

**3:1-2:** *And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk, not with meat; for ye were not yet able (to bear it): nay, not even now are ye able;*

There is a clear connection between the opening verses in this chapter and the material in chapter 2. Paul had a *wisdom* when he came to Corinth (2:6, 7), and here we find he “*could not speak*” it. The reason? What stopped him from presenting the *spiritual wisdom* of the gospel? Verse one says the Corinthians were “*carnal*” (*sarkinos*). Spicq (3:241) said this means “not anti-spiritual, but they are non-spiritual.” A different word for carnal is used in verse 3 (*sarkikos*), and this second term means “*flesh*.” Thayer (p. 569) understood the second term in verse 3 to mean the Corinthians were “governed by mere human nature, not by the Spirit of God.” The second term “emphasizes sinful tones that are discordant with the divine” (Spicq, 3:240). When combined, both words show the lack of spiritual maturity among the Corinthians. Immaturity can come from both what people do and fail to do.

Another key word in verse one is “*spiritual*” (*pneumatikos*). Paul used this term 24 times in his writings and 15 of these times are in this book. This is the same word previously used in 2:13, 15 and more information about this term is given below. Since the Corinthians could not be treated as *spiritual*, Paul meant the Corinthians were “men and women who on many levels continued to be children, ‘babes in Christ’” (CBL, GED, 5:231).

“*Babes*” (*nepios*) is used several times in 1 Cor. 13:11. Here the word describes spiritual immaturity. Brown (1:282) noted how in 1 Cor. 3:1 “the spiritual is contrasted with the fleshly and the childish.” What Paul described can be compared to physical life. People go through four basic stages during a typical lifetime. First, there is life as a newborn. During this period children are often called “cute,” and they are basically helpless. They cannot say or do much. This is a time when children often fuss and even fight to get their way. They need around the clock care, never try to help themselves, and parents must regularly check on them. While babies need special care, a time comes when they are supposed to mature. Just as the “bib is one day traded for an apron,” so Christians are to increase in their spiritual maturity.

After infancy children begin to learn the basics. They learn to feed themselves, become “potty trained,” and begin to clean up their own messes. They learn basic skills such as tying their shoes. When the teen years come more responsibilities are given. In the teenage years young people begin to date, may enter into the work world, prepare to enter college, buy their first car, and begin to make noticeable contributions to their family unit. Then comes adulthood, a time for even more responsibilities.

Although this is the way life should progress, there are those who never grow up and this is wrong. “It may be forgivable in a child to sulk, to be liable to fits of uncontrolled temper, to refuse to play if he does not get his own way. And there are many adults—and in the Church—who are as childish in their behaviour as any child. Physically they are men and women; in matters of conduct they have never grown up” (Barclay, Hebrews, p. 50). “It is true that Jesus said that the greatest thing in the world is the *childlike* spirit; but there is a world of difference between the *childlike* and the *childish* spirit. Peter Pan, the boy who would not grow up, makes a charming play on the stage; but Peter Pan, the man and the woman who will not grow up, make a tragedy in real life” (ibid). Christians must grow in their Christian lives (this was even true for the

apostles, Jn. 16:12). For suggestions on how this growth can be accomplished, see the commentary on Heb. 5:11-12.

The word *spiritual* has many different senses in the Scriptures. Wayne Jackson (Bible Words and Theological Terms Made Easy A Practical Handbook, pp. 169-170) noted how spiritual "(a) may refer to a being that is 'spirit' in nature, e.g., angels (Eph. 6:12). (b) Spiritual may denote that which is from God, thus is lofty in its quality (Rom. 7:14). (c) Spiritual may connote a person who has access to sacred revelation by supernatural means of the Spirit's operation (1 Cor. 2:6ff). (d) The term may be set in contrast to the secular, as in 'spiritual songs' (Eph. 5:19). (e) Spiritual may describe one who is knowledgeable and strong in the faith, as opposed to the uninformed, weak person (1 Cor. 3:1; Gal. 6:1). Those who would possess the character of the 'spiritual' (cf. Gal. 6:1), must be 'led by the Spirit' and 'walk by the Spirit,' as the Spirit instructs via the written word (Eph. 6:17). Thereby one is able to cultivate the 'fruit of the Spirit' (Gal. 5:16, 18, 22-23)."

Even though the Corinthians could not be taught as spiritual people, they were not like the "*natural man*" described in 2:14. If Paul had used the *natural man* phraseology from 2:14, he would have meant the Corinthians were unsaved. Because the Corinthians were Christians, Paul used unique wording (*babes* and *carnal*) to say they were children of God but spiritually weak. The members of this congregation needed "*milk*" instead of "*meat*." *Milk (gala)* is found only a few times in the New Testament (the other places are 1 Cor. 9:7; Heb. 5:12, 13; 1 Pet. 2:2). The NASB does a wonderful job of capturing the sense of the Greek text: "I gave you milk to drink."

Although the Corinthians were "*in Christ*" (1b), they were unable to grasp some of the more complex facts concerning Christianity. Their lack of understanding was not due to an inability to learn. Their problem was related to sin. According to verses 1 and 3, they had become involved with the sins of carnality, jealousy and strife. They "*walked after the manner of men*" (3b) and thus lacked the spiritual maturity God's people are to have (compare 1 Pet. 2:1-2). Today continued growth is still necessary for all Christians, and those who fail or refuse to grow are in error (Heb. 5:11-14).

The Corinthians' lack of growth might be compared to a 45 year old man who refuses to act like an adult. I once met a Christian who always wanted to attend a children's Bible class. Though she was forty years old and had been a Christian for many years, she said she "learned so much" in a Bible class for children under the age of ten. She was addicted to milk and did not want any meat. A time comes when adults are to "put away childish things" (compare 1 Cor. 13:11), and this principle is widely recognized in the world. Yet, in the spiritual realm a similar thing can happen and many are not disturbed. Some embrace Christianity but after 5, 15, 20, 30 years they are still spiritual babies. If Christians are not growing and maturing, they need to be stirred up and pushed forward because spiritual retardation nauseates God. Just as children eventually need to give up the bottle and/or breast, so such is true for God's people.

At Corinth the lack of growth is described as: "*for ye were not able to bear it*" (2b). Without growth Christians will never come to grips with some of the *harder truths* in God's word. These truths include Mt. 7:13-14 (most of the world will be lost) and 2 Thess. 1:7-9 (those who do not obey the gospel will be unsaved). Getting people to remove themselves from the "works of the flesh" and begin producing the "fruit of the spirit" (Gal. 5:19-26) are also challenging tasks. Additional information about hard truths

is found in the commentary on verses 3-4. Some Christians are resistant to growing and learning, but teachers need to challenge those who hear them so growth will occur on a regular basis. It is not sinful to be a child in the faith, but it is a sin to always remain a spiritual child.

**3:3-4:** *for ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you jealousy and strife, are ye not carnal, and do ye not walk after the manner of men? 4 For when one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not men?*

The information in verse 3 is a mini climax (it is like Paul gave an “ascending order of sin”). Paul accused the Corinthians of jealousy, strife, carnality, and walking after the manner of men. He reached these conclusions by previously affirming:

- I could not speak unto you *as spiritual* (verse 1)
- You are *as carnal* (verse 1)
- You are *as babes in Christ* (verse 1)
- You were *fed with milk and not meat* (verse 2)
- The Corinthians had been unable to *endure the meat* (verse 2)

In the first verse Paul used a simile (*as carnal*. For information on the word *carnal*, see the commentary on verses 1-2 above). While the opening verse softened Paul's accusation, here he dropped the comparison and changed to a metaphor (the same type of speech but the comparison word “as” is omitted). He said the Corinthians *were carnal*, and he used a present tense verb (“*are*” carnal). Paul knew his friends were being strongly influenced by fleshly desires and drives (3b). He then proved his accusation in verse four. Paul made a connection between the Corinthians' lack of growth (verses 1-2) and the church problems found in the present two verses. A high percentage of church difficulties stem from people not understanding or not applying God's word.

The Corinthians had a problem with “*jealousy*” (verse 3b). This term (*zelos*) is translated “*envying*” in the KJV. Here it means “an envious and contentious rivalry” (Thayer, p. 271). Paul used this same word in listing the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:20, and see the additional commentary on this verse). It seems the Corinthian factions described in the first chapter of this book involved seeking prominence and dominance. The different sects saw themselves in competition with one another (each wanted to be “top dog”). Envious and jealous rivalry create many, many problems. “If **jealousy** produces people who are **of the flesh**, it is time for us all to make loud lamentations, put on sackcloth, and smear ourselves with ashes. For who is unstained by this passion?—unless I am merely making assumptions about others based on myself” (The Church's Bible, p. 53).

The word *strife* (*eris*), also found in verse 3, is only found in the writings of Paul. This term is “always used of *disputes* that endanger the church” (Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:52). Here it means “factions in the church” (ibid) and “the outward result of envious feeling” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 393). Paul listed this

activity as a work of the flesh in Gal. 5:20. This word may also indicate that some of the Corinthian Christians wanted to be important. As Christians fought for status there were clashes and strife. Here we get a picture of a local congregation that resembles a war zone. The problems at Corinth were very, very bad.

