God's foundation. Apollos had continued to instruct the new converts. Now, some of the Christians of the congregation in Corinth were beginning to teach and lead in building the church. But it was evident to Paul that care was not being taken in their building. They were producing disciples who were jealous, indifferent to immorality in the church, bringing litigations against one another in pagan courts, careless about marriage, uncaring about weaker brethren, disrespectful in the corporate worship of the church and toward God ordained structures of human authority, both prideful and envious in the matter of supernatural gifts, teaching confusion about the bodily resurrection, and slack in matters of Christian stewardship. The teaching leadership of the Corinthian church was constructing God's building with weak and unendurable material. They were not building up Christian people who had strong, self-disciplined, servant-minded faith in Christ and his Word.

There are two classes of building materials (disciples, Christians); fireproof and flammable. Some Christians will be able to stand the scorching heat of persecution and testing while others will wither under it and die (cf. Matt. 13:5-6; 13:20-21). Paul's main concern in this exhortation is the ability of the Corinthian Christians to withstand the fiery trials which were coming upon the whole first-century world of Christendom (see I Cor. 7:26; I Peter 2:20-23; 4:12-13). John the apostle writes in the book of Revelation about the "great tribulation" coming upon the Roman Empire of the first and second centuries. Christians had been put to the "fires" of testing ever since the Day of Pentecost when the church was begun (see Acts of the Apostles). And physical or economic hardships are not the only forms of testing the Christian must prepare to meet. There is also the seductiveness of fleshly self-indulgence and the deceptiveness of false religious teaching.

A day of testing comes to every follower of Jesus, in every age. The word *hemera*, Greek for *day*, is *not* capitalized in the Greek text,

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although it is preceded by the definite article. That, however, does not necessarily mean *he hemera* ("the day") is pointing to the final Judgment Day of God. The Old and New Testament both have many references to specific, past, historical judgments of God upon the earth and use the term, "day of the Lord" or, "the day of the Lord." Many days of testing (in fact every day) are in the Christian's life. Paul is probably referring to a specific era of testing (perhaps the Neronian persecutions or those later under Domitian).

Paul was concerned from the reports he had received of conditions in the Corinthian church that many of the Christians there were "wood, hay and stubble" as far as their spiritual substance was concerned. Paul knew that Christians then faced "an impending distress." Their spirituality was about to be proven (Gr. *dokimasei*, tested) or disproven by some "fire" (Gr. *pyri*). Paul comes back to this subject of testing and temptation for the Corinthian Christians in chapter ten where he uses the tragic story of the Israelites in the wilderness as a case in point. Some of the Christians at Corinth will withstand the "impending distress" and others will be consumed.

The trials of the Christian life (whether persecution or temptation) will prove not only what the material (disciple) is, but it will also prove how careful the builder (teacher) has been with the material. The "day" will disclose each teacher's work! Temptations, trials and tests of faith are very revealing. Every preacher, Sunday School teacher, Christian parent, elder, deacon, and Bible college teacher who has ever sown the seed of God's word anywhere will have his work tested. Fires of persecution and temptation are so certain to come Peter chides Christians for being surprised, or acting as if these "fires" were something strange (I Peter 1:7; 4:12-13). It was predicted that the Messiah would bring the fires of testing to mankind (cf. Zech. 13:9; Mal. 3:1-5). Jesus himself said he came to cast testing-fire upon the earth (Luke 12:49). God will not have any person built into his church as a living stone who has not been tested. The "wood, hay, stubble" kind of disciple is illustrated by Jesus in his parable of the soils and the "rocky ground" which has "no root in itself" so when the scorching heat of tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word "immediately he falls away"; or in the "thorny ground" which lets the word be choked out by the cares of the world and the delight in riches. The gold, silver and precious stones kind of disciple is like the "good ground" of the parable or one who hears the word and holds it fast in an honest and good heart bringing forth fruit with patience (see Matt. 13:1-23; Luke 8:4-15).

