

The Wreckage and The Fire

Text: 1 Cor. 3:1-15

WHERE WE ARE

- Sermon One – We learned that the city of Corinth was broken, but God decided that this was the right place to plant the fire of the Holy Spirit.
- Sermon Two – Corinth was a city filled with philosophy and human intellect, but God dismantled this human wisdom through the paradox of the cross.
- Sermon Three – Paul begins to teach about the depths of wisdom that only the Holy Spirit can reveal. There is a doorway to this level of revelation, and the Holy Spirit is the key.
- Sermon Four – Now, we are going to discuss the devastating gap between what God has PLACED IN you and what is still COMING OUT of you.

1 Cor. 3:1-15

¹ And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people but rather as fleshly, as infants in Christ. ² I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now, you are still not ready, ³ for you are still fleshly. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling^[a] among you, are you not fleshly and behaving according to human inclinations?⁴ For when one says, “I belong to Paul,” and another, “I belong to Apollos,” are you not all too human?

⁵ What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered,

but God gave the growth. ⁷ So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. ⁸ The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and each will receive wages according to their own labor. ⁹ For we are God's coworkers, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

¹⁰ According to the grace of God given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Let each builder choose with care how to build on it. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—¹³ the work of each builder will become visible, for the day^[a] will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. ¹⁴ If the work that someone has built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a wage. ¹⁵ If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.”

- Paul turns his attention from the city and looks directly at the congregation. What he says next is not a condemnation, but a diagnosis.
 - He says, “You are still carnal. You are still fleshly. You are still like infants.”
 - So today, I have both a title and a hard statement wrapped in one: **You Are Still Carnal.**
 - I know that is going to make some people mad, but the word for this house today is that **God is not impressed with how long you have been In Church. He wants the church to produce something In You.**

Introduction

- So, as we get started, I have two questions I want to ask you:
 - 1. **How long have you been saved?**
 - 2. **What do you have to show for it?**
 - I'm not asking how many services you have attended or all of the great revival services you have experienced.
 - I'm not asking how many scriptures you have memorized, because the devil knows the scriptures far better than you, and it hasn't helped him any.
 - I'm not asking about how much you've given in tithes and offerings.
 - **I want to know, if we were to all take the time to honestly assess ourselves, what has our TIME spent in the CHURCH PRODUCED in us?**
- This is the conversation Paul is about to have with the Corinthian church.
 - This church was not considered a group of backsliders. They were not cold, nominal, seat-warming Christians.
 - In chapter 1:4-7, Paul states that they are not lacking in any gift. They are spirit-filled, gift-operating, tongue-speaking, prophesying, laying on of hands, and healing the sick kind of Christians.
 - And for all of the gifts, all the spiritual activity, and all the supernatural operation, Paul says in 3:1, "**But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ.**"
 - **People of the Flesh?**

- Infants?

- But it thought churches that are flowing in all kinds of gifts are the ones that have it all together.

- I can watch TV, search on YouTube, and follow on social media all these churches that are having miraculous things happening in their services, but that doesn't mean they are mature when the service is done.

- Talk to somebody beside you and say, "Being in church a long time doesn't MAKE you mature." Now talk to another neighbor and say, "In fact, it can MAKE you comfortable with being immature."

- As I said earlier, this was not Paul condemning the church but diagnosing it. Any good doctor knows that they must tell you the truth, no matter how bad it is, because the truth is your only chance at becoming well again.

- Point 1: **Spiritual Infancy Is Supposed To Be A Season, Not A Lifestyle.**

- In verses 1-2, Paul says that he wishes to address the congregation as spiritual people, but is unable to because they are fleshly and like infants.

- Paul uses the word *nepios*, meaning a nursing infant.

- Infants are not evil or rebellious. They are just undeveloped. So, he is not accusing the church of being in blatant rebellion or evil, but completely undeveloped.

- There is nothing wrong with being an infant when you are actually an infant, but there comes a time when you have been around too long, learned too much, and experienced too much to continue operating as an infant.

- Video Clip – My Crazy Obsession – He’s A Grown-Up Man.

- I believe we can all agree that this is extremely weird behavior. It’s cringey. It hurts to watch and causes us to have second-hand embarrassment for them.

- So why don’t we feel the same way when this type of immaturity takes place in the church?

