

August 3, 2025

“Christians as God’s Temple”
Lesson 1

1 Cor. 3:10-23

Intro

The city of Corinth was a busy center of trade in Paul’s day. It was a cosmopolitan city, meaning that it had people of many ethnic groups and from many places in the world. It was also a place of low morals and many pagan religions. Paul began his preaching in the city’s synagogue, which had both Jews and Greeks in it. Opposition to Paul caused him to leave the synagogue and focus on the Gentiles in the city. However, it was to this mixed congregation that Paul wrote both the letters to the Corinthians found in the New Testament books. Four years had passed between his time in the city and the first letter, during which time many ungodly habits had developed, which Paul addresses.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-23

1. vs. 10: Earlier in chapter 3, Paul notes that the apostles are collaborators, not competitors
Paul says he planted, and Apollos watered
Paul “built the foundation”, and Apollos built on it
Paul was gifted by God with the ability to understand, so he could start others correctly
He finishes the verse with a warning for others to “build with care”
He could be speaking generally, or to faction leaders in the Corinthian church
2. vs. 11: The word “for” at the beginning connects this verse to the warning in vs. 10
How one builds is dependent on building on the *one* foundation—Jesus Christ
This includes the things Jesus said, the things He did, and correction teachings about Him
3. vs. 12: Paul uses a building analogy to connect to building on the foundation of Christ
He uses two groups of materials:
Precious and durable one, like gold, silver, and costly stones
Common ones, like wood, hay, and straw
Just because one is building a foundation of Christ doesn’t guarantee it will be durable
The builder may be building using inadequate/improper materials
4. vs. 13: Paul says here that every work will be tested with fire
This implies that some works will be destroyed, while others will stand the testing
He says that “each person’s work”—every disciple’s work will be tested
This will happen on “the Day”—when God will judge all people
5. vs. 14-15: Paul here explains what will happen after the works are tested
Those that survive the fiery testing will receive a reward
Those that don’t survive will “suffer loss”
Both of these outcomes refer to believers, and is not a reference to salvation
This is clear by saying those that suffer loss “yet will be saved”

6. vs. 16: Paul calls Christians God's "temple"

To Jews especially, this would have had a significant connection
The OT temple was the place where God dwelt with His people
Jesus' sacrifice and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit now alters this situation
God through the Holy Spirit now dwells inside His people
The people are now the temple of God

7. vs. 17: Paul notes that God will "destroy" anyone who destroys His temple

The temple is sacred as a place of God, and that temple is now the people of God
This is a warning to those in Corinth that are causing the factions in the church
They are destroying God's temple (other Christians)
Paul warns that they will be under the same judgment from God

8. vs. 18: He continues by warning them against self-deception

Here, self-deception is specifically connected to wisdom
They are not to consider themselves wise according to how the world sees wisdom
Instead, they are to remember that God is wise
They are to humble themselves, consider themselves fools compared to the wisdom of God
Back in 1 Cor. 1:19, Paul refers to this very idea by quoting Is. 29:14
"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate"

He goes on to compare God's wisdom to that of the current culture
He does this to encourage the people to not rely on human standards of wisdom, but God's
God's wisdom does not put one person above another or divide the faith community

9. vs. 19: Paul has just asked them to do something opposite of what the culture considers reasonable

Don't rely on your own wisdom, but instead on the wisdom of God
Be willing to seem foolish to the world in order to follow God's wisdom
There are two viewpoints at work here: the world's and God's
The world may consider God's way to be foolishness, but Paul says "Guess what?"
God considers the world's way to be foolishness
Paul quotes Job 5:13 to support his point
The world might think it is "crafty"(wise), but God will "catch" them in this wisdom
The passage in Job is dealing with how God sees the lowly and the weak and helps them
This is not what the world of the "crafty" does

10. vs. 20: Paul finishes the thought begun in vs. 19 with another OT quote, this from Ps. 94:11

"The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile"
Ps. 94 refers to people who are wicked and powerful being unjust to others
The passage says that God sees what they do and will bring judgment upon them
This passage has a direct connection to what Paul has been warning against
The people who think they or their faction are better need to reconsider
They need to pursue God's wisdom, and not the wisdom of humanity

11. vs. 21a: Paul makes a pronouncement here that summarizes this whole section

"No more boasting about human leaders!"
God is the focus, and putting leaders ahead of God is harmful to the church

12. vs. 21b-22: Here Paul brings some encouragement

He says “all things” belong to them

This means Paul, and Apollos, and Cephas (Peter) all belong to them

It isn't one or the other; all the leaders bring things to them

All are servants of Christ for the church; there is no rivalry

The other things listed are also things that belong to them

The world, life, death, the present, the future

This is Paul's same list from Rom. 8:38-39 that can't separate us from God

13. vs. 23: Though all these previous things belong to the church, this is not the end of the story

The people belong to Jesus, and Jesus is “of God”

The body of Christ is reminded to recognize God's authority

How they behave toward others should be based on God's way, not the world's

Application: Through the Holy Spirit, God now reside in each person who has come to salvation in Christ.

We have the duty and privilege of bearing God's presence in and to the world today. That calls for us to live in a way that honors God and other Christians as well as ourselves. We avoid divisions and factions, especially when they get motivated by the values of the world. We are also here called to remember that God will call to account all who dishonor his temple. We are to remember that we answer to God, not to public opinion or current social trends.

Prayer: Father God, thank You for choosing to live in us, for making us Your living temple. Help us to continue to honor one another, remembering Your plan is to bring peace and wisdom to all. In Jesus' name, Amen.