

## “Purposeful Living”

1 Cor 3:1-23

5.30.21

A group of tourists visiting a picturesque village walked by an old man sitting beside a fence. In a rather patronizing way, one tourist asked him, “Were any great men born in this village?” The old man replied, “Nope, only babies.”

Every person who is a born-again believer starts life as a baby in Christ. Whether the new believer is seven or seventy, that person is still a new Christian and needs to grow in the Lord.

The culmination of the Christian life is not the decision to give your heart to Jesus. Trusting in Christ is the **beginning** of the Christian life. God has so much more for you. God has a purpose for your life. But with that purpose come expectations and plans for you to live out. God loves you just as you are but He is not satisfied. He wants to make you more like Jesus.

In our continuing series in 1 Corinthians we are going to see some of God’s expectations are for the believer in Christ; how we relate to God, His people and His Church. Please turn to chapter 3 of 1 Cor. It is page 953 in the Bibles under the chairs.

1 Corinthians 3:1–23 (ESV), “But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. <sup>2</sup> I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, <sup>3</sup> for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? <sup>4</sup> For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human? <sup>5</sup> What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. <sup>6</sup> I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. <sup>7</sup> So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. <sup>8</sup> He who plants and he who waters are

one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. <sup>9</sup> For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. <sup>10</sup> According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. <sup>11</sup> For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— <sup>13</sup> each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. <sup>14</sup> If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. <sup>16</sup> Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? <sup>17</sup> If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. <sup>18</sup> Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. <sup>19</sup> For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," <sup>20</sup> and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." <sup>21</sup> So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, <sup>22</sup> whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, <sup>23</sup> and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

What can we learn about God's purpose and expectations of us? First,

**We are expected to grow spiritually.**

The Corinthians had been personally taught by Paul for the first 18 months of their Christian lives. And yet they had not grown much in the 3+ years since their conversion. Paul was concerned so he wrote, verse 1, "But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. <sup>2</sup> I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, <sup>3</sup> for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? <sup>4</sup> For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human?"

The Corinthians were not growing in spiritual maturity. Paul called them “people of the flesh.” The word flesh means “carnal”- to be living according to the flesh rather than by the power of the Spirit. That was their pattern and as a result they were still “infants in Christ.”

Infants want their own way. Infants look out for themselves. These Corinthian infants were jealous and causing disunity. They were choosing sides in the church. Some chose Paul. Some chose Apollos.

In most churches you can find Christians who have not progressed from the infant stage. And because of that they act like infants in the church. They don't share well. They whine. They want their own way. They create conflicts. They need to grow up spiritually.

Paul used an analogy to differentiate basic, fundamental teaching from more in-depth teaching. He described fundamental teaching as milk. And in-depth teaching as solid food. The Gospel is milk. It is what new believers need to feast on when they come to Christ. 1 Peter 2:2 (ESV), “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may **grow up** into salvation...”

Milk is what human babies need. They are not yet ready for solid food. As children grow, they add solid food to their diets like vegetables, chicken, steak or even tacos.

When our oldest son Jackson was four years old, he loved going to Taco Bell. That little guy would eat four tacos. On one visit, I asked Jackson to be the one to pray before we ate. He folded his hands, closed his eyes and prayed with such sincerity, “Thank you God for tacos and thank you God for bells.”

Though the Gospel is milk; it is still important for all Christians to remember and think about often. When we forget the Gospel you forget that we were purchased at a price. When we forget the gospel we forget that we cannot earn salvation; it is a gift from God.

When we forget the gospel we forget that the ground is level at the cross- that no one is more important than anyone else.

Don't forget the milk. But as you mature in Christ, you are expected to eat solid food. Solid food is understanding themes of the Bible- like creation, the sacrificial systems in the Old Testament and how it is a foreshadow of Christ as the Lamb of God. Understanding systematic theology- like ecclesiology- which is the study of the church- purpose, structure, etc. Eschatology- study of the scriptures and what it teaches about the end times.

There is an expected progression in the Christian life. Hebrews 5:11–12 (NLT), “There is much more we would like to say about this, but it is difficult to explain, especially since you are spiritually dull and don't seem to listen. <sup>12</sup> You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God's word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food.”

A teacher doesn't necessarily mean teaching a large group of people. A teacher is able to pass on the milk that he/she was taught or to pass on the meat of God's Word. We are all called to pass on the Good News to others.

God expects you to grow. We want to help you grow. Our vision is designed to help you take steps to progress from being a Christ-follower to a Disciple to a Disciple-maker. **[Show slide]** In that process you are able to not only teach others but make disciples who will also make disciples. You will be able to teach others who will be able to teach others.