When Paul spoke of the Corinthians' way of life ("*walking*" in 3b), he used the present tense. Furthermore, in some manuscripts there is an additional description of the Corinthians (this is the word *divisions*). This term (*dichostasia*) is found in the KJV but not in the ASV. It described dissension, and it is also used by Paul in Rom. 16:17 and Gal. 5:20. If this word is considered part of the original text, it suggests this congregation was in bad shape but not completely torn apart; things could be salvaged. If changes were not made soon, Paul realized the Corinthian congregation might very well be fractured beyond repair. Illustrations for the problems at Corinth are given in verse four. There we find a foundation that gave Paul a basis to present information involving first century preachers (this new subject begins in the verse five). Warren Wiersbe (First Corinthians, p. 577) suggested this chapter contains three pictures of the church. "The church is a *family* and the goal is maturity (1 Cor. 3:1-4). The church is a *field* and the goal is *quantity* (1 Cor. 3:5-9a). The church is a *temple* and the goal is *quality* (1 Cor. 3:9b-23)."

Wiersbe also (p. 578) said the usual interpretation of food illustration "is that 'milk' represents the easy things in the Word, while 'meat' represents the hard doctrines. But I disagree with that traditional explanation, and my proof is Hebrews 5:10-14. That passage seems to teach that 'milk' represents what Jesus Christ did on earth, while 'meat' concerns what He is doing now in heaven. The writer of Hebrews wanted to teach his readers about the present heavenly priesthood of Jesus Christ, but his readers were so immature, he could not do it (note Heb. 6:1-4)." The information in Heb. 5 does relate to Jesus' work as high priest (and is "meat"), but this is not the only difficult topic in God's word. Another excellent observation from Wiersbe (First Corinthians, p. 578) is: "The immature believer knows little about the present ministry of Christ in heaven. He knows the *facts* about our Lord's life and ministry on earth, but not the *truths* about His present ministry in heaven. He lives on 'Bible stories' and not Bible doctrines. He has no understanding of 1 Corinthians 2:6-7."

Anyone who knows anything about the Bible will agree that there are *easy* and *hard* things in the word of God. Peter specifically said this in his second letter (2 Pet. 3:16). Sometimes things are hard because we make them hard. We may not want to follow a command of God so it is classified as "difficult information." In many places God's word is very explicit, but the information is hard to accept. When one considers what Jesus said about money (Mt. 19:23), not fearing any man (Mt. 10:28), dedication (Mt. 12:30), loving God supremely (Mt. 10:37), loving one's enemies (Mt. 5:44), marriage and divorce (Mt. 19:9), forgiveness (Mt. 18:21-22), making whatever sacrifice is necessary to enter into the kingdom of God (Mk. 9:43), the first shall be last (Mk. 10:31), God rejects improper worship (Mt. 15:8-9) and God will destroy all religious groups He has not authorized (Mt. 15:13), it quickly becomes clear that there are many hard teachings just from Jesus' life. It is certainly easier to stay a spiritual baby, but God commands His people to increase to the point where they can teach others (Mt. 28:20). This requires a commitment to personal Christian growth and perseverance. Local congregations should give careful consideration to how they can help Christians learn

as much as they can and reach their full potential.

*3:5-7: What then is Apollos? and what is Paul? Ministers through whom ye believed; and each as the Lord gave to him. 6 I planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.*

The ASV uses the word “*what*” at the start of the 5<sup>th</sup> verse (this puts attention on the “function” or job of Paul and Apollos). The KJV has the word “*who*” and this puts stress on the personalities. This difference is due to a manuscript variation and the better translation of the thought is *what*. Paul was not asking who he and Apollos were. He asked *what* he and Apollos were. The emphasis is *on the office* (job), not the preachers. This is very similar to 1:13 where Paul wanted to know what kind of position he and other evangelists occupied. What is said directly relates to the first four verses in this chapter (the Corinthians were acting in ways that were not *spiritual*, verse 1).

Paul’s questions about the role of preachers are answered at the end of verse five. What did ministers in the first century do? What is a minister’s God given job in our day and time? Ministers are *a* (not “the”) means by which people believe the gospel (compare Rom. 10:14f). Notice that belief came “*through*” men like Paul and Apollos (the KJV says “*by*”). “Faith was not placed *in* them or *because* of them. Faith is the gift of God which comes through hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17; Eph. 2:8-9)” (Gromacki, p. 45).

The word translated “*minister*” (*diakonos*) is the same word elsewhere translated “*deacon*.” This term had both a specific and general meaning. The specific definition applied to those who taught the gospel. The general meaning, which is the proper sense here, described some type of servant. First century preachers like Paul and Apollos were not rulers or high officials to be revered; they were servants who taught others about Christianity. Since they were servants they were not suitable candidates for leading uprisings and creating strife within the church. Preachers are servants and no one worships or exalts servants. Even angels are simply servants (Rev. 22:8-9).

The clause at the end of verse 5 says, “*And each as the Lord gave to him.*” This is related to verse 6. Paul meant that not all preachers are alike. Not all preachers have the same talents and skills. Some are able to start a congregation where one does not exist. Other preachers lack this ability, but they are tremendous encouragers. There are preachers who excel in the fields of scholarship and research. Some have the ability to work in situations where boldness and straightforwardness are needed. Others have the gift of tact and work well in places requiring great diplomacy. Preachers are all different and this is acceptable to God. When we find areas that are not a preacher’s strong point, we should not be critical of his weaknesses because we also have areas wherein we are weak, too. Preaching requires many skills, and all evangelists have their weak spots. When the Law of Moses was in effect, God said the high priests were people who struggled with sin just like anyone else (Heb. 5:1-3). Preachers are also just people (sinners like everyone else), though they do have a unique function.

If we relate the information about skills and talents to the life of Paul, we must say he was a skilled church planter. He was able to start the Lord’s church in places where the gospel had not been preached. Apollos was also a minister, but his abilities were different from the ones possessed by Paul. Apollos had the ability to work with an

established congregation and “water” what men like Paul had planted (in this context *water* has no relation to baptism). Apollos was an encourager. Paul established the Corinthian congregation (Acts 18:1, 8) and Apollos later helped evangelize this city (Acts 18:24-19:1). These two men were talented in different areas, and God was the true boss/leader (6b). Since God is involved with the whole evangelism and encouragement process, He is ultimately responsible for what takes place in His vineyard and Christians have no right to follow any man. Our leader is Jesus and our orders must come from Him.

Paul described preachers with an illustration based upon gardening (gardening and farming illustrations are found in several parts of the Bible). Jesus spoke of the sower sowing seed, the parable of the tares, the parable of the mustard seed, etc (compare Mt. 9:37-38). Illustrations like these were and still are excellent because preaching and Christianity are a lot like gardening. There are weeds in the field; there is crop damage; beautiful vegetables are eventually raised with sufficient time and care, etc. There are many parallels between a garden and the kingdom of God. The 6<sup>th</sup> verse is also a passage filled with encouragement. God’s people are only obligated to plant the seed and all are workers in the same garden (1 Cor. 12:12). The responsibility for the seed’s growth rests with God. He is the harvester (Mt. 13:41).

“Increase” in 6b (*auxano*) is a very interesting word (it also occurs in verse 7). Jesus used this term in the Sermon on the Mount to describe the “growth” of lilies (Mt. 6:28). It is used of John the Baptist’s growth (Lk. 1:80), as well as Jesus’ outpacing John (Jn. 3:30). In Acts 6:7 it is applied to the Scriptures. In 1 Cor. 3 this word tells us “God is the one who causes to grow that which he himself sows through Jesus, or plants through his servants” (Brown, 1:219).

Another key point in verse 6 is based upon the verb tenses. When Paul spoke about his planting and the watering done by Apollos, he used aorist tense verbs. When He spoke about God *giving the growth*, he switched to the imperfect tense. Men may do much good for many years, but a time comes when humans die. We pass from this earth, but God continues His work. In some cases our actions can have a lasting impact (“still speaks,” Heb. 11:4). See, too, Rev. 14:13 (our works “follow us”). When we realize the transitory nature of life and the importance of spiritual work, wisdom suggests (and we might say demands) that we try to do as much good as we can in the spiritual realm. We must “work while it is day” (Jn. 9:4). One way we can continue to work after death is through life insurance. Christians have taken out large life insurance policies and upon their death allowed the proceeds help train preachers and evangelize the world. Other efforts, such as this commentary series, can be completed and left for future generations. Our time is limited and we must try to make full use of it.

A second point about God *giving the growth* is also important. As human beings there is only so much we can do in the area of evangelism. We can “plant” and “water,” but it is God who *gives the increase*. Many congregations have set evangelism goals. Perhaps we have been part of a congregation that said, “We want to convert ten people this year.” It certainly is good to have goals and it is God’s will that we reach people with the gospel. A more Bible centered evangelism goal would be, “We want to teach or expose 200 people to the gospel this year, do our best to nurture and encourage the people we contact, and pray that God would give us a bountiful increase.” Our job is to plant and water (sow and nurture the seed) while God gives the increase.

In the seventh verse we find that *men* (especially those who preach) are insignificant when compare to God. Evangelists are servants of God and only God causes His word to succeed. Thus, if men are going to exalt anyone or anything, it must be God and His word. Christians must exalt the one who causes the growth of the seed, not the ones doing the planting and watering. Bengel (2:179) noted that without God's help (increase), "the grain from the first moment of sowing would be like a pebble."

