

1 Corinthians – Lesson 5

3 **And I** (Καί ἐγώ), **brethren** (ἀδελφός), **could** (δύναμαι) not speak to you as **to spiritual** (πνευματικός) **people** **but** (ἀλλά) as **to carnal** (σάρκινος), as **to babes** (νήπιος) in Christ. 2 I fed you **with milk** (γάλα) and not **with solid food** (βρῶμα); **for** (γάρ) until now **you were not able** (δύναμαι) **to receive** it, and even now **you are still not able** (δύναμαι); 3 **for** (γάρ) you are still **carnal** (σαρκικός). **For** (γάρ) where **there are** envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not **carnal** (σαρκικός) and behaving like **mere men** (ἄνθρωπος)? 4 **For** (γάρ) when one says, “I am of Paul,” and another, “I *am* of Apollos,” are you not **carnal** (σαρκικός)?

3:1 – The first four verses of this chapter conclude a line of thought Paul began in 2:6 and also serve as a transition into the next paragraph. The NKJV translates Καί ἐγώ as “**And I**” reflecting a continuation of Paul’s thoughts – which I believe correctly reflects his intent. Once again, he addresses the Corinthians as his brothers and sisters (in the Lord). Referring back to his early ministry at Corinth (as indicated by the aorist tense), Paul says that at that time he was not able to speak to them as “**spiritual people**” (πνευματικός – adjective). Instead of being able to speak to them as *pneumatikoi* as indicated by the strong adversative ἀλλά, Paul had to speak to them as “people of the flesh” (σάρκινος). This Greek word is not a synonym for ψυκικός which was used in 2:14 to designate one who functions bodily without being touched by the Spirit of God. Rather, the suffix -ινος indicates “made of” and, when affixed to σάρξ (“flesh”), means “made of flesh”. I like Leon Morris’ explanation: “The -inos termination means ‘made of ...’; thus tablets ‘made of stone’, *lithinos*, are contrasted with those ‘made of flesh’, *sarkinos* (2 Corinthians 3:3).”¹ Paul expands on his description of them as “made of flesh” or “fleshy” as “infants” in Christ. He was not referring to people without the Spirit (they had received Him when they were baptized into Christ); rather, Paul is talking about infants or babes in Christ. Paul uses the Greek word νήπιος which he normally uses in a pejorative sense as in 13:11. (Paul often speaks more positively of children in his letters but uses a different Greek word – τέκνον. See 1 Thessalonians 2:7, 11; 1 Corinthians 4:14; Galatians 4:19; and Philippians 2:22.) All of us who are Christians were “babes in Christ” at some point in time. The same Greek word is used in Hebrews 5:13.

3:2-4 – Following up on the fact that they were mere babes in Christ, Paul says that he fed them with “milk” (γάλα – *gahl'-ah*). He had not fed them with “solid food” (βρῶμα – *bro'-mah* – “that which is eaten” – a word Paul uses also in 6:13; 8:8 and 13). Paul gives the reason he had not given them solid food – introduced with an explanatory γάρ (“for”): the Corinthians were not able to receive solid food. When Paul was in Corinth, these babes in Christ had not matured enough to eat solid food. Now Paul switches from the aorist or past tense to the present tense to state that they are still not able to receive solid food. (Don’t miss the triple repetition of δύναμαι with a negative in verses 1-2 meaning “unable” or “without power”.) We might understand the lack of maturation in these “babes in Christ” since Paul was only in Corinth for a span of 18 months but not after five or six years. The Corinthians are not going to like what Paul has just said but he introduces his explanation with γάρ (“for”) – they are still carnal (σαρκικός). Subtly, Paul switches Greek words – from σάρκινος to σαρκικός – from fleshy to fleshly. Once again,

