

Christians as God's Temple

Study Guide

I. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

This lesson summarizes key themes and ideas which focus on 1 Corinthians 3:10-23, particularly the concepts of a strong foundation, careful work, the church as God's holy temple, and the contrast between human and divine wisdom. The lessons draw from Paul's letters to the Corinthian church, a community in a "busy and wealthy center of trade" known for "lax morals and influential pagan religions". Paul's letters addressed a "mixed congregation" of both Jews and Greeks, offering guidance on building a lasting spiritual life and maintaining the holiness of the collective body of believers.

II. Building on a Strong Foundation: Careful Work and Fiery Test (1 Corinthians 3:10-15)

The concept of a "strong foundation" is central to any lasting endeavor, particularly in spiritual life and ministry. Just as a physical building requires a robust base, so too does Christian work.

A. The One Foundation: Jesus Christ

Paul, as a "wise masterbuilder," laid the foundational truth for believers: "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11). This highlights that "Salvation and the entire spiritual life are held up by Him". Once this foundation of faith in Jesus is established, believers begin "constructing his spiritual life, his existence, upon Him."

B. Various Materials and the Fiery Test

Believers, or "many builders," construct upon this foundation using various materials, metaphorically described as "gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble" (1 Corinthians 3:12).

- **Precious Materials:** "Gold, silver, precious stones refer to the apostle's teaching, also that of Apollos and other good men".

- **Flimsy Materials:** “‘wood, hay, and stubble’ refer to teaching that was divisive, marked by the wisdom of this world”.

A "fiery test" awaits "every man's work" to "declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is" (1 Corinthians 3:13). This "day of reckoning," or the *bēma* (judgment seat of Christ), is not for determining eternal destiny, as "The believer's eternal destiny, however, was completely and fully settled at the cross". Rather, it is to assess the "quality of that construction" and the "ministry reward."

- "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward" (1 Corinthians 3:14).
- "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (1 Corinthians 3:15). Even rewards are considered "entirely a gift of grace".

This section prompts reflection on the "vetting process" for new ministries and what constitutes a "fireproof test" for a ministry one might consider joining, emphasizing the need for attentiveness to the Holy Spirit's leading.

III. THE HOLY TEMPLE OF GOD (1 CORINTHIANS 3:16-17)

A higher incentive than rewards motivates believers: the understanding that "ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

A. The Church as God's Dwelling Place

This refers to the church "collectively... as a group, a body of believers with whom God fellowships and resides". The Holy Spirit "resides in each person who trusts in Jesus as Lord. Thus, Christians are God's temple on earth".

B. The Consequence of Defiling the Temple

God takes the sanctity of His temple seriously: "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are" (1 Corinthians 3:17). To "defile" or "destroy by corrupting" signifies "the marring of an assembly by unprofitable teaching and by producing a party spirit thereby, or by leading it away by any means". Believers, despite imperfections, are "positionally as holy because they belong to Christ".

This section encourages discerning "threats to God's temple" and the "role [that] the concept of holiness" should play in that recognition. As God's earthly temple, Christians

"have the duty and privilege of bearing God's presence in and to the world" and "must live in a way that honors ourselves and our fellow Christians".

IV. DECEITFUL WORLDLY WISDOM VS. GOD'S KNOWLEDGE (1 CORINTHIANS 3:18-23)

Paul strongly contrasts human, worldly wisdom with God's divine knowledge, advising believers not to be deceived.

A. The Folly of Human Thinking

"If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise" (1 Corinthians 3:18). This emphasizes that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God" (1 Corinthians 3:19). The commentary further supports this by quoting Job 5:13 ("He taketh the wise in their own craftiness") and Psalm 94:11 ("The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain") . This implies that human wisdom, left to its own devices, often leads to vanity and self-deception.

B. All Things Belong to Believers in Christ

Therefore, Paul asserts, "let no man glory in men" (1 Corinthians 3:21). Instead, believers should recognize a profound truth: "For all things are your's" (1 Corinthians 3:21). This includes spiritual leaders (Paul, Apollos, Cephas), the world itself, life, death, and all things "present, or things to come" (1 Corinthians 3:22). This ownership is not inherent but conditional on one's relationship with Christ: "Only as we belong to Him do things belong to us. Since we are members of Christ, and all things are under His authority and control... they are ipso facto subservient to our real welfare".

The section concludes with a powerful statement of identity and subordination: "And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1 Corinthians 3:23). This means the church "is the possession of Christ," and both "the church and Christ are in subordination to the Father".

This theme challenges believers to discern when the church might "shift to worldly wisdom" and to prevent "personal preferences from slanting your conclusion." It also addresses "factionalism" within the church, urging believers to take steps to address it while ensuring their impressions are correct.

V. Key Takeaways and Application ("Into Life")

- **Foundation:** Jesus Christ is the sole and indispensable foundation for all Christian life and ministry.
- **Work Quality:** The quality of one's spiritual "building materials" (actions, teachings) will be tested, though salvation is secure through Christ.
- **Collective Holiness:** Christians collectively constitute God's temple on earth, indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This necessitates living in a way that honors God and fellow believers, recognizing that dishonoring the temple will lead to divine accountability.
- **Divine Wisdom:** Worldly wisdom is foolishness to God. True wisdom comes from God, and believers, as Christ's own, have access to all things through Him.
- **Bearing God's Presence:** "We carry God's presence in the world". This carries the "duty and privilege of bearing God's presence in and to the world".