Up to this point the material in this letter has not been too difficult. The rest of this chapter and the rest of the book becomes more complex. Some of the passages where commentators often disagree include other parts of this chapter, chapters 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, and chapter 15. Ten of the chapters in this book are the basis for much controversy among Bible commentators, and the disagreements may be divided into two categories: *doctrinal matters* and *matters of judgment*. Doctrinal matters are items that affect a Christian's faith, worship, and salvation. These differences limit and can even prohibit fellowship (2 Jn. 9-11). Non-doctrinal matters are matters of judgment that Christians may disagree upon and still maintain fellowship with each other. This commentary attempts to help distinguish between matters of doctrine and matters of judgment. One non-doctrinal matter is found in the next two verses.

There are some general principles we may use to determine whether something is doctrinal or a matter of personal judgment. Some information about this subject is available in the introductory commentary on Romans 14 as well as the commentary on Colossians 3:17 (this latter reference also contains information about Bible authority and how the Scriptures authorize various activities). Here a few additional matters are listed for consideration. Some things are wrong because the Bible specifically prohibits them (Gal. 5:19-21 is an example, and notice that in verse 21 Paul said "*and such like*").

If something is not explicitly dealt with in the Scriptures we may employ several principles. We may ask if a matter will hurt us or the congregation where we worship (Mt. 6:33; Eph. 5:15). We must ask if the matter in question will bother our conscience (Rom. 14:23) or the conscience of a fellow Christian (Rom. 14:21). If something would harm us physically, it is wrong (1 Cor. 6:19). We may also ask if an action damages our influence for the Lord (2 Cor. 6:3) or causes us to worship contrary to spirit and truth (Jn. 4:24). It is certainly necessary to consider whether an action somehow violates the "pattern" God has given to us in the New Testament Scriptures (2 Tim. 1:13). Would an action introduce religious error to us or in the place we worship? Would the matter we are considering put us in the "wrong crowd" (1 Cor. 15:33)? Finally, in virtually any area of life, we can ask, "Would Jesus do this?" (1 Jn. 2:6; Jn. 8:12). Even if "all things are lawful," not "all things are expedient" (1 Cor. 6:12 and see the comments on this verse).

**3:8-9:** *Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: but each shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9 For we are God's fellow-workers: ye are God's husbandry, God's building.*

In the earlier verses it was noted how the Corinthians had "received milk" instead of meat (verses 1-2). The Corinthians were *carnal* (verse 3), followed men instead of the Lord (verse 4), and thought more highly of preachers than God wanted them to (verse 5). Paul also taught that church growth comes through planting and watering the seed (the seed is the word of God, verse 6; Lk. 8:11). In verse 7 Paul demonstrated how those involved with church growth are only servants and cannot compare to God.

In 8a Paul said those who are involved in church planting and watering are “one.” That is, the *planting phase* in church work is not the most important job. *Watering* (promoting growth) is also not the most important job. The preacher is no more important than the one who encourages. The encourager is not more important than the one who arranges a Bible study. Each person has a part in the Lord’s body and each part is essential (compare 1 Cor. 12:12-27).

Rather than focus on our *specific function* in the church, the key word in verse 8 is “*labor*.” Did we do our Christian duty with all the energy and zeal we had? Our job may have been less visible and seemingly less glorious than others, but were we “faithful stewards” with our resources and abilities (1 Cor. 4:2)? “It often happens that one person brings two hundred people to the Savior with great ease, while another frees only one or two from error at the cost of great effort. We can see this also in the case of fasting and chastity. One person, aided by his nature, achieves chastity without toil, but another, whose nature opposes him, achieves his goal only with the greatest effort” (The Church’s Bible, p. 55). Peter picked upon a similar theme in 2 Pet. 1. Before he listed what many call the “Christian graces,” he spoke about using “*all diligence*” (2 Pet. 1:5).

Peter’s word for *diligence* (*spoude*) in 2 Pet. 1:5 has the sense of *eagerness* in several New Testament verses (Rom. 12:8, 11; 2 Cor. 7:11, 12; 8:7, 8, 16; Heb. 6:11; Jude 3). This term is also used in the death of John the Baptist (Mk. 6:25). After Herodias’ daughter was told by her mother to ask for John’s head on a platter, she returned with “*haste*” to this ruler. As Christians we want to be as engaged in the work of the Lord as fully as possible. When age and health finally seem to get the best of us, our specific work in the church may change, but we still want to be active.

At the end of verse 8 Paul spoke of a “*reward*.” This reward is based on each person’s *labor* (for an explanation of what this *reward* is, see the comments on 3:14-15. A general overview of *reward* in the New Testament is found in the commentary prior to verse 10). In view of what is said in verses 5-7, *labor* refers to church planting (evangelism). Men like Paul worked to establish and ground local congregations throughout the first century world. In verse 9 this thought is continued. Christians work together with God in many areas, especially with respect to evangelism, and this makes them “*God’s fellow-workers*” (the KJV says “*labourers together with God*”). More information about this is given below, but here we may say God works with His people in many ways. God wants all people to be saved (2 Pet. 3:9), He has put salvation in Christ (2 Tim. 2:10), Jesus adds us to His church (Acts 2:47, KJV) when we are baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27). After we become a member of Christ’s church we are God’s tool in His spiritual vineyard (i.e. we also plant and water). The efforts of men like Paul are described as *God’s husbandry* (God’s building, 9b). We may summarize the immediate context with these six points.

- Some plant (teach people the word)
- Others water (encourage those who have heard and or obeyed the word)
- We all labor (work in God’s service)
- All are fellow-workers (we work with God and each other)
- All are members of God’s husbandry (God’s building)
- God looks at us individually (“*each*,” “*his own reward*,” “*according to own labor*”)



At the beginning of verse 9 Paul spoke about being *God's fellow-workers* (the KJV says, *labourers together with God*). Paul's word for *fellow-workers* (*sunergos*) occurs about twelve times in the New Testament. It is applied to Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16:3), Urbanus (Rom. 16:9) and Timothy (Rom. 16:21). For the other references that have this word see 2 Cor. 1:24; 8:23; Phil. 2:25; 4:3; Col. 4:11; 1 Thess. 3:2 (KJV, NASB), Phile. 1, 24; 3 Jn. 1:8. *Labourers together with God* are "co-operating servants of God" (Brown, 3:1152).

There are two metaphors (figurative descriptions) of the church at the end of verse 9. The first metaphor is found in the word "*husbandry*" (in the NKJV, NIV, NAS, RSV the word "*field*" is used). Paul could have used the word *agros*, a word literally meaning *field*. Instead he used a more vivid term (*georgion*). This other word is found only here in the New Testament and it meant a *tilled or cultivated field*. This word plus the imagery shows that time, money, and labor had gone into helping the Corinthians. The investments in these Christians are also seen in verse 8 (plant, water, labor, fellow-workers). Today when we find a well grounded Christian or a wonderful congregation, this state is due to work—a lot of work. There are no easy ways to help people mature in the faith or build strong congregations.

The other description of the church is seen in the word "*building*" (*oikodome*) at the end of verse 9. In the New Testament this word often "denotes God's building, the Church, built upon the cornerstone, Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:20, 21)" (CBL, GED, 4:321). This description of the church is more fully explained in the following paragraphs. "Both metaphors illustrated the fact that God was building a unified church—one building, one field—not a fragmented, divided church" (Holman, 7: 49). One cannot help but read these words and be reminded of Mt. 16:18 (Jesus said He would build His church and He is, therefore, the owner of it. No man owns, controls, or directs the church of Christ). For information on Mt. 16:18 see section 22 of the Gospels commentary.

As noted in the preceding commentary, some attention must be given to the word *reward*. This term expresses a fascinating concept in the New Testament. When this word in all its related forms is examined in the Bible, more than one hundred references may be found in English Bibles. "In present day usage, a reward is a gift given in recognition for some service rendered, either good or evil. Its biblical usage, however, is quite varied, including such ideas as a bribe (Ps. 103:10), punishment (Ps. 91:8), and gift (1 Kings 13:7). It includes, therefore, the punishment on experiences in this life for evil deeds (Matt. 6:5) as well as future retribution (Ps. 91:8). Several times the word is used of evil done to a person where good was expected (Gen. 44:4; Ps. 35:12)" (Baker's Dictionary of Theology, p. 460).

Two main passages in the New Testament that discuss rewards are 1 Cor. 3:9-15 and 1 Cor. 9:16-27. "Various types of service merit rewards such as enduring temptation (James 1:12), diligently seeking God (Heb. 11:6), dying for Christ (Rev. 2:10), faithful pastoral work (1 Pet. 5:4), faithfully doing God's will and loving his appearing (II Tim. 4:8), soul winning (1 Thess. 2:19-20), faithful stewardship (1 Cor. 4:1-5), acts of kindness (Gal. 6:10), hospitality (Matt. 10:40-42). Rewards can be lost (Rev. 2:10; II John 8). Then too it is possible to be busy in the Lord's service and receive no rewards at all (1 Cor. 3:15; 9:27), or to receive little when one should receive

much (II John 8)” (Baker’s Dictionary of Theology, p. 461). For information concerning degrees of reward and punishment in eternity, see the commentary on Lk. 12:46-48 in section 17 of the Gospels commentary.

