



PAUL CONDEMNS DIVISION IN THE CHURCH

The Corinthians needed to mature in their spiritual lives. They were allowing themselves to be divided into factions regarding which preacher they liked better. These divisions in the church threatened the unity they would need ... in order to stand for the truth against false teachers and persecution.

GROWTH PATTERN

Paul called the Corinthians infants (“*babes*”) in the Christian life because they were not yet spiritually healthy and mature. The proof was that they were comparing themselves to one another and competing for recognition like children. This had led to divisions among Christians.

Paul was not accusing the Corinthians of being carnal (or “worldly”) ... **he was saying that their behavior was sinful** ... in comparison to that of the mature believers. They were indwelt by the Spirit, for they could not be Christians without the Holy Spirit (cp. Romans 8:9; Galatians 3:2-3). **But these “spiritual infants” had not grown in the faith because they were acting like the world around them.** The proof was that they quarreled like children ... allowing divisions to distract them -- as noted in the following verses.

Immature believers often continue to live in “worldly” thought patterns, controlled by their own desires; mature believers are more in tune with God's desires.

- How much influence do your desires have on your life?
- To what degree have you allowed God's Word and God's Spirit to rewrite your personal desires?

Seek to make God's desires your own. Being controlled by your own desires will stunt your spiritual growth!

CHAPTER OUTLINE

I. THE “BABY” CHRISTIANS IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH (3:1-10): Paul addresses some squabbling believers in this assembly.

A. Paul's criticism (3:1-2)

1. **What he hopes to do** (3:1): The apostle wants to give them the solid meat of the Word.

2. **What he has to do** (3:2): Because of their carnality and immaturity, he can only feed them milk.

B. Paul's correction (3:3-10)

1. **Their sinful view of Christian leaders** (3:3-4): They are looking to men (like Paul and Apollos) instead of to Christ.
2. **His scriptural view of Christian leaders** (3:5-10)
 - a. What the leaders do (3:5 a, 6 a, 7 a, 8-10): They can only sow and water the spiritual seed.
 - b. What the Lord does (3:5 b, 6 b, 7 b): God alone can cause the crop to grow.

Paul again reminds the Corinthians not to elevate teachers of the word of God ... over the Word itself.

TEAMWORK

God's work requires many different individuals with a variety of gifts and abilities. There are few superstars; instead, many team members are needed to serve in their special roles. The effectiveness of one member depends in a large way on the effectiveness of all. We may see only partial results from our individual efforts. We can even misunderstand God's purposes or overemphasize our role. Only God, who makes things grow (3:6), sees the whole picture.

We can become useful members of God's team by not seeking personal acclaim for what we do. Don't seek the praise that comes from people -- it is comparatively worthless. Instead, seek approval from God!

II. THE BEMA JUDGMENT AND THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH (3:11-23)

- A. **The works** (3:11-15): Paul says all believers will someday stand before an elevated platform (called a "*bema*") to be tested in regard to their service for Christ. (cp. 2 Corinthians 5:10)
 1. **The objects in this test** (3:11-13): Our works here are classified as gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, and straw.
 2. **The outcome of this test** (3:14-15)
 - a. The owner of ... the gold, silver, and jeweled works will receive a reward (3:14).
 - b. The owner of ... the wood, hay, and straw works will receive no reward (3:15). Also see Colossians 3:23-24, 1 Corinthians 15:58.
- B. **The warning** (3:16-23)
 1. **Don't defile your temple** (3:16-17): God regards our bodies as temples.
 2. **Don't deceive yourselves** (3:18-21): Paul warns not to depend on earthly wisdom or human leaders ... but on God Himself.
 3. **You belong to Christ as Christ belongs to God** (3:22-23).