



151st Church of Christ
Small Group Study Guide – 1 CORINTHIANS
by Richard Wolfe

AN IMPERFECT LOCAL CHURCH
A Study in 1 Corinthians

Lesson 5: 1 Corinthians 3:1-17
CLASS

Review

- 1:1-17 The Problem: Division in the church
1:18-2:16 The fundamental and doctrinal solution: The message of the cross
3:1ff Back to the problem: Division in the church

OUTLINE

- 3:1-4 Carnal Christians
3:5-15 Ministers, followers and the temple
 5-9 Farming analogy
 10-15 Building analogy
3:16-17 Nature of the building

Paul had introduced the problem of church division in chapter 1 before leaving it while he discussed the differences between being followers of worldly wisdom and power or being followers of God's wisdom and power. He considered this natural versus spiritual perspective to provide the single and fundamental explanation of why the Corinthians were divided on a wide range of issues.

Now, in chapter 3, he returns to a direct treatment of the division in the Corinthian church (see "Review" above). But rather than merely documenting the problem and telling them to unite, he builds his exhortation on the doctrines presented in chapters 1 & 2. They were "in Christ," and therefore, called out of the world. "In Christ," they should follow the same spiritual understandings of life that had led them to become Christians in the first place.

DISCUSSION

1 Cor 3:1-4, Carnal Christians

1. Complete the syllogism

- Spirituality means unity in Christ
- You Corinthians are divided
- Therefore: _____

2. In chapter 2, how had people who followed the wisdom and the power of this world reacted to the gospel (e.g., 2:14)? How does Paul connect that action of non-Christians to the behavior of Christians in Corinth?

3. Why had Paul not fed them “solid food”? When had this occurred? (cf. 2:1-5; 5:9)

4. What had Paul taught what would be called “milk”? Is there anything wrong with “milk”? How should we feel about the immaturity we may have displayed earlier in our lives as Christians (our teen years, for example; consider 13:11)?

5. If the Corinthian Christians were carnal, were they still Christians and were they still saved? Was this division problem a “salvation issue”? “Salvation issue” is a popular phrase today. What does it mean to you?

6. In what way(s) does Paul’s description of his readers in 1 Cor. 1:2 serve as a foundation for the indictment of 3:1-4? What are the advantages and disadvantages of focusing on what we should do as opposed to who we are?

1 Cor 3:5-15, Two analogies

Paul now uses two analogies to illustrate the outcome of embracing the ways of God and renouncing the ways of the world. This change will affect our relationships with each other. It will lead us to value salvation-related goals more highly than earthly rank and prestige.

3:5-9b, Farming analogy

7. On the “ladder of importance” in God’s kingdom, where were Paul and Apollos? How was the division in the congregation a matter of failing to understand the spiritual nature of the church?

3:9c-15, Building analogy

Paul’s Progression

I laid a foundation.

Others build on it.

They should be careful how they build.

Christ is the only valid foundation.

8. To what building is Paul referring in verse 9?
9. If a congregation was built following the “natural” things of chapter 2, would that be a case of inferior construction methods (3:12) or a different foundation (3:11)?
10. How could someone build poorly on the foundation, see his work destroyed or fail, and still be saved? How would Paul have felt to know that at some point in history, the congregations he started would cease to exist?

1 Corinthians 3:16-17, The Temple

11. What does it mean in this passage to destroy or defile the temple?
 (a) Abuse one’s body (b) Divide the congregation (c) Litter the church building

Note: Defile and destroy in verse 17 are from the same Greek word. Check different translations to see how they treat the two words.

12. What is the temple in each of these passages? Is it the entire worldwide church, the local congregation or the individual Christian?

- 1 Cor 3:16-17 _____
- 1 Cor 6:19 _____
- 2 Cor 6:16 _____
- Eph 2:21 _____

13. What would happen to the one who destroyed the temple as compared to the one who built with inferior materials?

14. What role did a temple play in the life of those who worshiped its god? What does the temple analogy tell us about the role of the church in a Christian’s life, and our responsibilities toward the church?