**3:10-11:** *According to the grace of God which was given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder I laid a foundation; and another buildeth thereon. But let each man take heed how he buildeth thereon. 11 For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

Here Paul further described how the church is a *building*. Before any building can be built a “*foundation*” must be laid. In the case of the church (the people who have been saved by Christ), Jesus is the foundation. In Mt. 16:18 Jesus said He would build His church. Jesus did what He promised, and His death serves as the foundation for the church (see the commentary on Mt. 16:18 in section 22 of the Gospels commentary). This foundation only had to be laid one time (“*is laid*”). Since the foundation is permanently in place, workers (i.e. Christians) can “*build*” upon it. All Christians are to try to win souls for the Lord and expand the borders of the church founded on Christ.

One first century church builder was Paul. He was able to build because of God’s “*grace*” (10a). It is only by God’s grace that any of us can be part of God’s building or help people be added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47, KJV). Paul’s imagery of a foundation and building harmonizes very well with several other images of the New Testament church. In Eph. 1:22-23, Paul spoke of the “*head and body*” (*head* is parallel to the foundation and *body* is parallel to the building in 1 Cor. 3). In Jn. 15:1-2 Jesus spoke about His being the “*vine*” and His people being the “*branches*.” In Eph. 5:23, 25 the image is Christ as a “*bridegroom*” and the church is His “*bride*.” Jesus is the “*good shepherd*” and His people are the “*sheep*” (Jn. 10:11). He is “*the way*” and we are the “*travelers*” on that way (Jn. 14:6). He is the “*firstborn*” and we are His “*brethren*” (Rom. 8:29). He is the “*heir*” (Mt. 21:38) and we are the “*fellow heirs*” (Rom. 8:17). He is the “*resurrection*” (Jn. 11:25) and we will be the “*resurrected*.” He is the “*light*” (Jn. 1:9), and we are the “*enlightened*” (Eph. 5:8).

When Paul described his abilities he said he was a “*masterbuilder*” (*architekton*). This word is only used here in the New Testament and it is the basis for our word *architect*. This term shows that Paul thought of himself as a *director of works, an architect, an engineer, and a foreman*. A *masterbuilder* “was not a designer of plans on paper; he was like the old cathedral builders, the *master-mason*, developing his ideas in the material” (Expositor’s Greek Testament, 2:790). “Paul knew that the foundation was well built, but he was apparently concerned about how others had built upon it” (CBL, GED, 1:456). *Masterbuilder* shows that Paul knew what was needed to get a congregation started and growing in places where the gospel had never gone (Rom. 15:20). He had the ability to “plant” churches where none existed (verse 6). His knowledge and abilities allowed him to “lay a foundation” (10a). That is, he founded (started) congregations based on Jesus.

In addition to being a *masterbuilder*, Paul was “*wise*” (*sophos*; for information about this word see the commentary on 1:20 and 1:26). Here *wise* means Paul was not a novice. When it came time to start a congregation, Paul was ready with skill and experience. Also, after Paul started a congregation, he was content to let others continue the building process; he would move on and let others continue working with the newly planted congregation. Contrary to *unwise builders* who do not lay a

foundation or do not lay the right type of foundation (Lk. 6:49), Paul did things exactly right. In the secular world two builders may have the exact same materials to use, but the end result is very different. One may use his materials to build a structure that is not square, sturdy, or attractive. The other builds a quality structure that is pleasing to all who see it. If we, like Paul, carefully use the Scriptures, our work in the spiritual realm will be quality labor that can have a lasting impact in the world.

When the Old Testament tabernacle was constructed it was done by people who were *wise* (Ex. 35:10, 25; 36:1, 4, 8). Paul was personally skilled in many areas, but he also had special guidance from the Holy Spirit when it came to Christianity (1 Cor. 2:13). Paul realized that if his work were shoddy or involved false doctrine, those who built on his work would have serious problems. Today when we engage in any type of work, especially in the spiritual realm, we should approach the task by thinking about things long-term (how will our actions impact things days, months and years in the future)? These two verses reminds us to be careful *how* we proceed in the church built by Christ.

The verb translated "*I laid*" (*tithemi*) in verse 10 is in the aorist in tense in some manuscripts and the perfect tense in others. Whichever tense is accepted, the idea is that Paul established new congregations. The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (3:356) offered this definition for the thought: "As founder of the church at Corinth, Paul *laid* a foundation (3:10f.); free of charge he *proclaims* (*lays forth*) the gospel (9:18)." When Paul spoke of others "*building thereon*" he used an interesting word (*epoikodomeo*). This term is a present tense verb and see how it is used in Acts 20:32; 1 Cor. 3:12; Col. 2:7; Jude 20. Of the eight times this special word is found in the New Testament, four of the places are found in 1 Cor. 3:10-14.

By associating this word with the present tense Paul implied the church is to spread (this is why Jesus gave a Great Commission, Mt. 28:18-20). Since Christians are continuously helping the church grow, Paul also issued a warning in 10b: "*let each man take heed how he buildeth thereon*" (*taking heed* as well as *building* are both present tense verbs). The apostle knew some of the Corinthian Christians were not wise builders. Some were in the business of church destruction instead of church construction. Today there can still be Christians who are more destructive than constructive.

What Paul wrote demonstrates the absolute necessity of having the right foundation in religion (compare Lk. 6:48-49). If a congregation has not been founded on Christ, it is not part of "His church" (Mt. 16:18) and will therefore be destroyed (Mt. 15:13). Furthermore, if any religious group is founded on or based upon any man—including the apostles—it is built on a bad foundation and cannot please God. We must strenuously object to and oppose any religious group built by and/or founded by any human being. Groups made by men may be popular and prosper, but they are not institutions that will allow people to enter heaven (Acts 4:12). Paul stressed this point even more in verse 11: "*For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ*". There are "other builders," but there is "no other *ground* for them to build on" (Expositor's Greek Testament, 2:790). Peter confessed Jesus as the Son of God and his "rock confession" (Mt. 16:18) is the foundation on which the church is built. Building on anything else but Jesus is building on "sand" (Mt. 7:26).

The latter half of verse 11 contains the preposition *para* (this is translated "*than that*"). The thought is, "For another foundation none can lay, *besides* that one that is

laid. The preposition *para* suggests “*in competition with; or contrary to*” (Expositor's Greek Testament, 2:790) and this is consistent with Mt. 15:8-13. Any group that is in competition with Christ's church, or is contrary to it, will fail. Just as a husband is entitled to only one living bride (Eph. 5:23), so Christ is joined to only one church (notice how in Eph. 5:25 Paul describes the church as “*it*” instead of “*them*”). Paul, like Jesus, used the singular instead of the plural when describing the church. Another point of interest is found in the words *which is laid*. When Paul said Christ is the foundation which is *laid* (11b), he used the present tense. This suggests Jesus is the foundation that is “*lying permanently and forever*” (Lenski, First Corinthians, p.135).

The next few verses are passages that create disagreement among commentators, but the disagreement does not involve doctrine.

**3:12:** *But if any man buildeth on the foundation gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, stubble;*

The six items in this verse demonstrate different types of builders (or *ministers*, verse 6). In verses 12-17 Paul also showed how *builders* (Christians) have varying degrees of success. Some are triumphant because their work “*abides*” (verse 14). Others are not successful in this way because their work does *not abide* (verse 15). Another type of *builder* is found in verse 17. This type of worker destroys and decimates things. The information in verses 12-17 mentions several types of builders, shows how these builders have different skills, but in the end there is only one foundation on which we can build (Jesus and His church, verse 11). Whether a builder is *successful*, *unsuccessful*, or *destructive*, each has an impact on the church (the people). Christians should regard themselves as a type of “*spiritual contractor*.”

In 12a Paul spoke of “*building on the foundation*” (see again verse 11), and here *build* is a present tense verb. The apostle realized that many materials could be used in Christ's church to further strengthen and expand it. These materials include *gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, and stubble*. Based upon the context (Jesus and His being the foundation for the church), these building materials are a metonymy for converts. The “*church*” is a body of people, not a physical building. Thus, the building supplies for the church (people) cannot be literal. Just as the word *building* in 9b is a metaphor for the church, the *gold, silver, hay, stubble*, etc. are also figurative terms. When people obey the gospel they become part of God's “*holy temple*” (Eph. 2:21). In this spiritual temple (the church) we find some Christians who are like gold, others who are like silver, and we have all met those who are like *hay and stubble*.

Some have suggested, and this is popular with denominational commentators, that the gold, silver, stones, etc. describe *doctrines*. That is, the three expensive materials describe *sound doctrine* taught to and accepted by faithful Christians. The three valueless materials describe *religious error*. While this view is initially attractive, it must be rejected for three reasons: (1) The church of Christ is not built upon doctrines. (2) The 15<sup>th</sup> verse says a man's work may be burned, but he himself will be saved. If Paul described different *doctrines*, he meant someone can teach false doctrine, but God will still save him. This is inconsistent with 2 Pet. 2:1 (Peter affirmed that those who teach false doctrine will be destroyed). False doctrine is called demonic doctrine in 1 Tim. 4:1 (Timothy was told false doctrine would cause people to “*fall away from the faith*”). Can people follow false (Satanic) doctrine, be classified by God as an apostate and still be saved? (3) A final reason for rejecting this interpretation is the context; this chapter

does not discuss “different doctrines.”

