

CHAPTER 3

In this chapter the apostle,

I. Blames the Corinthians for their carnality and divisions (v. 1-4).

II. He instructs them how what was amiss among them might be rectified, by remembering,

1. That their ministers were no more than ministers (v. 5).
2. That they were unanimous, and carried on the same design (v. 6-10).
3. That they built on one and the same foundation (v. 11-15).

III. He exhorts them to give due honour to their bodies, by keeping them pure (v. 16, 17), and to humility and self-diffidence (v. 18-21).

IV. And dehorts them from glorying in particular ministers, because of the equal interest they had in all (v. 22 to the end).

1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-4

THE SPIRIT OF PARTY REPROVED

Here,

I. Paul blames the Corinthians for their weakness and nonproficiency. Those who are sanctified are so only in part: there is still room for growth and increase both in grace and knowledge, ~~cor~~ 2 Peter 3:18. Those who through divine grace are renewed to a spiritual life may yet in many things be defective. The apostle tells *them he could not speak to them as unto spiritual men, but as unto carnal men, as to babes in Christ*, v. 1. They were so far from forming their maxims and measures upon the ground of divine revelation, and entering into the spirit of the gospel, that it was but too evident they were much under the command of carnal and corrupt affections. They were still mere babes in Christ. They had received some of the first principles of Christianity, but had not grown up to maturity of understanding in them, or of faith and holiness; and yet it is plain, from several passages in this epistle, that the Corinthians were very proud of

their wisdom and knowledge. Note, It is but too common for persons of very moderate knowledge and understanding to have a great measure of self-conceit. The apostle assigns their little proficiency in the knowledge of Christianity as a reason why he had communicated no more of the deep things of it to them. They could not bear such food, they needed to be fed with milk, not with meat, v. 2. Note, It is the duty of a faithful minister of Christ to consult the capacities of his hearers and teach them as they can bear. And yet it is natural for babes to grow up to men; and babes in Christ should endeavour to grow in Stature, and become men in Christ. It is expected that their advances in knowledge should be in proportion to their means and opportunities, and their time of professing religion, that they may be able to bear discourses on the mysteries of our religion, and not always rest in plain things. It was a reproach to the Corinthians that they had so long sat under the ministry of Paul and had made no more improvement in Christian knowledge. Note, Christians are utterly to blame who do not endeavour to grow in grace and knowledge.

II. He blames them for their carnality, and mentions their contention and discord about their ministers as evidence of it: *For you are yet carnal; for whereas there are among you envyings, and strifes, and divisions, are you not carnal, and walk as men?* v. 3. They had mutual emulations, and quarrels, and factions among them, upon the account of their ministers, *while one said, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos,* v. 4. These were proofs of their being carnal, that fleshly interests and affections too much swayed them. Note, Contentions and quarrels about religion are sad evidences of remaining carnality. True religion makes men peaceable and not contentious. Factious spirits act upon human principles, not upon principles of true religion; they are guided by their own pride and passions, and not by the rules of Christianity: *Do you not walk as men?* Note, It is to be lamented that many who should walk as Christians, that is, above the common rate of men, do indeed walk as men, live and act too much like other men.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:5-10

MUTUAL AGREEMENT OF MINISTERS

Here the apostle instructs them how to cure this humour, and rectify what was amiss among them upon this head,

I. By reminding them that the ministers about whom they contended were but ministers: *Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom you believed? Even as the Lord gave to every man*, v. 5. They are but ministers, mere instruments used by the God of all grace. Some of the factious people in Corinth seem to have made more of them, as if they were lords of their faith, authors of their religion. Note, We should take care not to deify ministers, nor put them into the place of God. Apostles were not the authors of our faith and religion, though they were authorized and qualified to reveal and propagate it. They acted in this office as God gave to every man. Observe, All the gifts and powers that even apostles discovered and exerted in the work of the ministry were from God. They were intended to manifest their mission and doctrine to be divine. It was perfectly wrong, upon their account, to transfer that regard to the apostles which was solely to be paid to the divine authority by which they acted, and to God, from whom they had their authority. *Paul had planted and Apollos had watered*, v. 6. Both were useful, one for one purpose, the other for another. Note, God makes use of variety of instruments, and fits them to their several uses and intentions. Paul was fitted for planting work, and Apollos for watering work, but God gave the increase. Note, The success of the ministry must be derived from the divine blessing: *Neither he that planteth is any thing, nor he that watereth, but God who giveth the increase*, v. 7. Even apostolical ministers are nothing of themselves, can do nothing with efficacy and success unless God give the increase. Note, The best qualified and most faithful ministers have a just sense of their own insufficiency, and are very desirous that God should have all the glory of their success. Paul and Apollos are nothing at all in their own account, but God is all in all.