¹ Morris, L. (1985). 1 Corinthians: an introduction and commentary (Vol. 7, p. 66). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Leon Morris explains: “The **-ikos** ending rather means ‘characterized by ...’; we see it in *psychikos* of the ‘natural’ man and *pneumatikos* of the ‘spiritual’ man (2:14-15).”² With another introductory **γάρ** (“for”), Paul explains how they are fleshly or carnal. While there is envy (**ζήλος**) and strife or quarreling or contention (**ἔρις** – already mentioned in 1:11) and divisions (**διχοστασία**), are they not still fleshly or carnal (**σαρκικός**)? Paul couples envy or jealousies (**ζήλος**), strife or contentions (**ἔρις**) and dissensions or divisions (**διχοστασία**) as works of the flesh in *Galatians* 5:20. Leaving no room for doubt, Paul further explains envy, strife, and divisions as the way humans walk in this life. Being a human (**ἄνθρωπος**) is not a bad thing any more than being **σάρκινος** (“made of flesh” or “fleshy” – carnal). But Christians who have received the Spirit are to act differently than mere humans. Now Paul returns to the quarreling he had heard about in 1:12 to explain how they are walking like humans. As long as one is saying, “I am of Paul” and another “I am of Apollos”, Paul concludes rhetorically that the Corinthians are carnal (or fleshly).

5 Who (τίς) then is Paul, and who (τίς) is Apollos, but (ἀλλά) ministers (διάκονος) through (διά) whom you believed, as the Lord gave (δίδωμι) to each one? 6 I planted (φυτεύω), Apollos watered (ποτίζω), but (ἀλλά) God gave the increase (αὐξάνω). 7 So then (ὥστε) neither he who plants (φυτεύω) is anything, nor he who waters (ποτίζω), but God who gives the increase (αὐξάνω). 8 Now he who plants (φυτεύω) and he who waters (ποτίζω) are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

3:5 – This section which continues through 4:5 is introduced by two rhetorical questions but there is slight difference between the NKJV/KJV and the newer translations which use different interrogatives – “who” and “what”, respectively. The difference is caused by the Greek texts used for translation. The NKJV/KJV use the *Textus Receptus* which begins with an interrogative pronoun of the masculine gender (**τίς**) and thus is rendered “**who**”. The ESV, NASB, NRSV, NIV and CSB (to name a few of the newer” translations) however, are based on the UBS (United Bible Societies) text which starts with an interrogative pronoun of the neuter gender (**τί**) and is translated “**what**”. Although some at Corinth seemed to be following their favorite preachers, Paul wanted them to know that he and Apollos were merely servants or ministers (**διάκονοι**). The basic meaning of this Greek word is “one who waits tables” and is the source of our English word “deacon”. It came to also mean “one who serves as an intermediary in a transaction” or “an agent” which is appropriate for its usage here. Paul and Apollos served as agents through (**διά**) whom the Corinthians had believed the gospel. This was the ministry the Lord had given (basic meaning of **δίδωμι**) to each of them – His agents! As the following verses will show, Paul is not referring to only their initial belief in Christ but also their continued growth in the faith (2 *Peter* 3:18).

3:6-8 – Paul will now specify what he and Apollos did. Paul initially brought the word to Corinth on his second missionary journey as recorded in *Acts* 18. Using an agricultural analogy which would be familiar to the Corinthians, Paul planted the seed (*Luke* 8:11). And, as seed naturally needs water to develop, Apollos came along to do just that (*Acts* 18:24-19:1). Since the processes of planting and watering will be mentioned three

² Morris, L. (1985). 1 Corinthians: an introduction and commentary (Vol. 7, p. 66). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

separate times in three succeeding verses, are there any additional meanings to the Greek words we need to understand? Φυτεύω is the usual word for planting a tree or vineyard but the word for watered (ποτίζω) was just used in verse 2 above for “fed” (you with milk) or, literally, “gave to drink.” Paul planted and Apollos watered but (strong adversative ἀλλά) God gave the growth (αὐξάνω). This Greek verb is used 20 times in the New Testament and basically means to grow or cause to grow (e.g, *Luke 2:40; 12:27; 13:19; Ephesians 4:15; 1 Peter 2:2* and *2 Peter 3:18*). Using the inferential conjunction ὥστε (“therefore”, “so” or “so then”), Paul draws the conclusion that neither the planter nor the waterer – neither he nor Apollos – is anything (τι – indefinite pronoun almost identical to the pronoun that introduced the rhetorical questions of verse 5). The only being that matters is the One who gives the growth (αὐξάνω) and that is God. Despite the preferences of the Corinthians, Paul emphasizes that he and Apollos are one – united in the same purpose of fulfilling the ministry God gave them. And so should it be with all who preach the gospel! Each one – Paul or Apollos or any other minister – will be rewarded with wages according to his own labor. See *Luke 10:7*. The last part of verse 8 anticipates verses 10-17.