Another explanation commonly found in denominational circles involves salvation. It has been argued that the *valuable materials* represent the “regenerate” (people who are saved) and the *useless materials* stand for the “unregenerate” (those who are lost). This explanation is hard to defend because the church is not composed of the unregenerate. Acts 2:47 (KJV) says Christ “*added to the church daily such as should be saved.*” If this statement has any meaning at all, it tells us that Jesus does not add unregenerate people to His church. Another important passage in this regard is Tit. 3:5. Paul speaks of the “saved” in this verse and then says this group of people has experienced *regeneration*. Regeneration (becoming saved) only applies to those who have become Christians. Still another false view is espoused by the Roman Catholic church (the wood, hay and stubble are *venial sins* while the other items describe *mortal sins*). *Venial sin* is said to be the “lesser” of the two types of sin (according to Catholic thought, not the Bible). Punishment for this lesser sin is alleged to take place in either this life or in “purgatory” (purgatory is another false doctrine dealt with in the commentary on verse 15).

The explanation for the materials based on the context is what was previously stated. Paul was speaking about people (converts). In the previous verses Paul presented information about evangelism and church growth (building up the Lord’s spiritual body). People are taught the gospel (Rom. 10:17) and this obedience allows them to be added to the church’s foundation (Acts 2:41, 47). Here in 1 Cor. 3:12 Paul continued the thought by affirming that different building materials represent *different types of converts*. Some Christians are like gold, silver, and costly stones (these materials were often used in sacred structures, some of which were fireproof temples. They were also used in royal palaces). Bengel (2:180) defined *costly stones* as “noble stones, as *marble*, etc.” instead of *small gems*. Granite would be another example of a costly stone. These types of stones had to be quarried, shaped, and then carefully fit into the proper place.

Christians who are like gold, silver and costly stones are those individuals dedicated to Jesus and most probably a “pillar in the church” (Gal. 2:9). Such people are usually very visible in a local congregation. They are loyal workers who help keep a congregation active and growing, and much of their work is often “behind-the-scenes.” Christians of this nature are often Bible class teachers (some teach two classes a week); they may do some fill-in preaching, be deacons, help clean the church building, conduct Bible studies, help coordinate weekly or monthly projects, prepare the church bulletin, are active in a visitation program or evangelistic efforts, maintain church bulletin boards, do church maintenance (including mowing the lawn), help in the church kitchen, send cards to those who are ill, make phone calls, welcome visitors, etc. When “the doors are open” they are always there. Most of this number face their fair share of discouragement, a lack of appreciation at times and even criticism, but they still persist in doing the Lord’s work. Jesus described these people as “good soil” (Mt. 13:8, 23).

Other converts are like wood, hay, and stubble (items that are cheap, perishable, and not long lasting). Christians such as this are not dedicated, involved, or very helpful. With this type of Christian one cannot say with confidence, “I will see you Sunday” because such a person is usually irregular in attendance and their sporadic presence is not due to health or work. If a congregation has two Sunday worship

services, Christians in this category are typically not greeted with “I will see you tonight” because there is a high degree of probability that he or she will not come for the second service. When looking for volunteers to help with a project, this type of person is at the very bottom of the prospect list and perhaps not on it at all. In some cases the only time this type of Christian is heard from is when he or she is hospitalized and wants a “church visit,” needs money, wants some type of reference, or wants to complain. A little persecution or small church problem will generally turn these people away almost instantly. When some of this persuasion do not get their way, they leave. Others never become dedicated Christians because they are simply selfish or covetous. Jesus described this type of Christian in Mt. 13:3-7, 19-22.

More than twenty years of church work has led me to conclude that there are basically two types of Christians: givers and takers. These categories are clearly very broad and both describe a wide range of people. Still, two decades of ministry have illustrated this conclusion again and again and Paul indicated a similar thing by listing only two types of converts. “Even a grain of gold is gold: even the lightest straw feeds the fire” (Bengel, 2:180). Warren Wiersbe (First Corinthians, p. 580) offered a chart about the different kinds of converts.

<b>Gold, silver, precious stones</b>	<b>Wood, hay, stubble</b>
Permanent	Passing, temporary
Beautiful	Ordinary, even ugly
Valuable	Cheap
Hard to obtain	Easy to obtain

Later in the 16<sup>th</sup> verse of this chapter, the church is likened to a *temple*. This additional metaphor is related to the material here. Temples were made of gold, silver, and costly stones, but the other three items (wood, hay and stubble) were not used to construct important and sacred structures. Wood, hay, and stubble were perishable items and used for houses. **Wood** was used for doors and posts. Today it is also often used for furniture, paper, cooking and heating. **Hay** (dried grass) was mixed with mud to make walls (this term is often translated “grass” in the New Testament. This can be seen from its use in Mt. 6:30; 13:26 [“blade”]; 14:19; Jas. 1:10, 11; 1 Pet. 1:24; Rev. 8:7). **Stubble** (“a stalk of grain,” CBL, GED, 3:224) was used for the roof (this term is found only here in the New Testament).

Since the church is a temple (16a), only materials fit for a temple are suitable construction supplies. The people who will be saved will be those who were dedicated to serving God. Converts like wood, hay, and stubble will perish. This shows that we cannot coast into heaven. Heaven is for those who strive to enter in by the narrow way (Mt. 7:13-14). Wood, hay and stubble have no means to change into something more valuable, but all Christians can. If you are a child of God and your life is like wood, hay or stubble, you can not fool yourself into thinking, “I have become a Christian and God will save me” (Jews thought they were fine with Abraham, but a “family connection” was not enough, Mt. 3:8-9). As the parable of the talents shows (Mt. 25:14-30), Christians must be faithful with what they have and use it to the best of their ability. Having a *wood faith*, a *hay faith*, or *stubble faith* will destroy us when Jesus comes in “flaming fire” (2 Thess. 1:7).

The information in verse 12 sets the stage for verse 13. Paul knew a future time is coming when all people will be examined (judged). The people we help convert will be brought before the Lord to see what kind of Christian life they lived (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 2:16). At this time all who accepted but eventually rejected salvation, the half hearted, the hypocrites, and those like wood, hay, and stubble will be rejected and “*burned*” (15a). God will weed out from His kingdom all who need to be removed and this unsavory element will spend eternity with the devil and his angels (Mt. 25:41-45). Those like silver, gold, and precious stones will be ushered into glory and saved for eternity (this is described by the word “*abide*,” 14a).

**3:13:** *each man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire itself shall prove each man's work of what sort it is.*

Paul spoke of “*each man's work*” (i.e. evangelism). In verses 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 Paul spoke of starting and nurturing congregations. Now additional material about this topic is provided. Paul said evangelistic *work* will be “*made manifest*” and *each man's work will be “proven.”* That is, all the people who became Christians will be seen for what they were. In the secular world, building projects must meet “code requirements.” Various inspectors evaluate construction projects to be sure the work is up to prescribed standards. A similar thing will be true for all people. On “*the day*” it will be “*declared*” whether or not people are like gold or like hay. The word *declared* (*deloo*) means “*reveal, make clear, show*” (Gingrich and Danker, p. 178). *Manifest* (*phaneros*) in 13a is used about twenty times in the New Testament, and it occurs two more times in this book (11:19; 14:25). Paul also used it in Gal. 5:19 to say the works of the flesh are *manifest*. Here it further stresses that at a future time all will be disclosed; everything will be made *visible*.

This *day* (there is a definite article in the Greek text) is interpreted in many ways. Some have suggested it refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70. Considering the context and the fact that Jerusalem was far from Corinth, this is a wild suggestion that does not merit serious consideration. Others have proposed this *day* describes the passage of time. That is, God allows time to pass so converts can have time to show what they are really like. The passage of time shows whether a person is genuinely converted to Christ or made an impulsive decision that is later abandoned. The passage of time also helps separate the hypocrites from those who are truly trying to serve the Lord. This explanation is a possibility, especially because the word *revealed* is in the present tense. Too, such an interpretation is consistent with Jesus' parable of the sower (Mt. 13:1-8, 18-23). It seems that Christians reveal their true nature while they live their lives, and the ultimate or final revelation of their personality and works will be disclosed on the Day of Judgment. I understand the *day* in this verse to describe the coming Day of Judgment. At the judgment there will be no doubt as to whether Christians were like gold or hay. Jesus made this same point in one of His parables (Mt. 13:39). Saved people will be like seeds sown in good soil and thus accepted by God. Unserved people will be like seeds that did not produce and will be condemned to hell.

The word “*fire*” is often used to describe punishment in the New Testament. It is also used in other ways. Sometimes, it conveys the idea of “human passion” (Jas. 3:5-6; 1 Cor. 7:9). It is used to describe Jesus' final return (2 Thess. 1:7-8), the final destruction

of the world (2 Pet. 3:7, 12), and punishing the wicked in eternity (Mt. 25:41). Fire is one “of the most arresting and suggestive metaphors in the Bible” and “a phenomenon common to all cultures ancient and modern” (Baker’s Theological Dictionary of the Bible, p. 256).

Here fire is used twice in a single verse to describe a future and final examination of each Christian. That is, fire is used to describe the power needed to judge the quality of our life and works. Paul described a testing or an inspection (the life of each Christian will be thoroughly investigated), and this investigation will be comprehensive. Those who lived true Christian lives will pass the test and appear as gold, silver, and bronze. The examination will also show that others were like wood, hay, and stubble (unsuitable for Christ’s church, verse 12). Those unfit for the kingdom of God will spend eternity separated from God and salvation.

