

# 1 Corinthians

3:5–23

## Introduce

What happens when, in the process of doing a math problem, you make one small mistake at the beginning of your calculation? Or what happens when you sit down to do a project without having a proper understanding of where to begin? In this study we are going to discover how the proper foundation for our lives and ministries will help us avoid building something that will not last.

## Investigate

### *Background*

Paul continues his extended argument against the divisions in the Corinthian church. He has established their unity in Christ, the superiority of God's wisdom to man's wisdom, and has rebuked them for looking like unbelievers in their undue allegiance to human teachers. Here he is going to give them God's perspective of human teachers and their ministry.

### *Explore the Passage*

*[Read each section before answering the questions.]*

#### **3:5-9**

- According to this paragraph how are the Corinthian believers to view human teachers like Paul and Apollos?
- What do we learn here about the relationship of human teachers and the work of God?
- How does it make you feel to realize that in all you do in ministry it is ultimately God who causes the growth?

#### **3:10-15**

- How does Paul describe his ministry in this section? What was the role of other workers in relationship to his ministry? How was Jesus Christ the foundation of his ministry?
- What is the point of the picture of gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and straw?  
*[Contrast in the materials you might use to build on the foundation. Paul is leading into his analogy of the fire; the first three would survive trial by fire while the last three would not.]* What kinds of things would constitute a lasting foundation for the Corinthian believers? What kind of things might they have been building that would not last? Think about the larger argument in this section about unity?
- What will happen to what each person builds? What is the fire that Paul is referring to?  
*[Fire was a common picture of judgment. Paul is using fire as an analogy, and he is not saying that believers will be put through a literal fire of judgment but that their work will be tested as precious metals are tested in the fire. God will reveal the nature of their works and only those works that stand the test will survive the judgment of God.]*
- What does this passage teach about the judgment of believers? What is the reward that we will be given for building a correct foundation? *[It could be that the reward we will be given is the enjoyment that our labor brought glory to God. When we glorify God through our lives it should bring us great joy because God gives us the ability to enjoy making much of Him.]*

- How might we build something in our lives that would not survive the refining fire of God? What about in our ministry?

### 3:16-23

- Who is God's temple? What difference does it make by understanding that the "you" in verse 16 is plural? *[Paul is saying that the church is God's temple, not a reference to individual human bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit]*
- How might someone destroy God's temple? What awaits those who do?
- What is Paul's point with the temple analogy? *[Those who continue to divide the church are destroying the temple of God and will bring God's judgment on themselves.]*
- Paul tells them not to deceive themselves. How might they be doing that?
- How do we as believers become fools in the sense Paul is talking about here?
- What does Paul mean by saying that "all are yours"? *[All things are ours through our position in Christ.]*
- What might he mean that "Christ is God's"? *["God is one. God is therefore the ultimate reality, the one who possesses all things and outside of whose ultimate control lies nothing. Everything Paul understands about the work of Christ is predicated on that singular reality... God is one; and Christian existence, brought about by the death and resurrection of Christ, is ultimately to be found in the one God. It cannot get any better than that."] (Gordon Fee)]*

#### Discover the Big Idea

- What is Paul trying to help the Corinthian believers understand in this section? How does this relate to his extended argument appealing for unity?

Summary: Paul wanted the Corinthian believers to have a proper view of human teachers, realizing that it is God who causes the growth. He also wanted them to understand the consequences of building upon a foundation in their lives other than Jesus Christ himself.

### Respond

- How can we make sure that, in whatever we do in life, we are building something that will last upon the foundation of Jesus Christ?
- What will make it difficult for us to build something that will last?
- What can motivate us to build something that will last? *[Make sure to emphasize that a proper understanding of the foundation, Jesus Christ, will cause us to desire to glorify Him rather than ourselves.]*