

(1 Corinthians) ch.3:1-3:17

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual maturity and the need to recognize God's sovereignty in our lives, highlighting the contrast between spiritually minded co-workers of God and carnal Christians.

Duration: 43:19

Scripture: Isaiah 55:8-9, Acts 20:27, 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, 1 Corinthians 3:8-9

Topics: "Judgment Day", "Spiritual Foundations"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the importance of building our lives and work on the foundation of Jesus Christ. He emphasizes that in the final day of judgment, God will test our work by fire, and man's opinion of our service for God will count for nothing. The preacher explains that there are two alternatives for building on this foundation: gold, silver, and precious stones, or wood, hay, and straw. He emphasizes that the quality of our work, not the quantity, will be tested by fire, and only the work built with gold, silver, and jewels will remain and receive a reward.

Transcript

We turn today to 1 Corinthians and chapter 3 and verse 1. And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, for you are not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly.

In our study of chapter 2, we considered how Paul told the Corinthians that he determined not to know anything among them except Jesus Christ and Him crucified, verse 2. That is the plain fact about Christ dying on the cross for our sins. But he said that among those who were mature, 1 Corinthians 2, 6, he spoke about things beyond Christ dying for our sins. Wisdom, the full counsel of God.

But he could not share the full counsel of God with the Corinthian Christians. In Acts chapter 20, when Paul spoke to the elders in Ephesus, he told them in Acts 20, verse 27, I did not shrink from declaring to you the full counsel of God. But he could not do that with the Corinthian Christians because they were not mature.

That is what he says in chapter 3, verse 1. I could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food, for you were not yet able to receive it. And that teaches us that not all Christians can receive the same spiritual diet.

It depends on the level of maturity of the Christian, the type of spiritual food that he is able to digest. There are many believers who remain babes even after many years. Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthians perhaps about 5 or 6 years after he had established a church there.

And he expected them by this time to have become spiritual. But they had not become spiritual. In other words, it does not take 15 or 20 years to be a spiritually minded believer.

In 4 or 5 years, the Lord expects us to have moved on to a spiritual attitude of mind, even though there is continuous growth throughout our Christian life. Yet a spiritual attitude of mind can be acquired even in a short period. But these Corinthian Christians had not arrived there.

And even after 5 years of being Christians, there were still babes drinking milk. And that is a sad thing. It is just like a baby who, even at the age of 5, is unable to eat solid food.

There is something wrong with that baby. And that was the condition of the Christians in Corinth. There were many wonderful fruits that Paul could not share with them because they were spiritually immature, unable to digest food.

Milk is something you just have to swallow. But solid food is something you have to chew in your mouth. There are truths in the word of God that we just receive.

Christ died for our sins. By simple faith and receiving it, we receive forgiveness. But there are many other truths in God's word which we have to digest.

We have to chew. We have to meditate on. We have to allow the Spirit of God to teach it to us, not only by hearing it, but by allowing our senses to be exercised in the trials of life.

In Hebrews chapter 5, we read, in verse 14, that solid food is for the mature. How did they become mature? Hebrews 5.14 tells us, who because of practice, not because of study. And Hebrews 5.14 clearly teaches that no Christian can be mature through study, but through practice.

What they studied in the word, they practiced, and they had their senses trained to discern good and evil. In other words, in the trials and temptations of life, they exercised their senses and discovered what was pleasing to God and what was not. But the Corinthians did not go along that way, and so they remained spiritually babies.

And he says, therefore I could only give you milk to drink, 1 Corinthians 3, verse 2. And one who is called to preach God's word needs to discern the spiritual level of the people he is speaking to, if he is able to give them food that is necessary for them at their particular level of spiritual development. Paul was discerning enough to know that, and so he gave them only milk. He says, you are not able to receive solid food.