These verses leave no doubt that some who become Christians will miss heaven. There is more to salvation than becoming a Christian, and this is what the Corinthians were told in very strong terms. We must be a Christian who is like gold, silver, and costly stones (i.e. an active participant in the Lord’s body). We must be dedicated to the Lord (compare Mt. 6:33). Though many congregations have members who are like hay and stubble (people are on the attendance roll but are inactive and lifeless), these people ought not to expect to be with the righteous at the end of time. Paul affirmed that being a member of the right faith is not enough. A final point is also worthy of inclusion. In the ASV the translators used the present tense (“is revealed in fire”).

**3:14-15:** *If any man’s work shall abide which he built thereon, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as through fire.*

These two verses are self-explanatory. If any man’s “work” (the people he converts) shall “abide” (be saved on the Day of Judgment), he shall “receive a reward” (compare Dan. 12:3). If a Christian converts people during his or her lifetime, but these converts do not *abide* (for some reason they are not saved on the Day of Judgment), *they* (the converts) “shall be burned” (sent to hell). The word translated *burned* (*katakaio*) is also used in Mt. 3:12 to describe how the unsaved will be treated at the end of time.

Contrary to what some believe, it is possible for a Christian to lose his or her salvation (see this point discussed in the commentary on 2:14). Compare, too, Gal. 5:4 in the ASV (“severed from Christ”). If we convert people to the Lord, and these people forfeit their salvation through unfaithfulness or apostasy, we as their teachers will “suffer loss” (verse 15). A single word (*zemioo*) translates *suffer loss*. This term is used six times in the New Testament, and in each instance it describes some kind of personal loss (see how it is used in Mt. 16:26).

There appears to be a *special reward* given to those who help save the souls of others (see 1 Thess. 2:19-20 and Phil. 4:1). If we convert people and some of this number does not enter into eternal life, some of our reward will be diminished. If we convert people and all or most are saved, this will somehow result in an added benefit for us. All the saved will receive salvation, but there will be something beyond that based upon what we did in our lives (see Mt. 10:41 and notice how Jesus distinguished between a “prophet’s reward” and a “righteous man’s reward”). Additional information about rewards is also at the commentary of verses 8-9 in this chapter.

Whatever our reward is, Paul made it clear that we will be saved if we have



remained faithful to God (15b). If those we convert also remain faithful, we will have multiplied blessings from God. The unfaithfulness of others *will not affect our own salvation*. Our salvation depends upon our obedience to the gospel and planting and watering with the word of God (verse 6). Noah did what heaven commanded and God was pleased. His salvation was not dependent upon his saving the world, though he did need to warn those around him. Such is also true for us. Compare Ezek. 3:16-21.

At the end of verse 15 Paul again introduced the idea of “fire.” The NIV says “*as one escaping through the flames.*” As noted in the commentary on verse 15, this imagery is simply a way of saying all people will be judged. “The fire is designed neither to punish the person nor to refine the believer or his work, but to unmask the essence of his Christian effort (to show it like it really is)” (Gromacki, p. 49). Catholicism has unfortunately used this verse to substantiate the false doctrine of “purgatory” (this belief is also found in the Greek Orthodox church). According to these groups, purgatory is a place of temporal punishment. In other words, people die and those who are “not at peace with the church” undergo some punishment so they can be purified and then be ready for heaven. Only when all sin has been purged will a person go to heaven. It is further taught that purgatory suffering varies in intensity and duration due to people having varying degrees of sin and not everyone demonstrates the same amount of repentance. It is taught that some may only suffer a few hours while others may suffer for thousands of years. Those on the earth are also told about how they can help purge sin for the deceased by offering gifts and services to a specific religious group. Prayers by priests and religious services (“masses”) are said to help shorten or eliminate a person’s time in purgatory. This doctrine is false in every way. It is mentioned in 2 Maccabees 12:39-45, but it is not found in the inspired books of the Bible.

Christians rightly and strenuously object to purgatory for several reasons. First, this teaching denies that man is personally responsible for sin (Ezek. 18:20; Rom. 14:12). Purgatory says a person or other human beings can somehow atone for sin, but God’s word says Jesus has made the one and final sacrifice for sin (Heb. 9:12, 26, 28; 10:10, 14; 1 Pet. 3:18). Paul said people cannot be saved by works of merit (Eph. 2:8-9), but purgatory is all about money and merit. We must prepare for salvation or condemnation *before death*, not after (Mt. 25:1-12) as the doctrine of purgatory says. When we die our fate cannot be changed (Lk. 16:26, “*great gulf*”), but proponents of purgatory say everyone’s fate can be changed. Jesus said the things necessary for man’s redemption were “finished” on the cross (Jn. 19:30), but the doctrine of purgatory says redemption involves money and special prayers. Are people saved by the blood of Christ or silver and gold (1 Pet. 1:18-19)? Will we believe Jesus and the Bible or a Catholic priest?

When Paul spoke of *fire* in 1 Cor. 3:13 and 15 he did not say it would “purge the soul.” It is an image to describe the testing of a Christian’s work. Notice too from verse 13 how Paul spoke of this fire happening on a *particular day* (the day of judgment, see again the commentary on verse 13). Because Paul was specific, this “passage not only does not sustain *the fire of purgatory*, but entirely extinguishes it; for only at the last day shall the *fire* try every man’s work. Therefore the fire of purgatory does not precede” (Bengel, 2:180-181).

**3:16-17:** *Know ye not that ye are a temple of God, and (that) the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? 17 If any man destroyeth the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, and such are ye.*

Paul has already described the church by two different figures (a cultivated field and a building, verse 9). Here he offered a third description (the church is a temple). Those familiar with the Old Testament promises about the establishment of the church (see the commentary towards the end of Mt. 16:18 in section 22 of the Gospels commentary) cannot help but be reminded of Zech. 6:12-13. About 500 years before Jesus entered into the world Zechariah spoke of a “temple” being built. When the first century came, this prophecy was fulfilled. Jesus arrived in the world and He built the promised temple. *Temple*, like *kingdom*, *body*, *house*, *bride* or *true tabernacle* all describe this same institution (those who are saved). Paul also used the temple imagery in 2 Cor. 6:16 and Eph. 2:19-22 to represent the church.

In the New Testament there are two words for “*temple*.” One word (*hieron*) described a sacred enclosure. The second term (*naos*) described a temple’s inner area, the place considered to be God’s dwelling place. In verses 16 and 17 Paul used the word *naos*. This tells us the church is God’s sanctuary and it is a “holy” place. The church (a word meaning those who are saved, see the comments below) is where God dwells (compare Matt. 26:26-29; Eph. 1:22-23). “After the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ the physical temple became obsolete in God’s economy, for Christ and his church became the antitypical fulfillment (Heb. 9:11-14) of all that which it foreshadowed and symbolically presented” (Baker’s Dictionary of Theology, p. 514).

Some believe the church is a building, but this is incorrect. The word “*church*” (*ekklesia*) described an assembly of people (Acts 7:38). In the New Testament this *assembly* generally refers to Christians, though there are some exceptions (see how this term is used in Acts 19:32, the “assembly”). Another example is Mt. 17:17 (“tell it to the church”). A fuller commentary on this word is also available in the commentary on 11:16, 18.

Since Paul described God’s dwelling in the church with the present tense in 16b and said the Holy Spirit dwelled among the Corinthians (i.e. the church), God is always among His people. Other passages that reflect this same truth include Mt. 18:20; Heb. 13:15 (if praise goes “through” Jesus He is in the midst of our assemblies); Mt. 26:29; Eph. 3:12 and Heb. 7:25 (in these last two references we see that God is present when the church prays).

Under the Old Testament there were some crimes that merited punishment by death. One of these crimes was defiling a sacred structure (Lev. 15:31). Even among the pagans one of the worst possible crimes was destroying a sacred structure like a temple. In the past and certainly now no one with any sense intentionally defiles what someone considers sacred structures because they are viewed as “holy places.” Given this general principle, Paul told the Corinthians the *church* is God’s *temple*. Since the church (the people, not a building) is holy, we are obligated to respect, honor, and carefully treat every church member. This was the obligation at Corinth, but treating church members well is not what was happening at this congregation and this was wrong. Today, there are still times when people do not treat church members very well. In fact, members of the church are sometimes damaged by fellow Christians. Jesus warned about this in Mt. 18:6. Sadly, there are times and places when a local congregation looks more like a war zone than the redeemed saints of God.

In verse 17 Paul made it clear that anyone who damages a congregation of God’s people is attacking God’s temple and even God Himself. Choosing to attack the church

will result in divine punishment (verse 17). The temple we know as the church is just as holy as any physical structure under the Old Testament era. This fact caused Paul to tell the Corinthians they had to avoid injuring anyone or anything related to the church. Notice again the ominous words in these two verses: *“Know ye not that ye are a temple of God, and (that) the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man destroyeth the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, and such are ye.”*

If the Corinthians failed to realize or accept this information, the problems at Corinth would have worsened. Verse 17 indicates that a failure to correct the problems would have caused God to intervene and stop those who were tearing apart His temple. If Jesus was not pleased with people destroying His spiritual body more than 2,000 years ago, we may affirm with all confidence that He is still angered by such today (Heb. 13:8).

