



"What are you building?"
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**by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Chapter 3 *Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in the Christian life. 2 I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready, 3 for you are still controlled by your sinful nature. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your sinful nature? Aren't you living like people of the world? 4 When one of you says, "I am a follower of Paul," and another says, "I follow Apollos," aren't you acting just like people of the world? 5 After all, who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only God's servants through whom you believed the Good News. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us. 6 I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow. 7 It's not important who does the planting, or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow. 8 The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose. And both will be rewarded for their own hard work. 9 For we are both God's workers. And you are God's field. You are God's building. 10 Because of God's grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we*

already have — Jesus Christ. 12 Anyone who builds on that foundation may use a variety of materials — gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw. 13 But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value. 14 If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. 15 But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames. 16 Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you? 17 God will destroy anyone who destroys this temple. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. 18 Stop deceiving yourselves. If you think you are wise by this world's standards, you need to become a fool to be truly wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God. As the Scriptures say, "He traps the wise in the snare of their own cleverness." 20 And again, "The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise; he knows they are worthless." 21 So don't boast about following a particular human leader. For everything belongs to you — 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Peter, or the world, or life and death, or the present and the future. Everything belongs to you, 23 and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

Chapter 3

3:1

Chapter 1 of 1 Corinthians had dealt with the "natural man." Chapter two dealt with the "spiritual man." Now here in Chapter three Paul is going to address the issue of the "carnal man."

Just what or who is the carnal man? The carnal man is the individual who has made the *mental* decision to follow Christ, yet still remains *in* and *part of* the world. For such a person as this, the flesh is still in control. They suffer under one of two scenarios: *One*, they are not truly born again. They have made a *decision* but they never changed *position*. Or *two*, they have never grown up, and are yet "baby's in Christ." Spiritually speaking, they manifest the qualities of an infant: 1) They can't feed themselves and are dependent on others for their well-being. They must be carried or they fall down a lot. 2) Like all babies, their world revolves around themselves. They are completely self-centered, self-absorbed, and very jealous of those around them. 3) Their diet is solely that which is easy to eat, tastes good, and is digested easily. Thus, no "meat" of course. 4) They are innately moody, fall asleep a lot, and can be quite temperamental. And of course, they are always very messy.

Sadly, Paul was forced to speak to the Corinth church as one would to a baby. There would be and *could be* no depth of instruction. Paul had been forced into the realm of a baby sitter instead of a teacher, pastor, instructor, and shepherd. Certainly such a relationship is normal for a time. Each of us, after we are reborn, must spend some time growing up. But when we do *not* grow up, there is a problem.

3:2

Paul seems to express a bit of frustration here with what had sadly become the status quo. His angst was not that he needed to feed them as babies, but that he was *still* needing to feed them as babies! Jesus knew similar frustration. He said to His disciples, "*I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now*" (John 16:12). The believers in Corinth had come so far, but not as far as Paul...or Jesus for that matter, wanted or needed for them. For any of us after years in a church community to be in such a state should be personally shameful and embarrassing. But then again, do babies understand that they are merely babies? Babies are cute, and we are so patient with them because, *well*, they are babies! But if a 20-year-old young man says "goo goo, gaa gaa" and you need to play games with his food to get him to eat his veggies, it is just sad.

3:3

Paul goes on now to list some of the attributes of one who is spiritually carnal, still a baby. First there is **envy**. Envy is jealousy *among* and *of* others. "...that's *my* toy!" ... "I want what *you* have," ... "I want *your* position."

James 3:16 says “*For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.*” And as often is the case, we didn’t really need that verse to know of its factual truth! What happens when such behavior is manifest? You get isolated from the group and have to stand in the corner by yourself.