Earlier on, in 1 Corinthians 2.14, he said that the natural man, the man who has not developed his spiritual senses, or the soulish man, we could say, cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness to him. If Paul had preached some of the deeper truths of God's word to these carnal Corinthians, who were living in their souls, developing their soulish powers, that is, their intellect and their emotions, they would have considered it foolishness, because these truths are only understood by revelation. And he says, even now, you are not yet able to receive this spiritual solid food.

The reason is not, you are not intelligent enough, or you don't study the word of God enough. No, the reason is that in their life they were walking after the flesh. There was jealousy, verse 3, among them.

There was strife. They were fleshly and walking like other men. He doesn't say they were walking like the devil, that would have been terrible, but they were walking like ordinary men.

Is that a crime, to walk like ordinary men? According to verse 3, yes. 1 John, chapter 2, verse 6 says, He who says he abides in Christ must walk even as Jesus walked, not as other men walk in the world, but as Jesus walked. That is the mark of a spiritual man, that his attitude in life is to walk as Jesus walked, not like other men around him.

And when there is jealousy in our heart, that is one indication that we are still fleshly, and therefore carnal, babies. When there is strife among believers, that proves that those believers are fleshly, and therefore babies. Their Bible knowledge may be fantastic, but they are still babies.

It's a great deception to think that increase in Bible knowledge makes us spiritual. That's the mistake and delusion under which so many believers live. No, it is our character that makes us spiritual.

And if there is one passage in Scripture that points out that so clearly that you cannot mistake it, it is 1 Corinthians, chapter 3, verses 1 to 3. Why does he call them babies? Not because they lack knowledge. We read in 1 Corinthians, chapter 1, that they had great knowledge, verse 5. They had knowledge of everything. Verse 5 of 1 Corinthians 1 also tells us that they had great ability in speaking in the meetings.

And 1 Corinthians 1, 7 says they had all the spiritual gifts. Here is a church that contained people who had fantastic Bible knowledge, who were able to express that Bible knowledge beautifully in their sermons, who had all the spiritual gifts, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and yet they were spiritual babies. One reason, and only one, that was their lives were carnal.

There was jealousy and there was strife. And they behaved just like other human beings with one another. Another characteristic of their carnality and their babyhood is what Paul mentioned even earlier in 1 Corinthians 1, which he repeats in 1 Corinthians 3, verse 4. He says, one says, I am of Paul.

Another says, I am of Apollos. He says, when you say that, aren't you behaving just like ordinary human beings? Ordinary human beings have got their leaders whom they follow. There are people who admire film stars and follow certain film stars.

There are people who follow certain politicians. And in the same way, he says, you people call yourselves Christians, but you are following a human leader. One says, I appreciate Paul's ministry, and the other says, I appreciate Apollos' ministry.

And when you don't understand that these are different servants whom God has given in the body, each with a ministry to make you complete and whole, when you don't understand that, he says, you are spiritual babies. If you are attracted only to the ministry of one particular brother in the body of Christ, that is another mark of spiritual babyhood. When we are unwilling to receive the ministry of different members of the body of Christ, that indicates our own spiritual level.

We are carnal and we are babies. Some appreciate Paul, some appreciate Apollos. Verse five, he says, what then is Apollos and what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed.

Channels, he could say, through whom God ministered life to you. And as the Lord gave opportunity to each of us, we ministered to you. Paul, I ministered to you.

Apollos, he ministered to you. And together we were able to share God's truth with you. But if you choose one of us to the occlusion of the other, you remain spiritual babies.

He says, what did I do? I planted Apollos' water, but it was God who caused the growth. And a spiritual person, we see from verse six, is the one who sees beyond Paul, beyond Apollos, and sees the Lord. Who gets in connection with the head.

So there are a number of truths that we find in verses one to six, by which we can be delivered from spiritual babyhood and press on to being truly mature spiritual Christians. We turn today to 1 Corinthians and chapter three and verse four. Paul was speaking to these Corinthian Christians about their carnality in claiming to belong to Paul or to Apollos.

And when a person says that he is the follower of a particular leader, a particular preacher, it usually means that he esteems that preacher above others. He considers this particular person as greater. And when we quarrel about whether one man of God is greater than another, we are ourselves carnal and spiritual babies.