The word “*destroy*” (*phtheiro*) in verse 17 is used twice. This word meant “the destruction of men as a result of God’s judgment” (Kittel, 9:102). In the Greek text the word is the same, but the KJV translates it in two different ways (“*defile*” and “*destroy*”). This term is also used later in the book (15:33). Knowing that this word is used twice in verse 17 makes the point even more powerful. The thought is basically this: God planned to dispense punishment that equaled (was commensurate with) the Corinthians’ deeds. Farr translates this as: *God will ruin the ruiner of the temple.* If we put Paul’s words into the form of an argument, they would look like this:

**Major premise:** If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him.

**Minor premise:** Some do try to destroy the temple of God.

**Conclusion:** Therefore, all destroyers will be destroyed.

No matter how bad things are in a local congregation (and Corinth had plenty of difficulties), no person has the right to attack a congregation of Christ’s church. Attacks can come in many ways and all are wrong. An entire congregation may be opposed or a single person in a congregation may be singled out for attack. Anyone who tears down a congregation of the Lord’s people as a group or destroys a member of the Lord’s body individually should expect to face God’s full wrath (if not in life, certainly in eternity). People will “reap what they sow” (Gal. 6:7). Preachers should often teach and emphasize this point, if for no other reason than Christians can be one of the church’s worst enemies (Gal. 5:15). Preachers need to communicate to their hearers messages like: “Are we a friend or an enemy to the church of Christ?” The rest of this chapter presents additional information about the church.

The expression “*Know ye not*” in 16a is found nine more times in this book. This is the first time this expression is found, and it is seen again in 5:6; 6:2-3, 9, 15-16, 19; 9:13, 24. Paul used it to introduce an indisputable statement (Bible Knowledge, p. 512).

What is said in these two verses is very similar to 1 Cor. 6:19-20, and this similarity has caused some to ask why Paul repeated himself later in this letter. While the wording is similar the *application* of the thought is much different. The material in chapter six deals with the human body (individuals) and sexual sin. The information in this chapter applies to the church.

**3:18-19:** *Let no man deceive himself. If any man thinketh that he is wise among you in this world, let him become a fool, that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He that taketh the wise in their craftiness:*

The *deceiving* (*exapatao*) described in 18a is in the present tense (“Let no man keep on deceiving himself”). *Deceive* describes self deceit and it was apparently directed at the factious troublemakers at Corinth. Kittel (abridged edition, p. 65) defined this word as “sinful ‘self-deception.’” Those who were contentious and divisive were deluded (not thinking properly). Perhaps one or more of the splinter groups had divided because they were self deceived (self deceit means denying or rationalizing away information we do not want to hear). Pride or ignorance may have caused the delusion. Perhaps the members of the various parties believed “their group” was better than the others. Whatever the cause of the problem, some of the Corinthians were not using good sense. Paul realized the bad attitudes and the problems in this congregation would not be solved until these Christians freed themselves from improper thinking. Delusion is a terrible thing and the Bible says we can *deceive others* (Eph. 5:6), *be deceived by others* (2 Tim. 3:13), or as here, *deceive ourselves*.

It was previously noted how the Corinthians liked *wisdom* (1:10). These Christians were from a culture where people followed those who claimed to possess wisdom. Although this was what the Corinthians were used to, this is not the way Christianity works. The gospel does not offer “*wisdom of the world*.” Some who pervert the gospel do offer worldly wisdom, and there are many examples of this. Scheming evangelists use mass media to claim “their prayers” or “their organization” offers a “miracle” if people will send in a financial contribution. This is not *wisdom*; it is a slick form of trickery and proof of someone having an apostate and counterfeit faith (compare 1 Tim. 6:5).

Those who considered themselves *wise in this world* (or were considered by others as *wise about matters in the world*) were told to become a “fool” (*moros*). Becoming a fool is a matter of *choice*, it is not to be our general nature. Spicq (3:541) said becoming a fool means Christians “must believe, must give themselves over to God in adherence to mysteries that derail human logic (the gospel, BP) and human good sense” (i.e. act in a way contrary to what the world believes and does. See again 1 Cor. 1:27-28). At Corinth this meant these Christians would reject the worldly philosophies and beliefs that conflicted with Christianity (specific examples of this are found below).

Paul affirmed that human wisdom and God’s revealed word are opposed to each other. These things are so at odds with one another Paul said they “*war*” against each other (2 Cor. 10:4a). Saved people cannot serve Jesus and also adhere to the ways and ideas of the world. We can have only one master and lawgiver (Lk. 16:13; Jas. 4:12). “To speak generally, if you examine every Greek and barbarian philosophy, you can say that wherever it is at odds with the teaching of Christ, it is folly” (The Church’s Bible, p. 66).

One example of what Paul condemned is *evolution*. Human wisdom says all things have evolved; random chance and a natural process have created what exists. God’s people can accept the world’s explanation of creation or they can be *fools* (according to the world) and believe God is responsible for creating all things. Believing in divine creation will cause at least some to conclude Christianity is a belief system lacking in

evidence and a religion for the simple minded, but we can show that we are *fools* for good reason.

Lee Strobel (The Case For Christ, p. 277) told of how he moderated a debate between William Lane Craig and a national spokesman for American Atheists, Inc. He spoke of how he watched “the faces of people as they discovered—many for the first time—that Christianity can stand up to rational analysis and rugged scrutiny.” His comments about the conclusion of this debate are also interesting. “In the end it was no contest. Among those who had entered the auditorium that evening as avowed atheists, agnostics, or skeptics, an overwhelming 82 percent walked out concluding that the case for Christianity had been the most compelling” (p. 277). Then he said, “Incidentally, nobody became an atheist” (p. 277). When people begin to consider the evidence for Jesus, Christianity, and the Bible, they soon learn who the true *fools* are.

*Worldly wisdom* extends to many other areas of life. The world often has very firm ideas about what education should involve, what is and is not moral, a standard for forgiveness, a definition for marriage and family, what is and is not suitable recreation and entertainment, what discipline for children and adults should and should not involve, a definition for commitment, what death is, what beauty is, what it means to succeed, what religion is, and what happiness is. In our day-to-day lives we are surrounded by the world’s wisdom. Consider how often we hear statements like these: *If something feels good, do it. Do not deny pleasure today because tomorrow may never come or no one will ever know. An opportunity for pleasure may be lost so it should be taken now. Choose your own path. Everyone has sexual relations outside of marriage so it is no big deal. It is okay to tell “white lies,” and there are times when hate is acceptable. Love is conditional. True love is a feeling. Put yourself first. Get people before they get you. We have a right to be happy. We cannot trust anyone. All people are the same. People cannot change their behavior, especially when they get old. Life should be based on how we feel instead of what is true. The majority determines right and wrong. Pride is a virtue. Divorce is the best solution to marriage problems. Love your friends and hate your enemies. One can be committed to both seeking wealth and having an acceptable spiritual life.*

A lot of the world’s wisdom deals with religion. People tell us, *We cannot know if God exists. Absolute truth does not exist. There are many ways to heaven. The Bible is a “good book” but not relevant to modern society. Prayer does not work. Heaven is not real. Jesus did not actually live. Jesus did live, but He was not resurrected. Parts of Christianity can be disproved. All Christians are hypocrites. God does not need to be feared. There is nothing beyond this life. God is not fair. If God existed, suffering would not exist. God is just waiting to “catch people” in sin. God is dead. The devil is not real. All churches want is money. Christianity is “just a bunch of rules.” All “good people” go to heaven. We can save ourselves. I can get along just fine with my own religion. Everyone needs to find a faith that works for them. We cannot make judgments in religious matters. Good people go to heaven. Women are qualified to serve as preachers.*

Hundreds of examples of worldly wisdom persist, and here we may list even more examples. *We should insist on our rights, get all we can, put ourselves first, and “prepare for retirement” because “nice guys finish last.” Living together is acceptable because marriage is “just a piece of paper.” Taking revenge is fine. Abortion is also*

*fine because what is in the womb is not a person. Animals are just as important as humans.* A high percentage of people stand ready to follow *heathen wisdom* instead of *divine revelation* (the Bible).

In virtually all realms of life the world offers lots of wisdom so Christians are called on to make a choice—to listen to the word of God or the wisdom of the world. Truth is truth whether or not people know it, believe it, agree with it, fully understand it, or follow it. If we reject the world's wisdom and stay with the truth, we will be classified as *fools*. The Expositor's Greek Testament (2:794) says we will become "a *fool* with a *criminal* for His Master." Paul chose to become a fool for Christ and he was not treated very well (1 Cor. 4:10). People even alleged he was crazy (2 Cor. 5:13). Today the world still makes this type of charge against faithful Christians. God's people are labeled "extremists," "radicals," "fundamentalists," the "Christian right," etc.

To avoid being seen as contrary to the ways of society, some have tried to find a compromise. One example of this involves the creation and evolution controversy. Rather than believe God created the world in seven literal days (and be regarded as *fools* by the world), some have suggested God used a very lengthy process (i.e. God used evolution to create all that exists). This process is known as *theistic evolution* (God + evolution). This compromise (which is full of contradictions and flaws) is repulsive to most people in the world as well as faithful Christians. Such is also usually the case with other compromises. Jesus said He was bringing a "sword" (Mk. 10:34) to the earth and this is precisely what the gospel does. The Bible is a book of convictions, not compromises.