Thoughtless building, using shallow and superficial "materials" (as some teachers at Corinth appear to have been doing) will program

the structure for demolition when the inevitable fires of testing come. But there will be reward for the worker in God's farm or God's building who builds with depth and discipline. Such a worker's materials will "survive" (Gr. *menoi*, remain)—they will not perish in the scorching pressures of temptation and trial. Paul's reward or "crown" was seeing his converts survive (see Phil. 4:1; I Thess. 2:19-20). The apostle John expressed the same joy that his converts were remaining true to Christ (cf. II John 4; III John 3, 4). The teacher who uses superficial materials will suffer the loss of this reward but he will be saved even if his part of the building (disciples) cannot survive the fiery trials. Even the best teachers cannot be sure those whom they teach and to whom they give their best will withstand temptation and persecution. Jesus lost Judas as well as many "thousands" of disciples who left him and followed him no more (cf. John 6:66ff.). Paul lost Demas (II Tim. 4:10). John lost Diotrephes (II John 9). The seven churches of Asia Minor lost members (Rev. ch. 2-3). However, the teacher's own salvation does not depend on the faithfulness of his disciples, but on his own faithfulness to Christ. Every teacher will face trials and hardships, discouragements and heartaches. The teacher, too, must go through the fire. He will be saved only if he is built of enduring material. The teacher, also, is a part of God's building, having been built into it by someone else. Every human being will survive God's testing-fires according to his own faith. No one will be condemned for someone else's lack of faith. Some may be saved and experience joy that others they pointed to Christ were saved also. And some may be saved and experience loss that those they pointed to Christ refused to be saved.

The honest and sincere builder (teacher) will be saved, even if some of his material (pupils) does not endure the testing. But the one who deliberately takes up the work of wrecking God's building will most certainly be destroyed. In this context, the *entire* church is being called "God's temple" (see also Eph. 2:19-22). This is *not* a reference to the individual Christian as in I Corinthians 6:19-20, and it should not be used as such. This refers to the jealous and striving brethren at Corinth who were quarreling (1:11-17) and dividing the church into separate parties following human leaders. There is no excuse for separating the local, or universal, church of Jesus Christ into factions following human leaders or using human names. Not even the name of Christ may be used to separate oneself from anyone else who is sincerely trying their best to be obedient to Christ's teachings. The only reason by which a Christian may justify separating himself from one who claims to be a follower of Jesus is deliberate, demonstrable,

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provable false teaching or licentious living. Even then such separation must have as its goal the reclamation of a brother or sister straying from Christ, (II Thess. 3:14; II Cor. 2:5-11; I Cor. 5:3-5).

God will not tolerate those who wreck his church by willful division. One must be either a builder or a wrecker. There is no middle ground. Every man or woman either gathers with Christ or scatters (Matt. 12:30). All people fall into one of two categories: either a citizen of God's kingdom making every effort to build it, or an alien enemy trying to destroy it. How terribly awesome is the sin of those who rebelliously and deliberately perpetuate divisions among believers in Christ. Division is perpetuated when unscriptural doctrine is wilfully perpetuated; when party-spirit or partiality is perpetuated; and when legalism is perpetuated. For further study of Christian unity see *Learning From Jesus*, by Seth Wilson, College Press, pgs. 412-430.

SECTION 3

Concludes With Spiritual Compensation (3:18-23)

18 Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. ¹⁹For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," ²⁰and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." ²¹So let no one boast of men. For all things are yours, ²²whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; ²³and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

3:18-20 Nothing: The man who thinks he is following the way of wisdom by dividing the church into factions striving against one another for superiority is self-deceived. The Greek word *exapatato* is intensive and means *thoroughly* deceived; it is related to the word *apatao*, meaning "to cheat." The man who is looking to glorify himself or some other man in the church is only cheating himself of the real reward from God. The wisdom of this doomed world is foolishness. The world that refuses to see through the perspective of God's revealed truth is a world that cannot know what is real and abiding. Christians do not see anything from a human standpoint of view (cf. II Cor. 4:16-18; 5:16-17). Christians are the ones who are wise; all who are not Christians are cheating themselves of God's divine wisdom. These are being blinded by the devil (II Cor. 4:3-6) and

deceived into thinking that following Christ is foolishness. It is true, "he who would be greatest in the kingdom must be the servant of all" (Mark 9:35; Luke 22:24-27).