All those who are placing one above the other. The mature apostle Paul says in verse five, what then is Apollos and what is Paul? Servants. And that teaches us that every true servant of God must take his place also as servants of all men.

Later on in 1 Corinthians chapter nine, Paul repeats that. That he was a servant. But he considered himself not as a great preacher or a leader, but only as a servant of these Corinthian Christians.

Servants of the Lord and servants of the church. And the Lord gave a particular task to Apollos and a particular task to Paul, as he says in verse five. The Lord gave a particular task and each of them did the work that was allotted to them.

Paul was given the task of planting. Apollos was given the task of watering. And we have to be spiritually immature in order to think that the one who plants is a greater servant of God than the one who waters.

Because it is just like the different ministries in the body. In our physical body, like the eye and the ear and the hand, there is just no way of comparing which is greater. All are essential.

Which would we rather do without? We want the eye and the ear and the hand. Later on in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul speaks about that. But the immature Christian is the one who does not understand this.

In an earlier study we mentioned that 1 Corinthians is an epistle which teaches us the characteristics of a carnal Christian. Because that is what the Corinthians were. And here are a number of characteristics that we have seen in these verses of chapter three.

Following of human leaders, esteeming one leader above another, not recognizing that each ministry is essential, a willingness to receive one ministry but not another ministry from another brother indicates our own spiritual immaturity. Feeling that the one who initiates the work, planting, is greater than the one who waters, is another mark of our own spiritual immaturity. Not seeing God beyond His servants is another mark of spiritual immaturity.

Verse six, he says, I planted, Apollos watered, but it was God who caused the growth. In other words, it had nothing to do with my ability or Apollos' ability. Each of us had been given a specific task, but God was behind Apollos and behind me.

And it was God who made sure that that which was planted took root, and it was God who made sure that that which was watered flourished. So he says, the one who plants is nothing. Verse seven, and the one who waters is nothing.

Just like there are here a number of things for carnal Christians to take heed to, from the example of the Apostle Paul himself, those of us who are in the Lord's work and who are in Christian leadership positions can learn a lot of lessons from this passage. To recognize ourselves, whatever our ministry may be, as servants, first of all, verse five, and secondly, verse seven, to recognize ourselves as nothing. In other words, if God's made you an apostle, you need to recognize yourself as nothing.

Paul recognized himself as nothing, verse seven. And if God's made you a teacher like the Apollos, you're still nothing. He may have made you an evangelist, you're still nothing.

It's only one who is willing to take that place of being a zero in God's eyes who can build a church effectively. Everyone else will only raise up carnal Christians. Paul was a spiritual man because he considered himself a servant of all men, verse five, and himself, his own estimation of himself was a big zero, verse seven, nothing.

He says God is everything, and that is the mark of a truly mature leader and a spiritual man of God. That he considers God as everything. God is the one who moves behind his servants.

And if we want to be mature when we hear others minister to us, we need to see beyond them to God who moves them. Otherwise we shall remain carnal, we shall be attached to human leaders and not be attached to the head from whom all growth comes. Paul and Apollos can never give spiritual growth.

Verse seven says it's God who gives spiritual growth. God is the one who keeps everything growing in plants. He is the one who gives the growth.

And if I look to men I shall be disappointed and I shall not grow spiritually. And so that reveals to us the reason why the Corinthian Christians were not growing spiritually. They were looking to men and their ministries and not to the Lord.

The men and their ministries are only channels, but they couldn't see that. And then another thing he says in verse eight, which is also a lesson for all who are servants of God, that the one who plants and the one who waters are one. In other words, there is no disagreement between them.

They are not in competition with each other. A true servant of God is not in competition with any other man's ministry. He gives place to the other person's ministry and he concentrates on his own.

He is not seeking to show that he is superior to another and he is not in competition with another. He doesn't despise the ministry of another. He doesn't pull down another before the eyes of other believers.