Paul did condemn the wisdom of the world (verse 19), but this does not mean he was opposed to science, physics, chemistry, and other types of learning. His censure was against the "tendency to judge the gospel on the basis of the findings of science or philosophy rather than vice versa" (Willis, p. 99). Our source of authority and our guide in life must be God's word, not *the wisdom of the world* (Jn. 17:17). At the present time this is sometimes difficult. We live in a period when many prefer to use things like science as their basis (foundation) for life instead of the Scriptures. If the Bible is used by people, it is considered a "secondary" and less important source. According to 1 Cor. 3:11, this is wrong.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> verse Paul said the world of his day considered itself "*wise*" (for information about this word see the commentary on 1 Cor. 1:20-21). Even in the first century man believed he knew a lot of things. Many years have passed and now men are even more convinced they have a great understanding of many, many things pertaining to life and the world. Our fast paced society and the continuing advancement in technology has led many to believe the human race is simply brilliant and man is overflowing with wisdom. Paul said our knowledge (or what we think we know) is nothing but *foolishness* in the eyes of God. Paul went on to say, "*it is written*," and this expression is based on a perfect tense verb. In other words, God made this point at some time in the past (during the Old Testament era) and this is still true. Until the end of time *man's wisdom will always be foolishness*.

A demonstration of man's foolishness is found in 19b. God "*takes the wise in their craftiness*" (this is a quotation from Job 5:13). Eliphaz, one of Job's visitors, spoke these words (he believed Job was finally caught in his *crafty* acts). Eliphaz was not an inspired speaker (a person who spoke for God), but we do have an inspired record of

what he said. Some of the things Eliphaz said were false (Job 4:7). This man also said some things that were accurate, and one of the things he got right is recorded in this verse. Eliphaz argued that many of the things highly regarded by men (items that are wise and crafty) lead to man's downfall. This is correct. A modern example of this principle comes from technology. Men boast of their new accomplishments and inventions, but all the breakthroughs frequently lead to unforeseen problems. Easier lives can lead to laziness. Man creates technology to prolong life, but society cannot adequately supply the needs of people as they live longer. Technology allows for greater secrecy, but the ability to mask behavior becomes a catalyst for moral corruption, crime, and sometimes acts of terror. In the end man's *wisdom* becomes the basis for his undoing.

Towards the end of verse 19 is the verb *takes* (*drassomai*). While this term occurs only here in the New Testament, it is used in the LXX (the Greek translation of the Old Testament). One place it occurs in the LXX is Lev. 2:2 (this passage describes how a handful of something was "taken"). Here Paul used this term to say God will "catch" those who think they are wise. *Craftiness* (*panourgia*) is found only a few times in the New Testament (Lk. 20:23; 2 Cor. 4:2; 11:3; Eph. 4:14). In Classical Greek this term usually had a negative meaning (it conveyed the idea of being unprincipled and a willingness or readiness to do anything). In the New Testament it always has a negative connotation. By using this term Paul reminded his readers that "man's ability to reason cannot stand up against divine sovereignty" (Brown, 1:413).

Many years ago Lipscomb and Shepherd (First Corinthians pp. 56-57) observed how "God knows all the plans of the wise that they are vain and will lead to ruin. All the provisions of human wisdom for the advancement of the church of God result in evil to the church and to the world. There never has been an age in the past when there were so many and such costly attractions to draw people to church – fine and luxuriously equipped houses, fine mechanical musical instruments furnishing the best music, well-paid and eloquent ministers preaching on topics of current interest, with all the societies and helps to attract and entertain the young and the old – yet the people cease to attend. Never before have there been so many human devices and so much money expended at home and abroad to hold and convert the people, and yet the denominational churches are growing relatively weaker and are losing ground." There can be no doubt. Human wisdom is destined to fail. Since God has made a judgment about the world's wisdom, this judgment must be "decisive for His church" (Expositor's Greek Testament, 2:794).

**3:20-21:** *and again, The Lord knoweth the reasonings of the wise that they are vain. 21 Wherefore let no one glory in men. For all things are yours;*

Paul quoted the Old Testament at the end of the previous verse and now turns to another Old Testament citation, Ps. 94:11. This verse talks about those who mock God. The Psalmist spoke of those who thought they could rebel against God and be safe, but quickly noted how such people are not safe. In Ps. 94:11 we find that when men have "wise thoughts" (reasonings) God knows about them. Furthermore, the *wise thoughts* of men are actually "*vain*" (*mataios*), 20b. The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (2:396) said in this context *vain* means "the presumptuous thoughts of the wise people of this world are considered as *nothing*." "It expresses the aimlessness, the

leading to no object or end” (Rienecker and Rogers, p. 395). Whenever any of man’s plans or ideas conflict with God’s word (and this is often the case), they will fail and be totally insignificant. Even if good intentions exist and the plans are carefully made, the procedures will fail. God and His word, however, will not fail.

The preceding information forms the conclusion in verse 21: no one is to “*glory in men*.” This expression seems to refer back to the first chapter (“I am of Apollos, I am of Paul”). The Christians at Corinth were boasting (glorying) in men like Paul and Apollos instead of God (1 Cor. 1:31). It was as if preachers were “church celebrities” and this had to stop. Paul was so concerned about how the Corinthians bragged on religious teachers he said in 21b: “You do not belong to these men. The teachers you brag about belong to you; you do not belong to them. All things are yours.” This conclusion is further stated in verses 22-23.

In the final verses of this chapter we find Paul reminding these Christians how they were very well off (22c) because God had given them “*all*” things. It seems Stoic philosophy put a great deal of attention on obtaining *all things through wisdom*. “Paul used this Stoic saying to encourage the Corinthians to gain a proper, Christ-centered perspective on their lives. If they became people of spiritual wisdom, they would see that everything had been given to them in Christ” (Holman, 7:51).

**3:22-23:** *whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; 23 and ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s.*

Part of the Corinthians’ *wealth* consisted of those who had taught them (Paul, Apollos, Peter, etc). The Corinthians believed each splinter group in the congregation had ties to a particular teacher (1:12-13), but Paul corrected this error by noting how *all the teachers* belonged to *all the Corinthians*. Since all the teachers belonged to all these Christians, there was no basis for division and strife.

In addition to being blessed with wonderful instructors, the Corinthians were also blessed with “*life*” and “*death*.” That is, life and death were states that served and helped them just as teachers had assisted them. Life and death exist for the benefit of God’s people. We “die to sin” (Rom. 6:2) so we can “live with Christ” (Rom. 6:4). Unsaved people die and eternally perish (Ezek. 18:4), but saved people “live with Christ” (2 Tim. 2:11). Life has true meaning for Christians because the saved do not seek vain or temporal things. Unsaved people are caught up in a cycle that leads nowhere. Many think they are pursuing happiness, but it is never found. Compare, too, Jn. 4:14; 10:10. *Life* is a good way of summarizing *joy, salvation, fullness, and wholeness*.

*Death* is the Christian’s doorway to heaven and the road to eternal rest and happiness. Though most of the world shuns death and wants to live as long as possible (death is regarded as a calamity and curse), Christians have been freed from the terror of death (Heb. 2:15) and look forward to the life beyond this one (Phil. 1:23-24). Christians find peace in their final hours while the unsaved are often terrified. Allen (p. 50) suggests that those who are unsaved *do not live*; the unsaved only possess *existence*. This is a true and sobering point.

At the end of verse 22 Paul made the same point by using different wording. Things that are “*present*” are another description of *life*. The word translated *present* (*enistemi*) is the same term used in Rom. 8:38, and the sense of the term there is the same as



here. As noted in the commentary on Rom. 8:38, Paul often used some of the most extreme things such as life and death to make a point. The “*things to come*” are synonymous with *death*. The things in the present and in the future are all designed to help God’s children.

The final verse in this chapter introduces a new thought. In the previous verses Paul said *all things* belong to Christians. When Paul listed what Christians possessed he did not include the *Lord*. This omission was surely intentional because it would be wrong to say Jesus belongs to us (the church). Christians belong to Christ, and that is why the chapter concludes with Paul saying Christians belong to the Lord. The ultimate conclusion to this matter is in 23b. The Corinthians should have boasted in God and not men. If the Corinthians wanted to brag about anyone, they should have glorified and bragged about the one who owned them (Jesus).

Concerning the information in 23b Hodge (First Corinthians, p. 63) wrote, “As the church is subject only to Christ, so Christ is subject only to God. The Scriptures speak of a threefold subordination of Christ. 1. A subordination as to the mode of subsistence and operation, of the second, to the first person in the Trinity; which is perfectly consistent with their identity of substance, and equality in power and glory. 2. The voluntary subordination of the Son in his humbling himself to be found in fashion as a man, and becoming obedient unto death, and therefore subject to the limitations and infirmities of our nature. 3. The economical or official subjection of the theanthropos. That is, the subordination of the incarnate Son of God, in the work of redemption and as the head of the church. He that is by nature equal with God becomes, as it were, officially subject to him. The passages the most directly parallel with the one before us are 11, 3, and 15, 28, but in Phil. 2, 6-11. Heb. 1, 3, and in many other passages, the same truth is taught.” All “believers belong to Christ; Christ belongs to God – thus, all believers belong to God” (Gromacki, p. 51). This point is further discussed and illustrated in the commentary on 11:2b.

To better understand the next chapter it needs to be remembered that Paul has criticized the Corinthians for exalting preachers. He has also condemned the factious groups who followed certain evangelists. In the next chapter the factions are dealt with from yet another perspective. In chapter four Paul says a preacher’s “position” is no higher than that of a servant. He also outlines some of the responsibilities imposed upon preachers. One task required of all ministers is *faithfulness*.