Then there is **strife**. Strife occurs as a result of those who are constantly full of contention. They are the problem-causers, and every church has them. 1 Timothy 6:4 says “*...he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions...*”

Last on Paul’s short list is **divisions**. Some people are innately dividers. In every situation where they could express God’s heart of unity, they seek instead for ways to divide. Unity renders them powerless because in such they would merely have equal standing with others, so they seek to keep the power off balance. They attempt to reign in the confusion. Order is their enemy, and God is nowhere in the mix. For 1Co 14:33 tells us “*For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace...*”

3:4-7

The overriding aspect of all of these attributes is that such folks always need a mommy to keep the peace. Such churches relegate their pastor and staff to daycare workers who spend their time running around keeping the peace and changing diapers instead of relational discipleship and being instructors. Paul however attempts to take these mommy figures out of the equation. Twice he says it is “God who gives the increase,” *not pastors*. Pastors are only channels through whom God speaks to His people. God is still in charge, the center of the picture and the of course, the ultimate disciplinarian. Col 2:10 “*...and you are complete in **Him**, who is the head of all principality and power.*”

3:8-9

Paul draws the Corinthian church back to the body of Christ. He emphasizes unity with God as the head. Each part of the church body is important. Alone we cannot function as God designed the church to function, whether it be the first century church in Corinth or the 21st century church in Menomonie, WI. We are to take the position of God’s workers. So I ask, *what are you working on? **Are** you working? We are His “field.” What are you growing? We are His “building.” What are you building? **How** are you building?*

We are herein reminded of a critical point in our faith: we will receive reward according to our labors here in this life. Or, *we won’t*... Rom 2:7-8 tells us “*God will render to each one according to his deeds: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness... (you will receive) indignation and wrath...*” We are stewards of God’s possessions, and are called to multiple His holdings.

3:10

“*...take heed how he builds on it.*” Clearly it’s not enough to simply *work* for the kingdom. We should always question **how** we serve, and **how** we build. It’s always our tendency to think the “end justifies the means.” That it doesn’t matter *how* we go about the work of God, as long as go through the motions. We must remember, however, that Christ actually could have forced His kingdom upon the masses! He could have done extraordinary miracles at the request of the leaders of His day so everyone would hail Him king, but He did not. He did not take away the people’s power and choice to sin. He did not try to legislate morality, or circumnavigate God’s long-term plans.

Today the greater church of God is often involved in building something akin to a religious Frankenstein: Parts of various “pet” doctrines all sewn together, then animated to bring forth some sort of life. Indeed it may be *breathing*, but it’s not *pretty*, functional, or successful. Albeit loyal, it’s just this big, bumbling fool that chants,

“Master!” and is most often offensive, uncoordinated, and juvenile. We are so proud of ourselves as we run artificial power through it and shout “Its’ alive!”, but it’s not life as God created. It’s not a supernatural, Holy Spirit-filled life. God actually gave us instruction concerning how to go about the wonderful and beautiful work of spreading the gospel and building His church. Why are we so consumed with spending our time trying to find another method and alternate road? Because the adult way is harder, more time consuming, more expensive, and we have to depend upon God more than we look to ourselves.

3:11-15

These verses have not kept men from trying. The religious world is constantly trying to utilize some new spiritual architectural method born in the minds of men. We seek spiritual construction that is cheaper, faster or easier. But our faith was never designed to be pre-fabricated or modular. It is to be built according to old-fashioned blue-prints with a strong foundation and sturdy walls, and built upon a foundation that lies on the rock of Jesus Christ. It may not be new and hip, but it stands the test of time. It will be standing, when our spiritual pole-barn has rotted away into history.

Note: compare St Vitus Cathedral in Prague, whose construction began in 1344 and labor continued *without modern construction equipment* up until about 1900. It survived world wars and numerous regional ones, countless storms and a multitude of usurpers and conquerors. Then you have St Marks Cathedral in Venice...finished in 1096 and survived the same wars and storms and roughly 100 floods each year as the ocean rises and falls. A nearby church there took 100,000 wood pylons driven into the ocean to create a strong enough foundation. In comparison, the Viking’s dome in Minneapolis opened in 1984 and was torn down in 2014, scarcely surviving 30 years.

If we build with poor materials and cut corners on construction quality, there will come an inevitable day when the work we have done will fail when tested. The winds and storms will come, and whether you and your work are still standing afterwards will reveal what has been built!