He appreciates the ministry of the other. If God has made you a planter, if you are mature, you will appreciate the ministry of the waterer. And if God has made you a waterer, you will appreciate the ministry of the planter without ever getting into competition or, what is worse, trying to imitate the ministry of

another.

There are people, for example, to whom God gives a gift of healing. The greatest stupidity would be to imitate that gift when God hasn't given you that gift yourself. God gives to some the gift of evangelizing people, to others teaching, to others he makes apostles, to others the gift of prophecy.

But each needs to appreciate the other if the church of Jesus Christ is to be built. And so he says, you are he who plants and he who waters are one. He says, you cannot bring a division between Apollos and me.

We are working as a team with the same aim, the same goal in view. And we are not in competition with one another. It's the carnality of you Corinthians that makes you distinguish between us.

But as far as we are concerned, we are one. Blessed are those Christian workers who can take this position, even with ministries that are different in their emphasis from their own. And concerning those who serve the Lord, here is a very important verse, the last part of verse 8. He says, everyone will get his own reward.

And that won't be arbitrary. It will be according to his own labor. Paul says, if I have planted faithfully, I'll get a reward.

If Apollos is watered faithfully, he'll get his reward. And I'll be quite delighted when he gets his. Each person must be faithful in their own ministry.

Each of us has a particular calling in the body of Christ. And it is as we concentrate on that particular calling and are faithful in that, that God can give to us a reward according to our own labor. God is righteous in his rewards and he will give us definitely a reward according to our labor.

If we seek for our reward here on earth, for example, if we serve the Lord because we want honor from men, or if we serve the Lord because we want money and make the Lord's service a means of earning a living, then we have got our reward right here. And there will be no reward in eternity for those who have served the Lord for an earthly reward right here. That's crystal clear.

But God gives his rewards, he's reserved them and he's kept them for those who have faithfully served him here on this earth, whatever their ministry may be. And in God's eyes, nothing is greater than the other. Faithfulness is the most important thing.

And then he draws a contrast in verse 9 between Apollos and himself on one side and the Corinthian Christians on the other. Apollos and Paul were spiritual men, the Corinthians were carnal. He says we, that is Paul and Apollos, we are God's fellow workers.

In other words, we are mature enough to be co-workers with God because we have a spiritual attitude of mind. We have the mind of Christ, he says in verse 16 of chapter 2. And therefore we can look at things from God's point of view. Therefore we are God's co-workers.

But you Corinthians, in contrast, are still a field on which work has to be done. God has to do a work in you. You are still a building in which God is building.

Now there are two different categories of people mentioned there. Those who are God's fellow workers who have come to maturity, who have come to freedom from jealousy and strife and following human leaders, and who have learned to exercise their senses and discern between good and evil, who have a

spiritual attitude of mind, the mind of Christ, and who therefore have matured to the place where God can say you are my fellow workers. Paul and Apollos were there.

And it is God's will that every one of us come there. But until we come there, God has to do a work on us through other workers. We are a field which needs to be plowed up, which needs to be planted.

We are a building, incomplete, bricks lying around that needs to be put in a proper place. And God's desire is that we move quickly from this low babyhood level to the place of spiritual maturity where God can use each one of us as his co-workers. We turn today to 1 Corinthians chapter 3 and verse 9. We saw how Paul was drawing a contrast between spiritually minded co-workers of God and carnal Christians who were living as babies, spiritual babies.

And he says we, referring to Paul himself and Apollos, his co-worker. He says we are God's fellow workers. God himself is working along with us.

And we are just servants together with God who is seeking to minister to you. But you have not yet come to the place where you can be a fellow worker of God. You are God's field needing cultivation.

And he says you are God's building, a building being built. I have come there, he says in verse 10, according to the grace of God which was given to me and the work God gave me as a wise master builder, I laid a foundation. Paul had the privilege of laying the foundation of beginning the church in Corinth.

And that's described in Acts chapter 18. When Paul went to Corinth, there were no Christians there. They were all heathen.

