

Chapter 3

God's workers 3:1-9

v1 Brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as if the Holy Spirit was guiding you. I had to speak to you as if you were following the ways of people in the world. You are still only like baby Christians. v2 The words that I spoke to you were like milk. They were not like solid food. You were not ready for solid food. And you are still not ready for it. v3 You are still following the ways of people in the world. Some of you are jealous. Some of you are quarrelling. So, it must be clear to you that you are following the ways of people in the world. You must know that you are acting like ordinary people. v4 One of you says, 'I belong to Paul'. Another person says, 'I belong to Apollos'. You are acting like ordinary men and women. v5 Apollos is not important. Paul is not important. We are only servants. We helped you to believe. The Lord has given each of us our own work to do. v6 I 'planted the seed'. Apollos 'watered' it. But God made it grow. v7 So the one who plants is not important. The one who waters is not important. It is God who makes things grow. He is the only one who is important. v8 The one who plants and the one who waters have the same purpose. The Lord will give each person a reward for his own work v9 because we work together with God. You are like God's field. You are like his building.

Verses 1-2 The Christians at Corinth were not behaving as if the Holy Spirit was guiding them. They were acting in the same ways as people who thought only about their physical nature. Paul could not give them the kind of teaching that was like solid food. They were still behaving like babies.

Verses 3-4 The Christians at Corinth were acting as if they were no different from non-Christians (people who were not Christians). Some were jealous. Perhaps they were jealous of the wealth or social position of other people.

They quarrelled about which leader they belonged to.

Verses 5-9 Paul spoke about himself and Apollos as servants. There was no quarrel between him and Apollos. Each man did his job as together they brought people to believe the Christian faith. They were like farmers. Paul planted the 'seed' of the gospel when he preached. Apollos helped. He was like someone who waters seed. But only God could make it grow. God is the only one who is important. Neither Paul nor Apollos was important. Each man had his work to do, and God would reward him. God uses people to work together with him. Paul and Apollos were servants who were working for the same master. The Christians at Corinth were like a field in which God was working. They were also like a building.

God's building 3:10-15

v10 God kindly taught me how to lay a foundation like an expert builder. Now someone else is building on it. But each one must be careful how he builds. v11 No one can lay any other foundation than the one that God has already laid. That foundation is Jesus Christ. v12 A person may build on this foundation. He may use gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay or straw. v13 But whatever the material, on judgement day, God will show the quality of each person's work. The fire of judgement will test how good each person's work is. v14 If the person's work passes the test of judgement, God will reward him for his work. v15 If a person's work has no good result, it will be like a burnt building. It will be like a building that the fire has completely destroyed. The builder will be safe. But he will be like someone who just escapes from a fire.

Verse 10 Paul worked for 18 months in Corinth (Acts 18:11). He spent three years in Ephesus (Acts 20:31). Usually he stayed in a city for a

much shorter time. But wherever he went, he laid the same foundation. He told the facts about Jesus Christ. He let other people continue God's work and help the church to grow.

Verses 11-12 Jesus Christ alone is the foundation of a Christian church. Those who help it to grow must make sure that their work will last. Then it will be as valuable as precious metals or stones. Wood, hay and straw are Paul's picture language for weak efforts that do not last.

Verses 13-15 Fire can test how pure a metal is. Fire can also destroy. God's judgement is like fire. On the day when Christ returns, God will judge the value of each person's work. He will reward those whose work was valuable. God will destroy what has no value. The bad builder will only escape God's judgement like someone who just escapes from a fire. The bad builder will not lose his salvation. But he will not receive much reward in heaven.

God's temple 3:16-23

v16 You should know that you are God's temple. You should know that God's Spirit lives in you. v17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. That is because God's temple is holy. And you are that temple.

v18 Do not make a mistake about this. Perhaps one of you thinks that he is one of the world's clever people. Then he should learn how to become a 'fool', so that he may become really wise. v19 In the Scriptures, there are these words: 'God catches wise people in their own clever plans.' v20 Again, it says, 'The Lord knows that the thoughts of wise people have no value.' v21 So then, you must not be proud that you have a particular human leader. God has given you everything that you need. v22 He has given you Paul, Apollos and Peter as your helpers. He has given you the whole world. Life and even death are your servants. God has given you all of the present and all of the future. v23 You belong to Christ. And Christ belongs to God.

Verses 16-17 Paul uses the words 'You should know' ten times in this letter, and only once in other letters (Romans 6:16). The Christians at Corinth were very proud about their 'knowledge'. But they had not really understood the nature of the Christian church.

There were many temples in Corinth. They all had idols but none of them contained a real god. The Christians in Corinth had God among them by means of his Holy Spirit. Therefore they were like a temple. Because there is only one God, there was only one true temple in Corinth. The spiritual temple of Christians existed to show that the only real God is holy. But the bad behaviour of the Christians at Corinth was stopping the work of the Holy Spirit. Their jealous quarrels were destroying God's work. The Christian church was becoming like a weak building. God would punish those who were destroying his church. Paul does not say how God would punish them. But he is probably thinking about the day of judgement.

Verses 18-20 Some people thought that they were wise. Paul repeats what he had already said about those people. In 1:18-25, he said that people thought that God's wise actions were foolish. Some people were proud about their wisdom. But God thinks that those people are foolish. If they want to be really wise, the Christians at Corinth must become 'fools'. That is, they must become humble. Paul uses two verses from the Old Testament to show that his words are true. In Job 5:13, there is the picture of someone whom God has caught in a trap. The Christians at Corinth think that they are like a clever person. But God has shown that they are foolish. They are as foolish as an animal that someone has caught in a trap. They do not realise that they will destroy themselves. (Esther 5:12-14; 7:9-10 shows us a good example of this.) Psalm 94:11 emphasises that human ways to think are of no use.

Verses 21-23 Therefore they must not be confident about their own ways to think. They must trust Christ rather than trust people. They had said, 'I belong to Paul' or 'I belong to

Apollos'. 'I belong to' was the kind of language that described the relationship of slaves to their master. The Christians at Corinth were making themselves the slaves of people. They do not belong to Paul, Apollos or Peter. Instead, Paul, Apollos and Peter belong to the Christians at Corinth. Those apostles were servants to the Christians.

The whole world belongs to God. So the world belongs to the Christians as well. Christians believe in Jesus' death and resurrection. Therefore, Christians have the real life from God that never ends. They can have eternal life

now in the present time. They may suffer physical death, but they can never lose this real life from God.

Paul ends with words of praise. Christians possess 'all things' because they belong to Christ. And Christ belongs to God. God has a plan. 'He will bring everything together, things from earth, and things from heaven. Christ will be the head of them all.' (See Ephesians 1:10.) Paul wants the Christians at Corinth to understand that only one person is finally in charge. This person is Jesus.

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This publication is written in EasyEnglish Level B (2800 words).

December 2004

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