Certainly this passage will be manifested when we arrive at that ultimate Day of Judgment before God. This is the Bema Seat of judgment. It is not judgment concerning salvation or eternal standing, rather a place in which what we have done, our *works*, will be seen for what they really are. Will there be anything there that day that will survive the test...survive His judgement? I ask again, in your faith life, what have you built, and out of what materials? Everything will fall into two categories: *Endure=reward or Burned=loss*.

3:16-17

The word Paul carefully chooses here is not in reference to the temple as a whole, but specifically to the Holy of Holies, the internal temple which was to be the residence of the Spirit of God Himself. Something else interesting appears in this verse: Paul, again choosing his words carefully, uses the *plural* word for “you.” So while we may apply this passage to the individual, which is the historical and common interpretation, it is better applied to the local church as a whole. Paul has been addressing the local church in Corinth, and dealing with the carnality, immaturity, and divisions within that church. Though it certainly can be received as personally directed, it would be proper contextual interpretation to hear Paul’s continued address here to the local church as a whole. One has to be concerned therefore as to those who have indeed defiled their local church and the condemnation that they carry thereafter. We can also see Paul, beckoning this church forward into its rightful place and calling, reminding them that they, *as God’s holy residence*, are His temple, His place of abode! He reminds them that in the midst of all the issues that currently plague this fellowship, God dwells in them as a church. That should be both a comfort and a warning for any church including this one in which we count ourselves a part of! The Corinth church was being given a solemn warning against continuing on the path they

were on. To defile such could cost one his very life. In an age of church splits and divisions, we would do well to heed Paul's warnings.

3:18-20

Paul continues to address this church, now turning to the individuals who, at this point in his letter, would no doubt be bristling in indignation. "*Let no one deceive himself...*" Paul went right to the root of the problem. Man's pride was the killer. Man's pride is *still* the killer. Truly no greater earthly plague faces mankind, and thus the Lord's church, than the arrogance of men. It is the source of church division, strife, and splits. It is the root of every sin we commit. We might recoil from any insinuation that we have "defiled" our church, because we conjure up pictures of debauchery and wicked actions, but Paul includes the practices of envy, strife, and division. That paints a rather different picture and one where many of us would truthfully find ourselves guilty.

Once again we are reminded that Corinth was a center for intellectuals and the "cultured" of that day. It wasn't long before intellectual, highly educated, and cultured society was creeping into the church. Yet Paul said we would better off to be a fool. The word in the original text means moron. It was not a state of stupor or ignorance that Paul was seeking, rather the humility that would accompany such a state. And yet man continues not only to *seek after* the world's wisdom, but stubbornly believes that's where our ultimate salvation lies. But God says that such thoughts are futile. One need only look out into the world to see the reality of that truth.

3:21-23

The church in Corinth had been putting their faith in *men*: They sought people to mediate between them and God, to tell them what God wanted of them. While they no doubt had good intentions, they had ultimately placed men between themselves and God.

Until Christ there was the priesthood, but Christ came so that no man need stand between us and our Creator. As the curtain tore between man and the closed Holy of Holies in the temple upon the crucifixion of Christ, the door to God was opened, and individual access to the Father was forever available. The Holy Spirit descended upon the upper room in the book of Acts, and God gave His Spirit to all who would have Him, to guide each one individually into what He had desired since the garden," *a personal and intimate relationship with Him, one-on-one.*

No one must ever take that precious gift away from us. Not a pastor or a priest, *no one*. There will be counselors, teachers, and pastor-shepherds. Their words can often be a blessing and can teach us. But the *greatest* thing they can teach us is to honestly and faithfully hear the voice of God speak to us personally. Unless we do, we remain a child. If we don't, then for what did Christ die?

Not Paul, Apollos, Peter, or any of them are to be allowed to take away one's personal relationship and communication with God. Not the world, not life or death. 1 Timothy 2:5 says "*For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.*" "*Everything belongs to you ...and you are Christ's...*" This was the key to the growing up of the church in Corinth. This is the key to our *own* maturity. But we must be willing to take off the bib and get out of the high chair...

Mark 12:30 "*And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.*"