- Paul also explains that there was a time in their beginning years when he fed them milk instead of solid food.

- Milk represents the introductory truths, while solid food represents the deeper things of God. Reserved for the mature.
- Anyone who has children knows that there are certain things you cannot feed to an infant.
 - The first 3-6 months are milk only.
 - Then you can begin to introduce other foods, but they are still all mashed up so that it is easy to swallow.
 - Then you can begin to introduce solid foods, but they have to be cut into small enough sizes for them to chew.

- Even my own 1-year-old daughter will eat a bite of steak every now and then, but it has to be very small, and I know, as her father, that her whole diet cannot be steak and potatoes.
- The same progression goes for Christians. There are some things that are too heavy in the beginning for them to delve into. It's also ok now and then to give little bites of things to come.

- What's really bad is that many of you have been saved long enough to be feeding others, but you're still waiting around to be fed.

○ **The Evidence for Immaturity**

- Verses 3-4 Paul says that they are still working in the flesh because of jealousy and strife.

- Paul doesn't say that they are being carnal or immature because of doctrinal issues. He points out their relational issues.

- He's essentially saying, "The way you treat each other tells me where you are spiritually."

- For some reason, the Pentecostal church has placed so much emphasis on personal experiences and spiritual gifts. **But No Amount Of Spiritual Gifts Can Cover Up Spiritual Immaturity.**

- You can speak in tongues and still be jealous.

- You can prophesy and still be in strife with one another.

- You can lay hands on the sick and still not want to shake the hand of certain people.

- **Gifts Operate By The Grace Of God. Character Is Built By Discipline And Maturation.**

- There is a difference between the gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit. Spiritual gifts don't prove maturity, but spiritual fruit does.

- Point 2: **Carnality Isn't Just About What You Do, It's About What You Are Focused On.**

- In verses 5-7, Paul circles back to the problem of different factions developing in the church that we discussed in the previous sermons of this series.

- The Corinthians were exalting Paul, Apollos, and others almost to a place of veneration and worship, rather than instruments of service.

- Paul corrects this by calling himself and Apollos **servants – Diakonos**.

- In the Greco-Roman culture, there was a heavy emphasis on social status, rank, and recognition.

- Servants are in the lower ranks of society. But there are different levels of servants within this rank.

- Paul didn't say that they were **Therapōn** – an honored assistant.
- He didn't say they were **Oikonomos** – a house manager.
- They aren't even **Misthios** – hired workers.

- He says that they are **Diakonos** – delivery boys, whose main function was to bring goods and services from one place to another.
 - He was saying that their jobs were merely to bring the message of the gospel and revelation to the church, like a waiter brings food to a table.

▪ Notice what he asks in verse 5:

- **What** then is Apollos? **What** then is Paul?
- He asks **WHAT** instead of **WHO**.
- He's moving the focus from **IDENTITY** to **FUNCTION**.
 - It's not about who you are and how much weight is behind your name. It's about what your function is to the greater good of the church.
 - I've known people in church who were more worried about how long their families had been attending a church, and how many times they had been on the board, and who was going to be the next political chess piece, than they were about serving the lost and broken people in their church.
- Paul says that holding them in such regard is as foolish as finding the nearest teenager on rollerblades working at Sonic and claiming that they are the epitome of your walk with Christ.

○ **WHAT ARE YOU FOCUSED ON?**

- Is your focus on how close you can get to the pastor?

- If you can slip into a green room to rub shoulders with a guest minister?
- Presenting yourself well enough to get a position on the board or staff?

○ As a father, I've noticed that much of what causes my children to disobey is their focus on the wrong thing.

- Many times, they are not blatantly going against something that I've asked them to do. It's not rebellion. They aren't spiteful. They are just focused on the wrong thing.
- They become so enveloped by something that I can say something 5 times, and they won't even know that I am talking to them until I finally raise my voice to get their attention.

- Is that how some of us are with God?

- So caught up in petty little disputes and arguments that really don't matter to anything in the big scheme of things. And we allow that to completely disable us from doing what God wants us to do.

- Do you realize how frustrating it is to ask a child to do something simple yet necessary, but they are in the middle of a YouTube video that means the world to them?

- Honey, dinner is ready. Go eat.

- I'm trying to feed and nourish them, but their focus is on something that doesn't even matter.

