



TEACH ME
THE BIBLE PODCAST

STUDY GUIDE

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CHAPTER

3

1 CORINTHIANS

Divisions in the Church



1 Corinthians: Chapter 3

If you are new to the Story of the Bible or would like to review the Story:
Listen to the following TMTB Podcasts:

The Story: Understanding the “Big Story” (30 min)

Old Testament: Walk Through the Broad Story (27 min)

Timeline: New Testament Beginnings (35 min)

Letters: Paul’s Writing to the Churches–Part 1 (30 min)

REVIEW

Chapter 3 of 1 Corinthians continues Paul’s explanation of why the Corinthians are wrong in their thinking which has caused divisions in their church. As you will recall from chapter 2, Paul has begun to spell out that true wisdom and true knowledge come only from the mind of God. And God, through the Holy Spirit, has revealed these things to Paul and the apostles. Thus, Paul has “the mind of Christ.” To be spiritual, then, is to listen to the word of the LORD which has been brought to the Corinthians by Paul. However, they are rejecting even Paul’s most basic teaching. In other words, he gave them “milk” to drink and not “solid food.”

This verse is an allusion to Isaiah 28:9. In Isaiah 28, Israel is being judged by the LORD for their disobedience to Him (28:1-8) and so the question is raised, “To whom would He teach knowledge, And to whom would He interpret the message? Those just weaned from milk? Those just taken from the breast?” The following verses make these statements clear: the LORD would speak back to the nation Israel through foreign tongues. In other words, just as Moses had foretold in Deuteronomy 32, the LORD would take His word to the nations in order to move Israel to jealousy. This is Paul’s ministry (cf. Rom. 11:11-13).

The problem in Corinth is that the Corinthians are not receiving the words of Paul (which are the words of the LORD) and instead are elevating their own wisdom, claiming their own strength, and then boasting about it. So, Paul must again return to the most basic of teaching. He must remind them of who he is in the body of Christ as well as who they are in the body of Christ. He is an apostle. He is a fellow worker in God’s field. They are God’s field. He is a wise master builder of God’s building (the temple). They are God’s building (the temple).



1 Corinthians: Chapter 3

TUESDAY

In 1 Corinthians 3:3 Paul states that the Corinthians are fleshly. Evidence of this is that there is “jealousy” and “strife” among them. The word for jealousy comes from the root word which means “to desire” or “to have zeal for.” Thus, the word does not have to carry a negative connotation. In fact, the Old Testament describes the LORD as being “zealous” (e.g., Exo. 20:5). However, Paul wants them to be “zealous” for the right things.

Thus, in 1 Corinthians 3:3, they are desiring things for themselves. They are zealous for their own wisdom, their own strength, their own elevation. Instead, Paul instructs them to be zealous for those things that elevate or build up the body of Christ. They are to “earnestly desire” (or be zealous for) the greater gifts which build up the body (1 Cor. 12:31). In 1 Corinthians 13:4, Paul reminds them that love is not “jealous” for oneself. Instead, they are to pursue love and “earnestly desire (or be zealous for) spiritual” things (1 Cor. 14:1, remember back to chapters 2 and 3); for these “spiritual” things edify the church (1 Cor. 14:12). Track Paul’s usage of “jealousy” through the book and see if it makes sense (3:3; 10:22; 12:31; 13:4; 14:1, 12, 39).

WEDNESDAY

How does Paul’s teaching concerning the “building” or “temple” relate to the church?

Read Ephesians 1:22-2:22.

Now read Ephesians 4:1-16.

Also, read 1 Corinthians 12.

Paul is consistent in his use of this “building” / “temple” terminology.

Thus, what is he saying in 1 Corinthians 3:16?

How does that relate to his argument in vv. 1-15?

Also, how does 3:16 relate to what he says in 1 Corinthians 11:23-30?



1 Corinthians: Chapter 3

THURSDAY

Explain Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 3:21. What is he saying?

Can you relate it to the argument of his epistle up to this point?

How do these words relate to 3:21-4:21?

FRIDAY

Boasting and arrogance, these two issues are at the core of the divisions in the church at Corinth. At their core, these two issues are a rejection of God as God. They are evidence of our fallen sin nature still very much at work in us. However, when one sits and thinks about oneself in comparison to God, what do we have to boast about? What do we have to be arrogant about? What do others have to be arrogant about, or to boast about? The boast of the believer can only be in the LORD.

What are some ways that this reality should find expression in your life?