



### **3. A Passion for Building Together (1 Cor 3:1-15)**

This is the third in our series on the heart of Fellowship. Here we are in a church in the middle of Norfolk, all from different backgrounds. Why are we here? Because in Christ we have been drawn into fellowship with God and as a result of being part of His family, we are now in fellowship with one another.

The Corinthians had found fellowship with God. They had been redeemed and included in the body of Christ. They were members of the family of God. But they didn't move in unity. We saw last week how important it was to walk in unity - within the mind and will of God. This week we are going to explore the reasons why the Corinthians got themselves into a muddle and some pointers as to how they and therefore we, can build God's church in unity.

The Corinthians were like a dysfunctional family. All families are a bit dysfunctional aren't they? We accept a relationship, but we do our own things and live our own separate lives. We have a few family occasions like Christmas when we reluctantly meet our relatives for the festive season and are glad by January that we don't have to see them for another 12 months! But we can't escape the fact that we are related to them. Sad but true. But functional families are great places to be! By and large my family was harmonious as I grew up and it was a great place to be - and a healthy environment in which I could grow into adulthood. God's family is no different.

The Corinthian church was very dysfunctional and stands as a warning not to go down their road. As a result of being dysfunctional its witness was damaged and worship was pretty dire. Paul describes them like this:

*Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly--mere infants in Christ. 2 I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. 3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?*

What had caused all this division?

#### **🍌 Immaturity**

The Corinthians were spiritually immature. They had never grown. They had never understood what it meant to be holy, to be a child of God. Why do you think we have focused so much on this in the past year? because when we understand who we are in Christ; how loved and how special we are to God: then our thinking is shaped by our desire to please Him and walk according to the Spirit.

#### **🍌 Worldliness**

The Corinthians' ways were still controlled by the values of the world rather than by the Spirit because they thought they knew better. They thought their church should be run by separation and confrontation; by the force of superior argument. All it did was

lead to jealousy and quarrelling. We need to understand that the pull of the world is very strong. It's not a case usually of things we do, but how we think. Our own society is similar to Corinth in the first century. We are a society where we place individual desires and aspirations over those of others. The ones that got their way were those that could win the argument or those already in high position in society.

### 🕒 Man-Based

It was a church where people confused what men said with what God said. They based their faith on personalities and not on Jesus. That's another mark of immature living. In their immaturity some thought that they were spiritually superior to others because they followed Paul. Others thought they were superior because they followed Apollos. In truth they were pathetic.

It's something people still do today, don't they? Sometimes people go to a church because of the Pastor. When he leaves, the church is decimated. It's a common problem because Christians often like to follow people, to enjoy the worship and teaching that they give - but it is all self-indulgent. They probably never even think that the sound preaching they receive (and that's what they probably get) applies to them at all. They go from church to church until they find another spiritual trill. Many big churches are populated by spiritual babes.

We need to learn from this, not because we necessarily have the problem, but that these are traits we can follow if we do not walk closely with God and with one another in fellowship. I believe that is our desire as a church - so the warning is given to us by Paul - if you want to be a healthy fellowship, then don't be like this!

So here they were, the Paul group, the Apollos group and the Peter group. Paul points out the obvious. They were hoist by their own petard. Paul knew all about Apollos. After Apollos had mis-taught the Ephesians in Acts 18 but was intercepted by Priscilla and Aquilla, Paul's friends who taught him more adequately. Apollos then went to Corinth on their recommendation to teach them. Apollos by this time was teaching the same truths as Paul. Oh dear! They had divided on personalities, not on truth. I know of many churches that have divided on personalities and in this case it was worse because the personalities involved did not approve.

*5 What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe--as the Lord has assigned to each his task. 6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8 The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labour. 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.*

Paul goes on to correct them. They had different functions in building up the church. Paul planted, and Apollos watered - but God made it grow. Why? It was God's church and existed and grew by the Spirit. They just performed their God-given roles to which they were called. *8 The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labour. 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building*

They were performing the same purpose as fellow-workers and look again at verse 8 - in the end they were responsible to God for it *each will be rewarded according to his own labour* . More on that in a minute.

Paul and Apollos had clearly defined roles. They were God's fellow workers: there to do a job in God's field, constructing God's building - the Church at Corinth. Now comes the crunch.

*10 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. 15 If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.*

Paul and Apollos had started it. Paul laid the foundations but what he is clearly saying to them is that as they build on top of that foundation, they should be very careful what they are trying to construct. The only true foundation for any church is Christ. That is what he had laid, and that is what they were building on.

In our generation, we too are building on a foundation that is Christ. As we build and grow this church, the same applies as we should take great care what we are building.

We often use this passage to talk about our individual responsibility towards God. It's a bit narrower than the longer passage on the judgement seat of Christ in 2 Corinthians 5 as it just talks about our responsibilities in building up the fellowship of the church.

It is about individual responsibility, but it is actually saying that we all have an individual responsibility towards God in relation to how we build His church - the fellowship of God's people. A fundamental part of Paul's teaching is that we ALL have a part to play in the building of His church just like he and Apollos did. Last week we saw how important it was to have a unity of vision and purpose. But we all have our own role - and function for which God equips us - in building up the fellowship of the church. We each own part of it. We'll get to that in a later week.