And when Paul left Corinth after about a couple of years, there was a church. And so Paul had laid the foundation of that church and another is building on it. Apollos came a little later and he took part in that building.

And now Apollos also had left and there were others in the church in Corinth who were continuing that work of building. But he says let everyone be careful how he builds upon this foundation. As far as the foundation is concerned, he says there is no other foundation other than that which God himself has laid and that is Jesus Christ.

It's not Paul that is the foundation. If you build your life on Paul, it will collapse. That is sand and not rock.

Jesus Christ alone is the rock foundation on which the church can be built. And so he is really continuing the same theme of not building your life on men or on any particular ministry. That foundation has been laid, that is Jesus Christ.

That is the house that can be built on the rock. And Jesus, of course, said in Matthew chapter 7 that that rock on which the wise man built his house was actually obedience to his word. It is the foundation of obedience to Jesus Christ on which the true church is built.

When we compare 1 Corinthians 3.11 with Matthew 7 verse 24 to 27, we come to that conclusion. It is not merely an intellectual faith but a faith which produces works of obedience as James chapter 2 says. Such faith is a living faith and such a man has got a solid foundation for all eternity.

The foundation which God himself has laid which is Jesus Christ. Now on this foundation, here is an evangelist or an apostle who comes along in a particular place and lays a foundation of Jesus Christ and

him crucified and leads people to faith and obedience in that foundation. And the beginning has been laid for the church of Jesus Christ to be built in that locality.

Now on top of that foundation, verse 12, all of us are building he says. And if any man builds upon the foundation with various types of materials well every man's work is going to be tested one day. There are two alternatives which we can use for building on top of this foundation.

First of all gold, silver and precious stones or jewels. The other alternative is we could use wood, hay that is dry grass and straw. And you know the difference that when these are put into the fire because he says in verse 13 that one day all of our work is going to be tested by fire.

And in that day he says every man's work will become evident. Today it is not evident. A lot of Christian work that is done today its real character is not evident because it has not yet been tested.

God's work throughout the world for 20 centuries has not been tested yet. The day of testing is yet in the future. And so we cannot assess a work perfectly by our human assessments.

No, every man's work will become evident in that day. For that day he says will show it because it will be revealed with fire. In other words everything we do to put up this building is going to be finally tested with fire.

And the fire he says will test only one thing. And notice the word used here in verse 13. The quality of each man's work.

Not the quantity which is where human beings place their emphasis. But the quality. Christian work in the world today unfortunately is assessed in terms of quantity.

That is number of souls saved, the amount of money in the offering box, our budget if it keeps increasing we think God is prospering us, the size of a building, the size of the congregation, and everything is in terms of numbers. And that is what impresses men. But Luke 16.15 says what impresses men is an abomination in God's eyes.

In the final day the fire of God is going to test our work not in terms of its size. Not in terms of how big a work we were able to build in our earthly lifetime. How many people or how large a building or how large a congregation but rather the quality of each man's work.

In other words did it have the divine nature? The people whom you brought to Christ did they become disciples? And then if any man's work which he has built upon this foundation remains he shall receive a reward. A reward is going to be given to all those who have built with gold, silver and jewels. Because when you put gold, silver and jewels into the fire they remain.

When you put wood, hay and straw into the fire it's going to be burnt up. And so if we know that this is the way God is going to test our work in the final day not by quantity but by quality for we know that even if we have built a building with one ton of wood when that building is put into the fire it's going to be burnt up to ashes completely. But if we have used even a few grams of gold that is going to remain.

And that is the contrast. Wood, hay and straw no matter how big their size, no matter how great their weight will all be reduced to ashes. Whereas gold, silver and precious stones mentioned in verse 12 though little in quantity is going to remain in the final day when it goes through the fire.

And if any man's work is burnt up Verse 15, he shall suffer loss. He himself may be saved because his sins are forgiven. But his entire lifetime's work is destroyed because the fire tests the quality of his work and it does not pass God's test even though men may have been impressed with his labours during his lifetime.

