



Living a Life of Significance 3:10-17

In the first nine verses of 1 Cor. 3, Paul has been writing about the terrible problem of division in the church. Division had stunted the growth of the Corinthian Christians and prevented them from moving on to solid spiritual food. They lived with jealousy and strife in a manner that Paul called fleshly. While they argued over who they would follow (Paul, Apollos, Peter, or Jesus), Paul reminds them that any growth that comes to the church is from the blessing of God.

In this lesson, we will see how Paul instructs Christians to live and within these teachings we see keys to building a life of significance. (1 Cor. 3:10-17)

I. If You Want to Live a Life of Significance, Use Your Gifts to the Build the Church

In 3:10, Paul uses the word “grace” to describe the gifts that God had given him. These gifts or “grace” were abilities that enabled Paul to accomplish those tasks that God had entrusted to him.

Paul was empowered by the Holy Spirit in extraordinary ways as an apostle, and while we may not have these same gifts today, Christians are blessed by God with talents that they can use for his service. Some in church are blessed with musical abilities, others can write or draw, and still others are blessed with the grace of wise counsel, encouragement, teaching, or great compassion. Some are good at planning, some at working with children, while still others excel in hospitality.

Paul was an expert church builder who planted churches in his missionary endeavours. Paul spent 18 months in Corinth where he preached and established the congregation while others followed and built upon what Paul started. In Corinth it was Apollos who followed Paul while in Ephesus it was Timothy. It is clear that Paul accepted this as the natural order of church building.

In 1 Cor. 3:5-8 Paul wrote that each person had been assigned a task to do by God. Paul was given the job to plant the seed, Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow.



1. What does Paul call himself in 3:10 and why does he use this description?

2. What foundation did Paul lay and how did he lay it? (3:10-11; 2:1-5)

In this building (the church at Corinth), Paul serves as the master builder who builds on the foundation of Jesus Christ and him crucified. Others like Apollos continue to build on the foundation that has been laid. Likewise today we can live lives of significance as we work together to build the church on the foundation of Jesus Christ using the blueprint God has given to us in his revealed Word.

II. If You Want to Live a Life of Significance, Consider the Eternal Benefits of Church Building

Much of our time is spent on insignificant projects. These ventures or undertakings have no lasting value because one day they will be burned and will cease to exist. Paul points this out in verses 12-15.

There has been some controversy about what Paul means in these verses. What are these items of gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and straw? Some say they are people since 3:9 makes it clear that Christians are the building. Those who take this view believe the verse means that some people who are led to Christ will remain faithful while others will not. If one led to Christ falls away and is lost the one who taught him does not lose his reward.

Others believe that these items of gold, silver, and precious stones refer to those things we do for Christ and that the wood, hay, and straw are our other accomplishments on this earth. All we do here will be lost, but those things that we do for Christ will endure for eternity.

Another way to interpret these verses is to say that the gold, silver, and precious stones, wood, hay and straw refer to building methods employed by the Christian worker with the gold, silver, and precious stones representing the power of God and the wood, hay, and straw representing the wisdom of men.

3. What is “the Day” in 3:13? (See also 1 Cor. 1:18; 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; 1 Thess. 5:1-8)



4. How will each man’s work be tested? (3:13)

5. What will happen to the man whose work survives the fire? (3:14; 1 Thess. 2:19-20)

6. What happens to the man whose work is destroyed by the fire? (3:15)

7. Do these verses (3:8, 11-15) teach that there are levels of reward in heaven?

8. What does this passage teach about our methods of church planting and building?

Verse 10 contains the warning to those who build on the foundation or work with the church that they are personally responsible for how they build. Therefore they must be careful not to cause division, and they must build on Jesus Christ instead of utilising “plausible words of wisdom” (2:2-3). They must build faithfully using the blueprint for the church that God has provided within his Word.

Those Christian workers who proclaim faithfully “Jesus Christ and him crucified” will produce a work that leads men and women to Christ. At the final judgment their work will continue to exist as men and women spend eternity with the Lord in heaven (1 Thess 2:19).

The teacher who builds on man’s wisdom will find that his work does not endure and is lost. Here Paul does not have in mind false teachers, but rather teachers who through ignorance or carelessness utilise methods that are not grounded solely in Jesus Christ and him crucified.

III. If You Want to Live a Life of Significance, Recognise the Seriousness of Church Building

What we have already covered in this lesson should convince us of the seriousness of church building, but the importance is stressed in another way in verses 16-17 where Paul writes, *“Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.”* Later in 1 Cor. 6 Paul will write that a Christian's personal body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, but here he is talking about the congregation at Corinth. The church is a temple of God and anyone who destroys the church will be destroyed themselves.

Paul has turned his attention from church leaders to the congregation. The word “you” in verses 16-17 is plural. He is now speaking directly to the members of the church at Corinth. The word temple is the Greek word *naos* which “is the place where the true God reveals His presence, and bestows his blessings and is worshipped.”¹ A congregation of Christians is “a temple” and here God's Spirit dwells.

The word translated as destroy means to bring harm, corruption, damage, or defilement. Earlier Paul had written about the sin of division which could greatly harm the church. False doctrine, selfish motivations, and the desire for power could also harm the church.

8. What are some other ways one might destroy God's temple?

9. What penalty is attached to destroying God's temple?

10. How is God's temple described in 3:17 and what does this mean?

11. Reflection question: Consider your life today. What are you doing to build the church? What could you do to make your life more significant for Christ?

Nothing could be of greater significance than using our lives to lead men and women to Jesus Christ. This is the only endeavour we can undertake that will last forever. Let us build using the grace that God has given each of us, building only on the foundation of Jesus Christ according to what is recorded within the Bible, and let us do all we can to promote growth, spiritual health, and unity in the church.

¹Reese, Gareth L. New Testament Epistles: 1 Corinthians. Scripture Exposition Books: Moberly, MO, 2004, p. 112.