II. By representing to them the unanimity of Christ's ministers: *He that planteth and he that watereth are one* (v. 8), employed by one Master, entrusted with the same revelation, busied in one work, and engaged in one design — in harmony with one another, however they may be set in

opposition to each other by factious party-makers. They have their different gifts from one and the same Spirit, for the very same purposes; and they heartily carry on the same design. Planters and waterers are but fellow-labourers in the same work. Note, All the faithful ministers of Christ are one in the great business and intention of their ministry. They may have differences of sentiment in minor things; they may have their debates and contests; but they heartily concur in the great design of honouring God and saving souls, by promoting true Christianity in the world. All such may expect a glorious recompence of their fidelity, and in proportion to it: *Every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own labour*. Their business is one, but some may mind it more than others: their end or design is one, but some may pursue it more closely than others: their Master also is one, and yet this good and gracious Master may make a difference in the rewards he gives, according to the different service they do: *Every one's own work shall have its own reward*. Those that work hardest shall fare best. Those that are most faithful shall have the greatest reward; and glorious work it is in which all faithful ministers are employed. *They are labourers with God, synergoi* — *co-workers, fellow-labourers* (v. 9), not indeed in the same order and degree, but in subordination to him, as instruments in his hand. They are engaged in his business. They are working together with God, in promoting the purposes of his glory, and the salvation of precious souls; and he who knows their work will take care they do not labour in vain. Men may neglect and vilify one minister while they cry up another, and have no reason for either: they may condemn when they should commend, and applaud what they should neglect and avoid; but the judgment of God is according to truth. He never rewards but upon just reason, and he ever rewards in proportion to the diligence and faithfulness of his servants. Note, Faithful ministers, when they are ill used by men, should encourage themselves in God. And it is to God, the chief agent and director of the great work of the gospel, to whom those that labour with him should endeavour to approve themselves. They are always under his eye, employed in his husbandry and building; and therefore, to be sure, he will carefully look over them: “*You are God's husbandry, you are God's building*; and therefore are neither of Paul nor of Apollos; neither belong to one nor the other, but to God: they only plant and water you, but it is the divine blessing on his own husbandry that alone can make it yield fruit. You are not our husbandry, but God's. We work under him, and with him, and for him. It is all for God that we have been doing among you. You are God's husbandry and building.” He had

employed the former metaphor before, and now he goes on to the other of a building: *According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon.* Paul here calls himself a wise master-builder, a character doubly reflecting honour on him. It was honourable to be a master-builder in the edifice of God; but it added to his character to be a wise one. Persons may be in an office for which they are not qualified, or not so thoroughly qualified as this expression implies Paul was. But, though he gives himself such a character, it is not to gratify his own pride, but to magnify divine grace. He was a wise master-builder, but the grace of God made him such. Note, It is no crime in a Christian, but much to his commendation, to take notice of the good that is in him, to the praise of divine grace. Spiritual pride is abominable: it is making use of the greatest favours of God to feed our own vanity, and make idols of ourselves. But to take notice of the favours of God to promote our gratitude to him, and to speak of them to his honour (be they of what sort they will), is but a proper expression of the duty and regard we owe him. Note, Ministers should not be proud of their gifts or graces; but the better qualified they are for their work, and the more success they have in it, the more thankful should they be to God for his distinguishing goodness: *I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon.* As before he had said, *I have planted, Apollos watered.* It was Paul that laid the foundation of a church among them. He had *begotten them through the gospel,* ~~4:15~~ 1 Corinthians 4:15. Whatever instructors they had besides, *they had not many fathers.* He would derogate from none that had done service among them, nor would he be robbed of his own honour and respect. Note, Faithful ministers may and ought to have a concern for their own reputation. Their usefulness depends much upon it. *But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereon.* This is a proper caution; there may be very indifferent building on a good foundation. It is easy to err here; and great care should be used, not only to lay a sure and right foundation, but to erect a regular building upon it. Nothing must be laid upon it but what the foundation will bear, and what is of a piece with it. Gold and dirt must not be mingled together. Note, Ministers of Christ should take great care that they do not build their own fancies or false reasonings on the foundation of divine revelation. What they preach should be the plain doctrine of their Master, or what is perfectly agreeable with it.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:11-15