9 For (γάρ) we are God’s fellow workers (συνεργός); you are God’s field (γεώργιον), you are God’s building (οἰκοδομή). **10** According to the grace (χάρις) of God which was given (δίδωμι) to me, as a wise (σοφός) master builder (ἀρχιτέκτων) I have laid the foundation (θεμέλιος), and another builds on it. But (δέ) let each one take heed how he builds on it. **11** For (γάρ) no other foundation (θεμέλιος) can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. **12** Now if anyone builds on this foundation (θεμέλιος) with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, **13** each one’s work (ἔργον) will become clear; for the Day (ἡμέρα) will declare it, because it will be revealed (ἀποκαλύπτω) by fire (πῦρ); and the fire (πῦρ) will test each one’s work (ἔργον), of what sort it is. **14** If anyone’s work (ἔργον) which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. **15** If anyone’s work (ἔργον) is burned, he will suffer loss (ζημιώω); but he himself will be saved, yet so as through (διὰ) fire (πῦρ).

3:9 – Paul begins with an explanatory “for” (γάρ). He and Apollos (and other preachers) are God’s fellow workers (συνεργός). This Greek word is used 13 times in the New Testament – all but once by the apostle Paul – and is the source of our English word synergy. Paul and Apollos have one purpose – they have planted and watered – they are God’s servants and His fellow workers in Corinth – in God’s field. The Corinthians are God’s field. The Greek word γεώργιον appears only here in the New Testament and refers to cultivated land. This is the first of three metaphors Paul will use through verse 17 of this chapter. The field fits what Paul has been discussing – his planting and the watering of Apollos. Now Paul switches metaphors to introduce the imagery of the next few verses by stating that the Corinthians are also God’s building (οἰκοδομή). This particular Greek word can mean either the process of construction or the result of that process. I favor the latter in this case.

3:10-11 – Paul now begins to expound on the building metaphor – making some of the same points he had just made with the agricultural metaphor (verses 6-9). He has just declared that the Christians (or church) at Corinth are God’s building. Paul is going to refresh their memories. First, he acknowledges that his ministry is by the grace of God. Notice how he expressed this idea to the church at Rome – *Romans 1:5-6*. Secondly, Paul describes himself as a wise (σοφός) master builder (ἀρχιτέκτων). The ESV’s use

of “skilled” for σοφός misses the connection to Paul’s discussion of wisdom in chapters 1 and 2. Ἀρχιτέκτων appears only here in the New Testament and literally means “chief carpenter”. The meaning is one who superintends the work of building. In this role, Paul laid a foundation (for the building) just as he had planted. Now someone else is building on it. Of course, Apollos had been one of those who built on it as he watered but Paul seems to just be saying that someone else is continuing to build (present tense) on that same foundation as they teach and preach to the church at Corinth. Then Paul adds a warning introduced in the Greek text with the conjunction δέ: Let each one be careful how he builds on that foundation. And then Paul gives the reason for caution as introduced by γάρ (“for”). There is no other foundation for the church than the one Paul laid which was Jesus Christ. The apostle explains this in greater detail in *Ephesians 2:19-22*.

3:12-13 – It is important to keep Paul’s warning from the end of verse 10 in mind as we look at this verse: “**Let each one take care how he builds upon it**” – the foundation Paul laid for the church at Corinth. He now directs his attention to a “what if” – to anyone building on that foundation of Jesus Christ and the type of building materials they use. Paul is not referring to the materials for a physical structure but rather to the teaching and doctrine being presented. The six types of building materials seem to be listed in a decreasing order according to their value; however, the sense seems to be that the first three are valuable and the last three are worthless – or at least combustible – for a permanent structure. The first three are compatible with the foundation – Christ purchased the church with His own blood (*Acts 20:28*). They are also components of the temple (*1 Chronicles 29:2*) to which Paul will turn in verse 16. The last three will perish like the wisdom (σοφία) of the wise (*1 Corinthians 1:19*). Verse 13 is the main clause following the conditional or subordinate clause of verse 12 – as properly reflected in the newer translations. The Day of the Lord will bring to light the work man has done. This day will be accompanied with fire which will test the building materials man has used – the first three materials will not be consumed but we know what happens when fire is introduced to wood, hay and straw. Many passages point to the great conflagration on that day – the second coming of our Lord or Judgment Day. See *Matthew 3:11-12*; *2 Thessalonians 1:7-8*; and *2 Peter 3:7, 10*. The work of the builders will become apparent that day when they are tried by fire. The apostle Peter warned of a fiery persecution which would test the genuineness of early Christians’ faith – *1 Peter 1:6-7*.