And this teaches us the absolute folly and stupidity of seeking the honour of men and the appreciation of men in our labours. Because that is not what is going to matter in the final day. In Romans and chapter 11 we read this word For all things are from God, Romans 11.36 through God and to God to Him be the glory forever and ever.

Three phrases, from God, through God and to God in Romans 11.36 And those three phrases indicate what is gold, silver and precious stones. If my labour has originated from God, that is in God's will if it has been accomplished through God, that is in God's power and if it has been accomplished to God, that is for God's glory then my work will remain forever. The fire would have tested it according to Romans 11.36 and I'll come through the fire, shining, burning, triumphant.

But on the other hand, if my work has originated from myself that is according to my own schemes and plans and has been done through myself, that is with my own abilities and resources and money and talents and human abilities and has been done to myself, that is for my own honour and glory then it is wood, hay and straw. I'll come through the fire now, not shining, but reduced to ashes. So this is the test of 1 Corinthians 3.12 What is the origin of my work? Is it from God or is it from myself? Is it according to God's will or my will? Secondly, what is the power by which I do God's work? Is it my human abilities and talents and resources or is it the mighty power of God's Holy Spirit? And thirdly, what is the ultimate end and motive with which all of God's work is done? Is it God's glory or my honour? The origin, the power and the motive of our work is going to matter much more in the final day than the quantity of our work.

Let's never forget that. He who is wise in this matter can build in such a way that his lifetime's labour will not be lost in the final day of judgement. We turn now to 1 Corinthians 3.16 In our last study we were considering how all of our labours on earth are going to be tested in the final day and that man's opinion of our service for God is going to count for absolutely nothing in that final day for God is going to test all of our work by fire and the origin and the power and the motive of our labours are going to determine whether they will endure the fire and qualify us for a reward or whether our entire labour on earth is going to be wasted.

And this is why it is very important to constantly test ourselves by the light of God's word so that we do not suffer loss in that final day. 1 Corinthians 3.15 is a verse that should bring fear and trembling into every one of our hearts that it is possible for us to be saved. We are not talking here about salvation.

We are not talking here about the forgiveness of our sins. We are talking here about our work, our labour for the Lord. And in that connection he says Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the spirit of God dwells in you? We are not putting up a merely human building.

We are putting up a divine structure. Each individual believer is a temple of God and the spirit of God dwells in him. There is no building made with hands today which is God's temple like it was in Old Testament times.

One of the differences between the Old Testament and the New Testament is this that in the Old Testament everything was external. In the New Testament everything is internal. In the Old Testament the

temple was external in Jerusalem.

In the New Testament the temple is inward. We are God's temple and the spirit of God dwells in us. There is no building anywhere on the face of the earth that can be called the house of God.

This is a mistaken expression used by millions of believers found nowhere in the New Testament. No earthly building is the house of God. We are God's temple individually.

In fact when Paul spoke to the heathen in Athens in Acts chapter 17 verse 24 to the heathen people who had no understanding he had to explain that God does not dwell in buildings made with hands. And even though he explained that to heathen the sad thing is many believers still think of various buildings as temples various buildings as churches. In the New Testament no building is called a church.

No organization is called a church. In the New Testament the church is a group of born-again believers in a particular town wherever they may meet. The church is not a building.

The church is not an organization. The church is born-again people. And it is very important for us to use scriptural language and not to allow the traditions of men to influence our thinking and our language.

You are the temple of God and the spirit of God dwells in you. The spirit of God does not dwell in buildings. He does not anoint books or buildings.

He anoints people. And when it says in verse 17 if any man destroys or desecrates or defiles the temple of God God will destroy him. He is not referring to a building.

The temple of God is holy and that is you individually and together. And we are not to pollute that building in any way. And when we read this verse in its context he is not referring here to sin.