And we have a personal responsibility to because God is later on going to show us how well we did. When Paul talks about the bit we have built in verses 12-15 he is referring about our personal responsibility because God does reward His people for their faithfulness. Note how this is positive rather than negative. The purpose of testing what we did isn't to damn us, but to reward us for our faithfulness in playing our part as a fellow-worker in the fellowship of God's people.

Like Paul and Apollos, the Corinthians were called to build. That's true of us too. We are called to build. We are fellow-workers, called to build this fellowship. We have a choice of materials: Gold, silver, precious stones and wood, hay and stubble.

What you build things out of will determine how enduring they are. Think of what is left of ancient Egypt - structures built out of the finest stone and artefacts made out of gold or silver. What about the houses made out of wood and mud that ordinary people of the time lived in? All gone.

Gold, silver and precious stones are long-lasting. Wood, hay and stubble don't. The implication is in verse 14 as God tests the building with fire (which is a scriptural picture of judgement or testing) is that only certain things that we do have any lasting value in eternity. The rest is just a waste of space which has no eternal value.

The implication is that Paul and Apollos had built with gold silver and precious stones and had already seen how God had given the increase. But the implication is that the Corinthians were not being careful how they were building and so far they had only built a shack up out of wood hay and stubble. And it had no eternal value.

Ouch! The encouragement to the Corinthians here is to consider what they are building. If they build in division then they build a shack. If like Paul and Apollos, they have a passion for building as God's fellow-workers then they build up something that is eternal. So what building should we be doing. What should our unity of vision for building the church be. Let's look at the building materials: So what are those things. Paul helpfully tells us.

#### ■ Gold silver and precious stones

What did Paul do? he preached the gospel and planted churches. He brought people to Christ. that was his burden. In chapter 2 he describes this in great detail. What of Apollos? He was a church builder , building up the people of God. Both were doing God's will as they used their gifts to build up the church. God gave the increase. This what building out of the finest materials is all about.

#### ■ Wood, hay, stubble

The stuff that was dividing the Corinthians - and is anything that won't survive eternity. It has no true worth whatsoever in God's eyes. It doesn't build church and therefore don't expect anything from God for making these things important. Division, jealousy, quarrelling over material things. Think about it? How many denominations are there in heaven?

*John Wesley tells of a dream he had. In the dream, he was ushered to the gates of Hell. There he asked, "Are there any Presbyterians here?" "Yes!", came the answer. Then he asked, "Are there any Baptists?" "Yes." "Any Methodists?" The answer was "Yes!" each time. Much distressed, Wesley was then ushered to the gates of Heaven. There he asked the same questions. "Are there any Presbyterians here?" And the answer was "No!" "Are there any Baptists?" "No." "Any Methodists?" "No." Then, Wesley asked, "Who then is inside?" The answer came back, "There are only Christians here."*

And what of our buildings? And what of our traditions? What about all the theologies we have fought wars over? Or the church matters that splits have occurred about? What about all the things that still from barriers between us? All gone. We are called to build not out of these things, but to save lives and build them up. Anything else is tinsel and window dressing that doesn't last any longer than this world is going to.

This passage is our priorities and we don't need to go further than scripture in pointing us in the right direction. I said last week about the need to seek the Lord for His direction. Scripture takes us 99% of the way. if we want to see God give the increase here in Swaffham, then we build with gold, silver and precious stones. Our desire should be to see people come to Christ. Our desire should be to intercede for our community to this end. Our desire is to help one another to grow and mature in Christ. Our desire should be to be a worshipping and witnessing community that God uses to bring glory to Himself and through which His purposes are worked out.

But now comes the hard bit. We are ALL called to play our part in building God's church. I remember when our conservatory was built. One guy measured up. Another drew up the plans. There was a guy who laid the base. Another did the brickwork. Other did the fabrication. There was one madman who did the electrics and laid the floor. Different people, different skills, one purpose. Without one of them, the job could not have been completed.

We all have a different role in the building. It's not just the job of the Pastor or the keen people to build. We all have a critical role in the building. If we are building out of wrong materials, the building will not even survive until the day of the Lord. Each one

of us is important. If we are not playing our role then this work is compromised. If we have any sort of division, it is very compromised.

What is your role? Maybe you don't know. In later weeks we'll explore that. But you need to find out - and fast. God's work depends on you and He rewards each of our faithfulness in using the gifts and talents He has given us to build His church.

#### Prayer

*Thank you Father that you have given each of us the privilege of working on building your fellowship here in Swaffham.*

*Thank you Lord that you have given me the gifts that I need to play my part in building up this fellowship*

*I pray that you will guide me and each person you have called here to know what part we each should play in building this fellowship up*

*Lord, help me to move in the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit*

*So that all the glory may go to You*

*And Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ*

*In His name*

*Amen*



*Preached by Mark Reid, Swaffham Baptist Church, 18/1/04. Scripture Quotes NIV  
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