3:14-15 – In the Day of the Lord, the work made by the first three materials (gold, silver and precious stones) will survive the test of fire. The man who used these materials for building will then receive his reward or wages – as in verse 8 with the agricultural metaphor. The first part of verse 15 is the opposite of verse 14. The one who builds with wood, hay and straw will see his work burned up in the Day of the Lord. It will not survive the test by fire. Therefore, he will suffer a loss instead of receiving wages. “**He will suffer loss**” (ζημιώω) is from the same Greek verb used in *Matthew 16:26* and *Philippians 3:8*. The last phrase in this verse is somewhat confusing. The most reasonable meaning seems to be that Paul still considered these Corinthians as Christians – even if they were presently building up the church with perishable materials or man-made wisdom (σοφία). They would see their works burned up, but they would still be saved – but only “by the skin of their teeth” (or as the NIV renders it: “**only as one escaping through the flames**” – provided they made some changes. (See *1 Peter 4:18*) Let’s look at this another way. Without the qualifying statement at the end of this verse, we would infer that

Paul was referring to one's eternal reward. But notice what is lost: the work of wood, hay and straw. Brother Howard Winters wrote: "If his converts (the building stones of the house of God) do not remain faithful unto the end, he will lose his work...A worker's salvation does not depend upon the faithfulness of those he reaches with the truth, but upon his own personal relationship with Christ and his faithfulness in proclaiming the divine message."³

16 Do you not know (οὐ οἶδα) that (ὅτι) you are the temple (ναός) of God and that the Spirit (πνεῦμα) of God dwells (οἰκέω) in you? 17 If anyone defiles (φθείρω) the temple (ναός) of God, God will destroy (φθείρω) him. For the temple (ναός) of God is holy (ἅγιος), which temple you are.

3:16-17 – Paul seems to be reaching a crescendo as he comes to his third metaphor. This is indicated by his use of **“Do you not know that...”** – a phrase he will use nine more times in this epistle but only once in his other writings (*Romans 6:16*). The congregation at Corinth had been called God's field and God's building in verse 9 but they should have known they were God's temple – especially as wise as they were and with their emphasis on knowledge (γνῶσις). Every “you” in this verse and the next is plural. The first three building materials in verse 12 were used in building the temple and now this is the metaphor for God's people. There are two Greek words for temple – ἱερόν (*hee-ehr-own*) for the entire temple area and ναός (*nah-ose*) which refers to the sanctuary or inner part of the temple. Ναός would include where the ark would rest, and the Spirit of God would dwell (cf. *2 Chronicles 5:7-14*). Using the same introductory formula οὐ οἶδα ὅτι (**“do you not know that...”**) in *1 Corinthians 6:19*, Paul will point out that the Spirit of God dwells in the bodies of individual Christians. But here the Spirit of God dwells in His temple – the church at Corinth. This would be a sharp contrast for the Corinthians whose pagan temples were called ναός in Greek literature. Οἰκέω (**“dwells”**) simply means to reside in a place. Verse 17 highlights the severity of the problem in the church at Corinth and is a strong warning for any who would promote divisions within the church. **“If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him.”** But we have to understand **“defile”** in the context of the jealousy and strife that existed within the Corinthian church. Φθείρω means to cause harm to or mar. Anyone who harms the church by causing division warrants God's wrath. Notice Richard Oster's observation: “While these detractors of Paul may not be preaching another gospel as they were in the churches of Galatia and while they would have agreed with many aspects of Paul's own theology, he nevertheless consigns them to destruction if they participate and encourage strife, jealousy, and division in the church of God at Corinth.”⁴ Paul then gives the reason for God's wrath beginning with an explanatory γάρ (**“for”**): **the temple of God is holy** (ἅγιος - *hahg'-ee-ose*) – sacred or set apart for God and belonging to Him.

