

1 Corinthians 3

by John Nelson Darby

In this sermon, John Nelson Darby explores the distinctions between spiritual maturity and carnality within the church, emphasizing the importance of building upon the foundation of Christ with care and integrity.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:1

Topics: "Spiritual Maturity", "Building God's Church"

Description

John Nelson Darby discusses the challenges faced by the Corinthian church, emphasizing their carnal state and inability to receive deeper spiritual truths. He contrasts the building of God's church with human efforts, highlighting the importance of being mindful of how one builds upon the foundation of Christ. Darby illustrates that while all believers are part of God's temple, the quality of their works will be tested, and those who introduce false teachings risk defiling the temple. He stresses the need for personal attachment to Christ to truly understand and communicate His message. Ultimately, the sermon calls for discernment in spiritual matters and a commitment to building according to God's design.

Transcript

Chapter 2 speaks of preaching Christ crucified to them, and chapter 3 deals with Christians. In chapter 3 it is his second visit to them. The carnal state was not going on while he was there. I do not think he had been twice to Corinth when he wrote this epistle. He wrote this from Ephesus, and the second from Macedonia, when he had sent Titus with the first. Although he says, "This is the third time I am coming to you," he does not say he had been. He had meant to come by Macedonia unto Corinth, but they were in such a state that he would not go. I do not think that he had been there more than once. In verse 1 he says, I "could not speak unto you as unto spiritual," and still he could not. "I have fed you with milk and not with meat, for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able." "Hitherto" gives the time all the way along, he could not bring these things before them.

God had said, "I have much people in this city," but God makes communication to hearts ready to receive them. It was so with Mary Magdalene, her heart clings thoroughly to Christ: the disciples go home, but she stays, and she communicates to the eleven our highest privileges at this moment, and that is because she was thinking about Christ. "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." Such is the message He gives her; it is the first time we have so full a statement. It was the personal affection of her heart set on Him through the attractive power of grace. So with the woman in the city that was a sinner. So with Mary that sat at His feet and heard His word. She

comes and anoints Him for His burial. You will always find the apprehension of the mind of Christ flows from personal attachment to Himself. These people at Corinth were fond of their show-gifts and of themselves, therefore they could not be carried forward. "He that planteth and he that watereth" (v. 8) are merely instruments in God's hands - ministers of what God gave; they may be and are distinct in their labours, but are only ministers. One plants and another waters, and everyone shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. But they were all one as instruments in God's hand who gave the increase; yet the Lord owned their labour to each.

213 Then we come to another important truth, though it is only the outside now; he goes farther in the second epistle. We have the outward house here. There is a difference between Christ's building and man's building, even where the men were God's ministers. In these days it is a very important distinction where church questions have come in from Rome to brethren, if you please, on all hands. Christ says, "Upon this rock will I build my church": there I have Christ's building. Of course Satan cannot prevail against that, but it is not all built yet, for it is going on; and therefore Peter, who alludes to it (1 Pet. 2:4, 5), does not give anybody at work; and so Paul says, "groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord." There it is Christ building, but here it is man working; and directly we see responsibility we have possible failure. "Let every man take heed how he buildeth." That never could be said of what Christ is building. But what has been done by the system of popery and all church doctrine is to identify with Christ's building, that which is connected with man's building. Against His work the gates of hell shall not prevail; whereas, when it is the thing set up on earth, we have "let every man take heed how he buildeth," where he does not say the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

In Ephesians 2:22 it is not man's building; there is nothing of man in Ephesians, but just the counsels of God. In chapter 3 we have the apostle as the instrument of the communication, but it is God's counsels and work to bring us into Christ, and so on. The church is the house as well as the body. In what Paul began to build there is wood, hay, and stubble, and that is wider than the body. The house built by Paul supposes wood, hay, and stubble built in, and there are both doctrines and professors; for if a man professes, he professes something.

214 In the apostle's days the house built by man may have been co-extensive with the body, but we read of false brethren creeping in very early. At first "the Lord added," and there it was co-extensive. When the three thousand were added, they were for certain all real; they were co-extensive as a fact, though not the same idea. Then there was the trusting of God's building in the world to man's responsibility. It had been the same with the law, the same with the priesthood, the same with the government. God set up everything first in man's responsibility, and all fails; but all will be accomplished in the Second Man in power - in rule and priesthood in Melchisedec, the true son of David.

A man may build with doctrines. We are not going to learn doctrines in the great day: they are used now, and you cannot separate these things. A good man may be a good builder, and all be well; but a good man may be a bad builder, and be saved, while his works are burnt up. The bad who corrupts is burnt up - he himself is destroyed. It is an amazing thing to see that there is a church-building going on upon earth which is not Christ's building. Whenever there is anything for man to do, there comes the question of his doing it properly Philip brought in Simon Magus, and there was man's building along with the good work which Christ was doing.

The "day" (v. 13) has always to do with judgment. It is the day that tries the work; it is simply and entirely judgment. The day shall be revealed in fire which shall try people's work; that will no doubt happen when

Christ is revealed. But the object in speaking of His revelation in contrast with having the Spirit and gifts now (chap. 1:8), is totally different from this, where it is expressly judgment. I may think of both, and of my appearing in glory too. The work might be tested any day, but, as stewards of the mystery of Christ, when that day comes, God will make manifest the counsels of their hearts.

In verse 16, we have "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God?" Here it is a collective thing - "ye are." The temple is the habitation in which God dwells. In Ephesians 2 the apostle says, "groweth unto a holy temple." In Ephesians it is a thing of God's work and therefore perfect, whereas here it is a present thing - what is actually on earth. When discriminating so, there are certain things you must take into account. Language in scripture is used about people fitly, and you cannot take them otherwise. If you did, it would be misapplied truth. There is meat in due season as well as good meat. If I gave meat to a babe six months old, I should choke it.

215 Though wood, hay, and stubble are built in it, it continues the temple of God. Our Lord said, "Ye have made my Father's house a den of thieves"; but suppose I should go and say, as a general thing, "My Father's house is a den of thieves," it would be very inaccurate. Until God judge a system, it remains in the responsibility in which He originally set it. Apostasy has not yet come in; it may be commencing a little now, perhaps, the spirit of it is at work; but positive apostasy is the giving up the name of Christ. In 1 Timothy he says, "Some shall depart from the faith"; and so they did. I think it took place immediately: but that is a different thing; it is only "some," a matter of individuality.

We must not confound building with wood, hay, and stubble, and defiling the temple. In the former, the man builds upon the foundation, whatever he builds with, and he himself is saved, though building (it may be) with foolish doctrine. The other was positively seeking to corrupt the temple of God itself with false doctrine. A Christian may introduce bad doctrine, and still be saying there is no Saviour but Christ. If he teaches perfection in the flesh, that must be burnt up. Going to convert the world is wood, hay, and stubble, although we ought to have done it. But the man who is seeking to defile brings in fatal errors, and he is not a Christian. I do not know of any Christian who has done this, though it is possible that a person may propagate what he has learned and been deceived into, and thus become an instrument of Satan for defiling the temple; to "defile," and to "corrupt," and to "destroy," are the same here. But the Gnostics were defilers; Socinians are such. A Christian may be snared into it, it is true, and he then becomes an agent of Satan in the flesh.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-nelson-darby/1-corinthians-3/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net