

VERSES 1-4

## ➤ The picture



## ➤ The details

*In 3:2, Paul says that in the early days, it was possible to only feed them milk, and that's understandable. But 3-5 years have passed, and it is still impossible to feed them anything but milk! "Neither yet now" --- an emphatic expression! The church is characterized by childishness. It is a church of Peter Pan! Arrested development is a sign that something is seriously wrong. (cf. Hebrews 5:12-14)*

*In verse 1, the carnal is sarkinos - made of flesh. In verse 3, carnal is sarkikos - characterized by flesh (still of the flesh). In term of status, they are spiritual. But in terms of behaviour/life, they live like natural man. Paul had hoped for the day to arrive when they can eat solid food. But the hoped-for day has not arrived! - You are still carnal/fleshly - still guided by the same principles as unbelievers. It is fine for babies to be babies but it is a tragedy for adults to act like babies.*

*Verse 4: By taking sides and behind human leaders, they are behaving like mere men == meaning, like unconverted people. The outlook is that of worldly wisdom, not Spirit-filled men. Their divisions were a standing witness of their worldly mentality, not spiritual perception. The envy and strife is the result of human pride and self-seeking, which in turn is the result of not grasping the importance and relevance of the Gospel that shows our wretchedness and great need of God.*

*Though Paul rebuked the Christians sharply, yet note that he called them 'brethren' (v1). It is a reproof from equals, not from a superior.*

➤ *The message*

*Something is not right. In fact, things are seriously wrong, that 5 years after their conversion, they are still babes in Christ! Hence, instead of boasting, they should be mourning.*

VERSES 5-8

➤ *The picture*



➤ *The details*

*Metaphor: Agriculture. Christ is the owner, the land(city of Corinth), the workers(Paul and Apollos), the fruits (church @ Corinth) belongs to Him. And He, unlike human owners and farmers, can give the growth. If there's any success in the work of the workers, the success was given by the owner. So the focus should be on Him, not the workers.*

*The word 'ministers' is diakonoi, a word that stresses the lowly character of the service rendered (table waiters). See Luke 22:24-27. The message is that the real work is done by God. The ministers are just instruments.*

*Paul and Apollos differed in their allotted tasks -- one plant, the other water. But their tasks were all subservient to the overall purpose - the building up of the believers in Corinth. There is an essential unity between the planter and waterer. The work of one cannot be successful without the other. So they are not rivals, but one. I planted (aorist tense - an act in time), Apollos watered (aorist tense - an act in time) but God gives the increase (imperfect tense - a continuing work). The point is that it is God who is doing the real work through these servants. Application: No labourer can succeed without God. So why get so excited about the labourers!?!*

*Though they do different task, yet they serve in the same cause. Hence they are one. And according to their labours (kopos == grinding toil), they will be rewarded by their Master. Criteria for reward is not success but labour.*

*Comforting to note that it is not the workers/ministers who are responsible for increase/growth. He is responsible to labour (kopos), and he will be judged according to that, not growth. He works hard and trusts God for the results.*

➤ *The message*

*If you understand the nature of Christian ministry, then all that unhealthy pitting of one leader against another, and dividing yourself into different factions supporting different leaders would be seen as foolish and unnecessary.*

VERSES 9-15

➤ *The picture*



➤ *The details*

*Next metaphor used is that of construction. The foundation is Jesus Christ. There can be only one foundation.*

*The church is God's building. Paul possesses the rank of a wise master builder (architekton) meaning a senior director of works rather than an overlord. He operates as enabled by the grace of God given to him. God could have chosen someone else, but He chose him.*

*Paul was instrumental in planting a church in Corinth. In this sense, he has laid a foundation. Others after him will build on that foundation. At this thought, he warned them to watch how they build. Scrutinize your work. Does it square with the foundation laid?*

*The Temple is the place where God meets man. But you can't have that without the Cross of Christ as the foundation.*

*The foundation is Jesus Christ. The minister must build the church on this foundation, or his work has no foundations, and then it will not last. Can be applied to individual believers (cf. Matthew 7:24-27) Nothing of lasting value can be built apart from Jesus Christ!*

*While there can only be one foundation, it is otherwise with the superstructure. It is all too possible for astonishing varieties to make their appearance. The issue is that of durability. Attractiveness or lack of it is not the primary factor. What counts is the potential of a construction to survive the ravages of time. We need to build a church that will stand on the Day of Judgment. Time of testing will come, via fire on that Day.*

*Verses 14-15 give us a “If ... then ... else ...” structure. Although our salvation is sure as Christians, we are accountable. If he has used lousy materials to build, he will be saved but his works will be destroyed. The distinction is between the saved who built well and who built poorly. By fire/through fire – picture of a man who has to dash through the flames to escape to safety!*

➤ *The message*

*Directly, Paul is warning the leaders as well as the members of the Corinthian Church regarding how they are building up the church. And the message is equally relevant for us today.*

**VERSES 16-17**

➤ *The picture*



➤ *The details*

*Do you not know – is not a mild rebuke. It ought to be a matter of common knowledge. The “you” is in the plural, referring to the entire church.*

*Temple (hieron) == temple precincts and temple (naos) == sanctuary, shrine. The congregation is now depicted as "the shrine of God" == naos, the inner sanctuary within the temple complex. So God dwells here. Anyone who harms this shrine, its divine occupant will react.*

*Ruin (phtheiro) means to corrupt. To engage in division is to destroy the Temple and hence is to invite God to destroy the sinner. It is a grave sin and hence liable to grave penalty.*

➤ *The message*

*Once more, a warning to the believers concerning what they do with the church.*

#### VERSES 18-23 [SUMMARY]

*Verse 18: They need to make a U-turn. They need to see the sharp contrast between the Christian faith and worldly wisdom.*

*Verse 19-20: The tension between the two wisdoms was not unknown in the Old Testament. (Cf. Job 5:13). In God's providence, the wise and powerful of this world tend to tie themselves up with the cord by which they aspire to entangle others. Verse 20 is a quotation from Psalm 94:11.*

*Verse 21-23: They are the property of none. In fact, they possess all things. 'All' defined in verse 22. Christ owns them. The ministers belong to God. The church*

*belongs to God. This world and the gift of life belong to God. Death is under the sovereign rule of God. The present and the future are in His omnipotent hands.*

*Question 1: What is your only comfort in life and death?*

*Answer: That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ; who, with His precious blood, has fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yes, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto Him.*