18 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise (σοφός) in this age (αἰών), let him become a fool (μωρός) that he may become wise (σοφός). 19 For (γάρ) the wisdom (σοφία) of this world (κόσμος) is foolishness (μωρία) with God. For (γάρ) it is written (γράφω), **“He catches the wise (σοφός) in their own**

³ Winters, H. (1987). *Commentary on First Corinthians: Practical and Explanatory* (p 43). Greenville, SC; Carolina Christian.

⁴ Oster, R. (1995). *1 Corinthians* (1 Co 3:17). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

craftiness"; 20 and again, "**The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise (σοφός), that they are futile.**" 21 **Therefore** (ὥστε) **let no one boast** (καυχᾶμαι) **in men** (ἄνθρωπος). **For** (γάρ) **all things are yours:** 22 **whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world** (κόσμος) **or life** (ζωή) **or death** (θάνατος), or things present or things to come—all are yours. 23 **And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.**

3:18-20 – Do we ever deceive ourselves? Paul is giving a command by using an imperative and then he explains the self-deception of the Corinthians: it is rooted in their view of wisdom (σοφία). At first glance, this discussion doesn't seem to fit what Paul has been addressing in this chapter – agriculture and building. (But notice how Paul begins with **"if anyone"** as he similarly did in verses 12 and 17.) Paul is reverting to the wisdom and foolishness which he mentioned in *1 Corinthians 1:17-2:8*. If any of the Corinthians think they are wise in the present age, Paul commands them to become fools in order that they may really become wise. We have already discussed the wisdom of God and the foolishness of the message of the cross. Two more examples of this dichotomy: Jesus teaches us to love our enemies (*Matthew 5:44*) but the world teaches "get even" with them. Jesus taught His disciples to give liberally to the poor (*Luke 6:30, 38*) but the world teaches "the one who dies with the most toys, wins." In verse 19, Paul explains why the Corinthians must become foolish by the standards of the world – because God is not impressed by the wisdom of this world. In fact, remember the ending of *1 Corinthians 1:20* – **"Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?"** Then Paul backs up his conclusion with scripture – **"it is written"** – using a quotation from *Job 5:13* and then another one in verse 20 taken from *Psalms 94:11*. Apparently, Paul by inspiration has inserted **"wise"** for **"man"** in this latter passage (or he took it from a manuscript no longer extant). Richard Oster sums it up like this: "All of this is designed by Paul to be a commentary on those leaders and trend setters among the Corinthian church, who because of their own seduction by Corinthian standards are contributing to the fragmentation and division in the church of God there."⁵

3:21-23 – With the little word ὥστε (**"therefore"** or **"so then"** or **"so"**), Paul begins the conclusion to his argument against their divisions begun in *1:10*. He follows ὥστε with another imperative or command: **"Let no one boast in men!"** Remember *1:31* – **"He who glories, let him glory in the Lord"** – not in men. Paul then gives them the reason for not boasting in men – all things belong to the Corinthians. This seems to be a rather broad statement, so Paul defines **"all things"** in the next verse. In a sense, Paul turns the tables on the Corinthians. Paul, Apollos and Cephas are their servants – they belong to the Corinthians instead of *vice versa* (*1:12*). Their present and future eternal existence belongs to them – they make the determining decisions. And, once again, Paul reaffirms that the Corinthians are Christians – they belong to Christ because they were baptized in His name (*1:13*). And, if they belong to Christ, they belong to God because all things ultimately belong to God the Father. We can now look back at Paul's arguments in chapter 3 – the metaphors of agriculture and buildings – and see that they refer to teachers and teaching. The truly wise are the foolish and spiritual. But what the Corinthians were boasting as wise and spiritual were men and fleshly.

⁵ Oster, R. (1995). *1 Corinthians* (1 Co 3:20). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.