He deals with sin in the house of God in chapter 5 where they allowed sin, the sin of fornication, to enter into their midst. But when we read verses 16 and 17 of chapter 3 here in its context that is the context which we have been studying from chapter 1 verse 18 onwards and which continues in chapter 3 verse 18 onwards as well the context of human intelligence and cleverness coming in in the work of God of human soul power manifested particularly in our intellect and our cleverness. By this we can hinder God's work and defile His temple.

Defiling God's temple is not just with sin. That is one aspect of it. But also with that which does not appear evil and ugly in the eyes of men but which is a hindrance to the work of God.

In the Old Testament we read in 1 Samuel chapter 15 of King Saul offering to God the good sheep of Amalek or planning to offer that as a sacrifice and Samuel told King Saul that that was unacceptable to God. The bad sheep of Amalek and Amalek there is the picture of the flesh the bad sheep of Amalek Saul could kill but the good sheep he thought was acceptable to God. That has a spiritual application for us.

The evil aspects of the flesh, sin, we understand God cannot receive. But the good aspects we think we can offer up to God are human intelligence and ability. This is an area in which many, many Christians just do not have light.

And this is the main theme, really, of 1 Corinthians chapter 1, chapter 2 and chapter 3. We cannot do God's work according to our way of thinking. For God says, My ways are not your ways. My thoughts are not your thoughts.

And if you want to know the difference in God's way of thinking from our way of thinking he goes on to say in that passage in Isaiah 55 the difference is as great as between heaven and earth as the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. In other words, if we seek to do the work of the Lord according to our thoughts we would have gone astray as far as earth is from heaven. If we seek to do God's work in a human way, in our way we'll go astray from God's will as far as earth is from heaven.

If anyone defiles God's temple his work is going to be destroyed. The temple of God is holy and we have to walk in humility and brokenness before God seeking to know his will and his way so that we can do his work in his way and not according to our own plans. Verse 18, he's continuing in the same theme and he says, let no one deceive himself.

He's spoken in verse 16 about the spirit of God dwelling in us seeking to guide our life in the will of God seeking to manifest God's glory in our lives personally and in the church which is also his temple. He's referring here to the temple the church of God which is in Corinth. Let no one deceive himself, he says if any of you think that he is wise in this age and he's speaking particularly to those who are very clever and intelligent.

If you think you're wise, he says if you really want to be spiritually wise you've got to first become a fool. How can we become a fool? Here is a verse that many believers haven't taken seriously. 1 Corinthians 3, verse 18 It's an area in which it's very easy for us to deceive ourselves for the spirit of God says, let no one deceive himself.

We think we're wise in this age that is, we've got the cleverness of this world if anyone thinks that he's got something of this world's cleverness well, he's really at a disadvantage when it comes to serving God because he has to first get rid of that human cleverness. Stop leaning upon it. We cannot reduce ourselves to the level of idiots The point is, in verse 18 I must not think that that human intelligence gives me any extra qualification to serve God.

It is actually a hindrance just like human righteousness as we considered in 1 Corinthians 1 There is a righteousness which is human there is a righteousness which is divine. Equally, there is a wisdom that is human and there is a wisdom that is divine. And he says, the wisdom of this world, verse 19 is foolishness before God.

In other words, you put all the cleverness and intelligence of this world together and God calls it foolishness. Now, if we serve God with what God calls foolishness we're really foolish. And God calls all of our intelligence foolishness here in 1 Corinthians 3, verse 19 We need to recognize that and that's the meaning of 1 Corinthians 3, verse 18 Let us recognize that all our human understanding and intelligence is good for worldly things but it's no use in God's work.

And so when I come to God's word I need to humble myself and say Lord, when it comes to spiritual things I don't know how to do your work. Teach me by your spirit. That's the person who does not lean upon his own understanding.

Proverbs 3, verse 5 and 6 says Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean to your own understanding. Your own understanding will lead you astray. And the man who really wants to trust in the Lord and live by faith has to learn to stop leaning on his own understanding.

Only then will he be wise in God's eyes and be able to build the church the way God wants it to be built.

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