If we are to follow Christ and have his reward we must be ready to be considered a "fool" by the worldly-wise. Those who give their money to see that the gospel is proclaimed and to minister to people's physical needs in the name of Jesus are "fools" according to the worldly-wise. The "smart" thing to do, according to the worldling, is to keep one's money and invest it for one's future security. The Christian who is willing to take the lowliest task or position, and let others receive the credit and applause, is a "fool" according to the world.

But the worldling is a fool! No human being can "out-fox" God. Paul says all wisdom in this world not focused on knowing God and doing his will is foolishness—but how many people believe that? God traps all the worldly-wise in their craftiness. The Greek word *panourgia* is translated *craftiness*. Literally, it means, "all working," that is, a "crafty" person is one who is versatile and clever in everything—he thinks! The word *panourgia* is applied to the subtlety of the devil in deceiving Eve (II Cor. 11:3) and to the methods of teachers who deceive immature Christians with false doctrines (Eph. 4:14). Christian teachers renounce the very idea that they need to practice such human cleverness (II Cor. 4:2). The Christian does not need the clever subtleties of falsehood and deception to feel secure in this world. He has the faithful, never changing word of God which makes him happy and secure. The one who lives by deceit and dishonesty is *caught* in the trap of guilt, shame, and destruction of selfhood. That is the way God governs his creation, (cf. Romans ch. 1 and 2).

3:21-23 Everything: While the non-Christian thinks the Christian is a fool and has nothing, Paul says the Christian has *everything!* Everything God has made belongs to the Christian to use to glorify God and thus be glorified by God. God has given everything to the Christian because only the child of God has surrendered his evaluation and use of everything to the revealed will of God. The Christian is the only person who knows what everything in God's creation is for! To surrender one's mind to human leaders is really a kind of self-impooverishment. Human "wisemen" who deny God understand nothing about what God has made. They will eventually use what God made for good to produce evil. But the Christian, in harmony with Christ's will, has opened up to himself the whole universe as his servant. Everything God has made is *good* (cf. Genesis, ch. 1-2; I Tim. 4:4-5). God intended his creation for man's benefit—to make

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man a spiritual partner with him and to give man enjoyment. When a man uses all that God has made to promote good, truth, purity, holiness and mercifulness, he is rewarded with glory and happiness.

All things belong to the Christian. Some in Corinth had been saying, "I belong to Paul," others, "I belong to Apollos." But the truth was that Paul and Apollos belonged to the Christians as their servants to bring them into a glorifying, enjoyable relationship with Christ. The world was theirs to use in service to God by serving men. In this they would be exalted and find satisfaction. Life was theirs to live in harmony with God's truth and holiness and in so doing find purpose and fulfillment. Even death belonged to them. Death belongs to the Christian as a release from the trials and tribulations of this world and a door opening into eternal bliss (Phil. 1:21; II Cor. 4:16—5:1). "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?" (Rom. 8:32) Christians are stewards of the whole universe. It belongs to their Father. He has given it into their hands for faithful use. He did not give it to them to be enslaved. They are to control it as men made free by Christ to enjoy and praise the name of their Master. They will be asked for an accounting when the Master returns. They will be asked only if they honestly used it to the best of their abilities according to his will.

The fact that God has given the Christian everything in his creation in no way gives the Christian room to be arrogant or boastful. With great privilege comes great responsibility. It is only by virtue that the Christian is in Christ that God gives these things. Having been united in Christ by faith and obedience the Christian has victory over death, life, present, future and everything else. Man had been given dominion over God's creation in the Garden of Eden, but man lost it by believing the devil and rejecting God. The Son of man (God incarnate) won that dominion back for man by his life of perfect faith and obedience (see Heb. 2:5-18). We share in what Christ has won for man only if we hold our faith in him firm to the end (Heb. 3:14).