THE SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION

Here the apostle informs us what foundation he had laid at the bottom of all his labours among them — *even Jesus Christ, the chief corner-stone,* Ephesians 2:20. Upon this foundation all the faithful ministers of Christ build. Upon this rock all the Christians found their hopes. Those that build their hopes of heaven on any other foundation build upon the sand. *Other foundation can no man lay besides what is laid — even Jesus Christ.* Note, The doctrine of our Saviour and his mediation is the principal doctrine of Christianity. It lies at the bottom, and is the foundation, of all the rest. Leave out this, and you lay waste all our comforts, and leave no foundation for our hopes as sinners. It is in Christ *only that God is reconciling a sinful world to himself,* 2 Corinthians 5:19. But of those that hold the foundation, and embrace the general doctrine of Christ's being the mediator between God and man, there are two sorts: —

I. Some build upon this foundation *gold, silver, and precious stones* (v. 12), namely, those who receive and propagate the pure truths of the gospel, who hold nothing but the *truth as it is in Jesus*, and preach nothing else. This is building well upon a good foundation, making all of apiece, when ministers not only depend upon Christ as the great prophet of the church, and take him for their guide and infallible teacher, but receive and spread the doctrines he taught, in their purity, without any corrupt mixtures, without adding or diminishing.

II. Others *build wood, hay, and stubble*, on this foundation; that is, though they adhere to the foundation, they depart from the mind of Christ in many particulars, substitute their own fancies and inventions in the room of his doctrines and institutions, and build upon the good foundation what will not abide the test when the day of trial shall come, and the fire must make it manifest, as wood, hay, and stubble, will not bear the trial by fire, but must be consumed in it. There is a time coming when a discovery will be made of what men have built on this foundation: *Every man's work shall be made manifest*, shall be laid open to view, to his own view and that of others. Some may, in the simplicity of their hearts, build wood and stubble on the good foundation, and know not, all the while, what they have been doing; but in the day of the Lord their own conduct shall appear

to them in its proper light. Every man's work shall be made manifest to himself, and made manifest to others, both those that have been misled by him and those that have escaped his errors. Now we may be mistaken in ourselves and others; but there is a day coming that will cure all our mistakes, and show us ourselves, and show us our actions in the true light, without covering or disguise: *For the day shall declare it* (that is, every man's work), *because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is*, v. 13. The day shall declare and make it manifest, the last day, the great day of trial; see ~~405~~ 1 Corinthians 4:5. Though some understand it of the time when the Jewish nation was destroyed and their constitution thereby abolished, when the superstructure which judaizing teachers would have raised on the Christian foundation was manifested to be no better than hay and stubble, that would not bear the trial. The expression carries in it a plain allusion to the refiner's art, in which the fire separates and distinguishes the dross from the gold and silver; as it also will silver and gold and precious stones, that will endure the fire, from wood and hay and stubble, that will be consumed in it. Note, There is a day coming that will as nicely distinguish one man from another, and one man's work from another's, as the fire distinguishes gold from dross, or metal that will bear the fire from other materials that will be consumed in it. In that day,

1. Some men's works will *abide the trial* — will be found standard. It will appear that they not only held the foundation, but that they built regularly and well upon it — that they laid on proper materials, and in due form and order. The foundation and the superstructure were all of a piece. The foundation-truths, and those that had a manifest connection with them, were taught together. It may not be so easy to discern this connection now, nor know what works will abide the trial then; but that day will make a full discovery. And such a builder shall not, cannot fail of a reward. He will have praise and honour in that day, and eternal recompence after it. Note, Fidelity in the ministers of Christ will meet with a full and ample reward in a future life. Those who spread true and pure religion in all the branches of it, and whose work will abide in the great day, shall receive a reward. And, Lord, how great! how much exceeding their deserts!

2. There are others *whose works shall be burnt* (v. 15), whose corrupt opinions and doctrines, or vain inventions and usages in the worship of God, shall be discovered, disowned, and rejected, in that day — shall be first manifested to be corrupt, and then disapproved of God and rejected.

Note, The great day will pluck off all disguises, and make things appear as they are: *He whose work shall be burnt will suffer loss*. If he have built upon the right foundation wood and hay and stubble, he will suffer loss. His weakness and corruption will be the lessening of his glory, though he may in the general have been an honest and an upright Christian. This part of his work will be lost, turning no way to his advantage, though he himself may be saved. Observe, Those who hold the foundation of Christianity, though they build hay, wood, and stubble, upon it, may be saved. This may help to enlarge our charity. We should not reprobate men for their weakness: for nothing will damn men but wickedness. He shall be saved, *yet so as by fire*, saved out of the fire. He himself shall be snatched out of that flame which will consume his work. This intimates that it will be difficult for those that corrupt and deprave Christianity to be saved. God will have no mercy on their works, though he may pluck them as brands out of the burning. On this passage of scripture the papists found their doctrine of purgatory, which is certainly hay and stubble: a doctrine never originally fetched from scripture, but invented in barbarous ages, to feed the avarice and ambition of the clergy, at the cost of those who would rather part with their money than their lusts, for the salvation of their souls. It can have no countenance from this text,

(1.) Because this is plainly meant of a figurative fire, not of a real one: for what real fire can consume religious rites or doctrines?