- Baby, you're starting to smell bad. It's almost bedtime, go take a shower real quick.

- I'm trying to get them cleaned up and have healthy habits, but their focus is on something that doesn't even matter.
 - Y'all, this room is getting dirty. Take 15 mins and clean up this room.
 - I'm trying to teach them how to have stability and to not be comfortable with dysfunction, but their focus is on something that doesn't even matter.
 - The **Level** Of The Things That You Allow **To Hold Your Focus** Is The **Level** Of **Your Spiritual Maturity**.
- Point 3: **What You Build On Determines What Survives The Fire.**
 - 1 Cor. 3:10-11 "According to the grace of God given to me, like a **wise master builder** I laid a **foundation**, and someone else is building on it. **Let each builder choose with care how to build on it.** ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ."
 - **Paul describes himself as a Wise Master Builder.** He's not the owner. He's just the architect.
 - He also says that **he has laid one foundation**, and that foundation can only be **Jesus Christ**.
 - But then he says something that shifts all responsibility to the listeners: "**Let each builder choose with care How to build on it.**"
 - If you have a good leader who has laid out a firm foundation based on Jesus Christ, it is now the responsibility of each and everyone of you to take great care as to how you build upon that foundation.

- Verse 12 lists six materials. These materials can be divided into two categories. But they are all put to one test.
 - Gold, Silver, and precious stones are all costly, rare, refined, enduring and are produced through pressure and heat.
 - Wood, hay, and straw are abundant, cheap, easy to accumulate, and can look impressive in large volumes.
 - Much like the fire and pressure used to refine gold, silver, and precious stones, a deep prayer life, the character of integrity and endurance, and unconditional love all take years of discipline, surrender, and suffering to develop.
 - Wood, hay, and straw are not bad materials by nature, but they are cheap. It's easier to collect them. Its like the appearance of business but no real effectiveness, or theology that sounds impressive, but has no real application or sound teaching to back it. Its ministry is done for recognition and applause.
 - But verse 13 says that a fire is coming, and the reality of “each one’s work will become manifest, for the day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.”
 - The Test Of Fire Is Not Worried About What You Look Like. It Only Cares About What You’re Made Out Of.
 - It will not recognize titles or positions.
 - It does not take into account the people who follow you, or the reach of your influence.

- The fire does not validate based on respect or reputation.
- The fire tests for one thing: what material you decided to build with.
- There's no amount of charisma, gifting, or talents that will outlast something built on truth, formed in the Spirit, and forged in obedience.
- Conclusion:
 - Verses 14-15 make a very hard point: **You Can Be Saved And Still Lose Everything You Built.**
 - "If the work that someone has built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a wage. ¹⁵ If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire."
 - **Two People. Same Foundation. Same Fire. Completely Different Outcomes.**
 - If your work survives, you will receive a reward.
 - If your work burns, you will suffer loss. You may be saved, but barely.
 - The imagery that Paul is implying here is a man literally running out of a building with smoke in his lungs, heat on his back, urgency in every step, and no possessions in his hands.
 - This isn't a punishment for sins, but a complete loss of everything you've built.

- In the ancient world, your house equaled your whole life's work.
 - Years of labor. Gone.
 - Planning and Effort. Gone.
 - Hopes of Legacy. Gone.
 - Stability. Gone.
 - You didn't just lose stuff. You lost everything you spent your whole life building.
- How terrible would it be to get that final day of testing, and you have to run out of the house you spent your whole life building, with nothing but the breath in your lungs, all because you chose to build with the wrong materials?
 - I mean, yes, you're still saved, but unrewarded.
 - Delivered, but depleted.
 - Alive, but empty-handed.
- This is what Paul was warning the Corinthians of.
 - They had every gift and spiritual operation when it was time for church, but in their daily lives, they were still building with cheap and easy materials.

Altar call:

- The good news is that **right now**, you have time to change what you are building with.
- As our prayer team comes forward, we are about to open the altars for prayer, but before we do that, I want everyone to say this: **The Fire Has**

Not Come Yet, I Still Have Time, and I Am Not Wasting Another Day
Building A Wasted Life!

THE ALTAR IS OPEN

- Every person who has been in church a long time and knows they are still running on milk - come.
- Every person who needs to realign their focus - come.
- Every person ready to exchange cheap materials for materials that will last - come.