To minister or not minister has been a problem with God's covenant people from the time Israel left Egypt until now. In old Israel (from Moses to Malachi) the majority of priests, prophets and kings were self-centered. There were always a few saintly exceptions. Among the thousands of Israel who assumed the offices of ministry, only a few heroic individuals really ministered God's will to God's people. There was Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Elijah and Elisha; there was David, Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah; there was Isaiah, Amos, Jeremiah and the other faithful prophets. These ministered in times of great distress,

devastation and discouragement. But for the most part the whole nation of Israel defaulted on its call from God to minister to the nations around them—they begged, rather, to be ministered unto. So God said through the old prophets that he would form a new “nation” a “new Israel” out of every nation on earth who would be ministers unto him and the world (cf. Isa. 66:18-23, etc.). The church of Christ is that new nation of priests (I Peter 1:9-10). *Every Christian is called to be a minister.* Every Christian is a priest offering the sacrifices of praise and confession with the lips and of good deeds toward those in need (see Heb. 13:15-16). When every Christian is committed to ministry rather than being ministered to, the problem of division in the church will disappear.

APPLICATIONS:

1. Servanthood is learned through practice, it is not innate. Jesus had a difficult time teaching his first disciples that greatness was in serving others. He taught it primarily by his own example: “The Son of man came to minister, not to be ministered to. . . .” Jesus washed the disciples feet (John 13) and said they ought have the same attitude toward one another. Paul served the Corinthian Christians—he was not served by them. In fact he refused to take any salary from them for his ministry to them so they might have it as an example (II Cor. 11:7-9; 12:13-18).
2. Dissension and the party-spirit in a church or among Christians is a sure sign of worldly-mindedness (i.e., *not* thinking as God thinks in his word). It is usually a result of refusing to see human beings as God sees them and, rather, seeing them as the world does—objects to be exploited for one’s own selfish purposes (see II Cor. 5:16-17). It is perpetuated by “comparing ourselves . . . or measuring ourselves by one another” instead of by Christ (cf. II Cor. 10:12). Christians can never make spiritual progress or come to maturity until they repent of such worldly thinking.
3. Every Christian, whether apostle, evangelist, teacher, elder, deacon, secretary, carpenter, custodian, man or woman is simply a *laborer* in God’s “field” or on God’s “building.” Only God and his Son have authority to be “boss.” Men are simply planters, waterers—God alone has the power (through his word) to produce life and growth.
4. Every laborer or worker will take care how he works on God’s building if he wants his work to survive and enjoy it:

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He will build only on the One Foundation—Christ crucified and resurrected.

He will exert every effort to produce quality materials; materials that will survive the fires of temptation and testing.

He will recognize that he too is saved by the quality of fire-survival built into his own life.

5. Christians must believe that the compensations of self-serving are for fools, while the compensations of servanthood for Christ and others are for the wise.
6. God made everything good and he made it for Christians to exercise dominion over in order to praise and serve him, to enjoy and benefit from, and to use to bring others to salvation in Christ.

APPREHENSION:

1. How could Paul call these Corinthians “brethren” and, in the same breath, say they were not “spiritual men”?
2. What is a “babe” in Christ? Should we remain “babes” in Christ? How does this fit into Christ’s admonition that we must “turn and become like little children” to enter the kingdom?
3. Should Christians be fed in “stages” or “phases”? Are all Christians ready to receive teaching from the scriptures on the same level?
4. What is the responsibility of the leaders of the church in this?
5. What is a *clear* manifestation of spiritual immaturity?
6. Do you find this clearly manifested in the brotherhood of Christians today?
7. Is Paul saying in this chapter we should not show respect or honor to those who teach us the scriptures? What is he saying about human teachers?
8. What is the *one* and *only* essential to church growth?
9. Where does God put his power to give growth? Are churches and Christian leaders “plugging in to” God’s growing-power or relying on something else?
10. If apostles are “not anything” but planters and waterers, why did God give them powers and authority he gave to no other Christian?
11. Is God serious about Christians being careful how they build his “building”?
12. Name some practical ways we may be careful about how we build!
13. Have you seen any of your “building materials” tested in the “fire”?

14. Have any failed the test? Have any survived? What made the difference?
15. Will there be any stars in your crown when you get to heaven?
16. What will God do with those who destroy his church through division?
17. Did you realize God was that serious about Christian unity?
18. Why is it foolish for Christians to be biased in favor of some of God's servants and reject others?
19. Do you really believe that all of God's creation is yours? Are you using it?