(2.) Because this fire is to *try men's works, of what sort they are*; but purgatory-fire is not for trial, not to bring men's actions to the test, but to punish for them. They are supposed to be venial sins, not satisfied for in this life, for which satisfaction must be made by suffering the fire of purgatory.

(3.) Because this fire is to *try every man's works*, those of Paul and Apollos, as well as those of others. Now, no papists will have the front to say apostles must have passed through purgatory fires.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:16-17

THE SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION

Here the apostle resumes his argument and exhortation, founding it on his former allusion, *You are God's building*, v. 9, and here, *Know you not that you are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile* (corrupt and destroy) *the temple of God, him shall God destroy* (the same word is in the original in both clauses); *for the temple of God is holy, which temple you are*. It looks from other parts of the epistle, where the apostle argues to the very same purport (see 1 Corinthians 6:13-20), as if the false teachers among the Corinthians were not only loose livers, but taught licentious doctrines, and what was particularly fitted to the taste of this lewd city, on the head of fornication. Such doctrine was not to be reckoned among hay and stubble, which would be consumed while the person who laid them on the foundation escaped the burning; for it tended to corrupt, to pollute, and destroy the church, which was a building erected for God, and consecrated to him, and therefore should be kept pure and holy. Those who spread principles of this sort would provoke God to destroy them. Note, Those who spread loose principles, that have a direct tendency to pollute the church of God, and render it unholy and unclean, are likely to bring destruction on themselves. It may be understood also as an argument against their discord and factious strifes, division being the way to destruction. But what I have been mentioning seems to be the proper meaning of the passage: *Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?* It may be understood of the church of Corinth collectively, or of every single believer among them; Christian churches are temples of God. He dwells among them by his Holy Spirit. *They are built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit*, Ephesians 2:22. Every Christian is a living temple of the living God. God dwelt in the Jewish temple, took possession of it, and resided in it, by that glorious cloud that was the token of his presence with that people. So Christ by his Spirit dwells in all true believers. The temple was devoted and consecrated to God, and set apart from every common to a holy use, to the immediate service of God. So all Christians are separated from common uses, and set apart for God and his service. They are sacred to him — a very good argument this against all fleshly lusts, and all doctrines that give countenance to them. If we are the temples of God, we must do

nothing that shall alienate ourselves from him, or corrupt and pollute ourselves, and thereby unfit ourselves for his use; and we must hearken to no doctrine nor doctor that would seduce us to any such practices. Note, Christians are holy by profession, and should be pure and clean both in heart and conversation. We should heartily abhor, and carefully avoid, what will defile God's temple, and prostitute what ought to be sacred to him.

✠ 1 CORINTHIANS 3:18-20

HUMILITY PRESCRIBED

Here he prescribes humility, and a modest opinion of themselves, for the remedy of the irregularities in the church of Corinth, the divisions and contests among them: *“Let no man deceive himself,* v. 18. Do not be led away from the truth and simplicity of the gospel by pretenders to science and eloquence, by a show of deep learning, or a flourish of words, by rabbis, orators, or philosophers.” Note, We are in great danger of deceiving ourselves when we have too high an opinion of human wisdom and arts; plain and pure Christianity will be likely to be despised by those who can suit their doctrines to the corrupt taste of their hearers, and set them off with fine language, or support them with a show of deep and strong reasoning. But *he who seems to be wise must become a fool that he may be wise.* He must be sensible of his own ignorance, and lament it; he must distrust his own understanding, and not lean on it. To have a high opinion of our wisdom is but to flatter ourselves, and self-flattery is the very next step to self-deceit. The way to true wisdom is to sink our opinion of our own to a due level, and be willing to be taught of God. He must become a fool who would be truly and thoroughly wise. The person who resigns his own understanding, that he may follow the instruction of God, is in the way to true and everlasting wisdom. *The meek will he guide in judgment, the meek will he teach his way,* ✠ Psalm 25:9. He that has a low opinion of his own knowledge and powers will submit to better information; such a person may be informed and improved by revelation: but the proud man, conceited of his own wisdom and understanding, will undertake to correct even divine wisdom itself, and prefer his own shallow reasonings to the revelations of infallible truth and wisdom. Note, We must abase ourselves before God if we would be either truly wise or good:

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, v. 19. The wisdom which worldly men esteem (policy, philosophy, oratory) *is foolishness with God*. It is so in a way of comparison with his wisdom. *He chargeth his angels with folly* (~~80B3~~ Job 4:18), and much more the wisest among the children of men. *His understanding is infinite*, ~~8E7B5~~ Psalm 147:5. There can be no more comparison between his wisdom and ours than between his power and being and ours. There is no common measure by which to compare finite and infinite. And much more is the wisdom of man foolishness with God when set in competition with his. How justly does he despise, how easily can he baffle and confound it! *He taketh the wise in their own craftiness* (~~88B3~~ Job 5:13), he catches them in their own nets, and entangles them in their own snares: he turns their most studies, plausible, and promising schemes against themselves, and ruins them by their own contrivance. Nay, *He knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain* (v. 20), that they are vanity, ~~894B3~~ Psalm 94:11. Note, God has a perfect knowledge of the thoughts of men, the deepest thoughts of the wisest men, their most secret counsels and purposes: nothing is hidden from him, but *all things are naked and bare* before him, ~~804B3~~ Hebrews 4:13. And he knows them to be vanity. The thoughts of the wisest men in the world have a great mixture of vanity, of weakness and folly, in them; and before God their wisest and best thoughts are very vanity, compared, I mean, with his thoughts of things. And should not all this teach us modesty, diffidence in ourselves, and a deference to the wisdom of God, make us thankful for his revelations, and willing to be taught of God, and not be led away by specious pretences to human wisdom and skill, from the simplicity of Christ, or a regard to his heavenly doctrine? Note, He who would be wise indeed must learn of God, and not set his own wisdom up in competition with God's.

~~84E2~~ 1 CORINTHIANS 3:21-23

AGAINST OVERVALUING TEACHERS

Here the apostle finds an exhortation against over-valuing their teachers on what he had just said, and on the consideration that they had an equal interest in all their ministers: *Therefore let no man glory in men* (v. 21) — forget that their ministers are men, or pay that deference to them that is due only to God, set them at the head of parties, have them in immoderate

esteem and admiration, and servilely and implicitly follow their directions and submit to their dictates, and especially in contradiction to God and the truths taught by his Holy Spirit. Mankind are very apt to make the mercies of God cross their intentions. The ministry is a very useful and very gracious institution, and faithful ministers are a great blessing to any people; yet the folly and weakness of people may do much mischief by what is in itself a blessing. They may fall into factions, side with particular ministers, and set them at their head, glory in their leaders, and be carried by them they know not whither. The only way to avoid this mischief is to have a modest opinion of ourselves, a due sense of the common weakness of human understanding, and an entire deference to the wisdom of God speaking in his word. Ministers are not to be set up in competition with one another. All faithful ministers are serving one Lord and pursuing one purpose. They were appointed of Christ, for the common benefit of the church: “*Paul, and Apollos, and Cephas, are all yours.* One is not to be set up against another, but all are to be valued and used for your own spiritual benefit.” Upon this occasion also he gives in an inventory of the church's possessions, the spiritual riches of a true believer: “*All is yours* — ministers of all ranks, ordinary and extraordinary. Nay the world itself is yours.” Not that saints are proprietors of the world, but it stands for their sake, they have as much of it as Infinite Wisdom sees to be fit for them, and they have all they have with the divine blessing. “*Life is yours*, that you may have season and opportunity to prepare for the life of heaven; and *death is yours*, that you may go to the possession of it. It is the kind messenger that will fetch you to your Father's house. *Things present* are yours, for your support on the road; *things to come* are yours, to enrich and regale you for ever at your journey's end.” Note, If we belong to Christ, and are true to him, all good belongs to us, and is sure to us. All is ours, time and eternity, earth and heaven, life and death. *We shall want no good thing*, ¹³⁹¹¹Psalm 84:11. But it must be remembered, at the same time, *that we are Christ's*, the subjects of his kingdom, his property. He is Lord over us, and we must own his dominion, and cheerfully submit to his command and yield themselves to his pleasure, if we would have all things minister to our advantage. All things are ours, upon no other ground than our being Christ's. Out of him we are without just title or claim to any thing that is good. Note, Those that would be safe for time, and happy to eternity, must be Christ's. *And Christ is God's*. He is the Christ of God, anointed of God, and commissioned by him, to bear the office of a Mediator, and to act therein for the purposes of his glory. Note, All things are the believer's,

that Christ might have honour in his great undertaking, and God in all might have the glory. God in Christ reconciling a sinful world to himself, and shedding abroad the riches of his grace on a reconciled world, is the sum and substance of the gospel.