We have great tools and people in place to help you grow. However, every believer is responsible for his or her own spiritual maturity. Nobody can make you grow, for that is your daily decision and responsibility.

In their carnality or flesh, the Corinthians were making allegiances in the church. Paul put their view of leaders in perspective. What are leaders in relation to God?

**We are servants who work together for God.**

Verse 5, “What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each.”

The word servant is often translated doulos or slave. But here, Paul uses a different form. The Greek word diakonos is translated Deacon in English. A Deacon is someone working in the service of another.

Paul is saying, Apollos and I and any other leader in the church are working in the service of another. It is not about us. It is about the One whom we serve. Then he describes their roles as servants. Verse 6, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. <sup>7</sup> So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. <sup>8</sup> He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. <sup>9</sup> For we are God’s fellow workers.”

It is not the one who shares the good news that is essential. It is the One who ultimately changes the heart and moves them to believe. That is God.

Your job as God’s servant is to be God’s witness- to share the good news and leave the results to God. Our job is to be faithful witnesses. It is His job to change lives. I hope that encourages you to know that life change is not up to you.

In any unhealthy church, leaders can think too highly of themselves. They can get a big head and think they are God’s gift to the church. They can even begin to think the church is theirs. Paul makes sure to bring clarity that the church does not belong to any leader.

Last week we saw the church is Christ’s body. Now we see that:

**The Church belongs to God. It is His field, His building, His temple.**

Verse 9, “For we are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s field, God’s building.”

Keeping with the planting and watering theme, we see that the Church is a field. As we plant and water, God gives birth and growth to the seeds. What started as a core of 120 believers at Pentecost is now billions of plants in God’s field.

The church is also God’s building. Paul will change illustrations from the field to a building in the next few verses.

And then the church is called a temple in verse 16, “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?”

Later on in 1 Cor, Paul will tell the believers that they are each a temple of God. Here though, the Greek word “You” is plural. The temple is all believers corporately.

Paul gives a strong warning in verse 17, “If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.”

False teachers. False preachers seek to destroy God’s church the temple by preaching things other than Christ. God will see to it that they are destroyed. All religions, all cults will one day be destroyed. Only Christianity will remain.

Let us be careful to not do anything to make the church look bad for it belongs to God.

For those who think God is okay with you being a Christian but not associate with a church you are not hearing from Him. The Church matters to God and you and I are called, and commanded to build up the church using our gifts, our treasure, our time, our talent.

The Church matters so much to God that He will hold us accountable to how we live out the Christian life. Next we see that:

**We will all face judgment by Christ.**

2 Corinthians 5:10 (NLT), "For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body."

Unbelievers will stand before God and answer to what they did with Jesus. For those who have **not surrendered their lives to Christ, judgment will not be good news.**

Revelation 20:11–15 (NLT), "And I saw a great white throne and the one sitting on it.

The earth and sky fled from his presence, but they found no place to hide. <sup>12</sup> I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God's throne. And the books were opened, including the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books. <sup>13</sup> The sea gave up its dead, and death and the grave gave up their dead. And all were judged according to their deeds. <sup>14</sup> Then death and the grave were thrown into the lake of fire. This lake of fire is the second death. <sup>15</sup> And anyone whose name was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire."

God doesn't want anyone to perish. But He will not strong-arm you to believe in Christ. Please choose Christ. Make Him your Lord and Savior now so that when you stand before Him one day, your name will already be written in the Book of Life.

**Christians will stand before Christ and answer how they built on Christ's foundation, on how they lived out their Christian lives.**

Scholars believe that a raised marble platform still visible today in the ruins of Corinth is the exact place where the provincial magistrate sat to hear Paul's case. The platform was called the bema, which is the Greek word for judgment seat. The judgment seat represented authority, justice, and reward.

The story is told of a judge who was dealing with a robber who had broke into a store three times. The judge said, “Do you admit to breaking into the same store on three successive nights?”

”Yes, your honor.”

“And why was that?”

“Because my wife wanted a dress” said the robber.

The judge responded, “But the records show you broke into the same store three nights in a row!”

“Yes sir. She made me exchange it two times.”

At the judgment seat of Christ,

**The Christian’s works will be tested by fire.**

1 Cor 3:10, “According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. <sup>11</sup> For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— <sup>13</sup> each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. <sup>14</sup> If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.”

Notice the different kinds of works that Paul describes- gold, silver, precious stones and wood, hay or straw.

At the end of time, all our works will be placed in the fire of judgment. How our works relate to fire is dependent on what kind of works they are.

What would cause a work to either burn like straw or endure like gold? Bruce Wilkinson, in his book *A Life God Rewards* gives us three tests to determine the worth of our works.



1. **The Test of Relationship.** It might relieve you to know that a life God rewards is not about performance apart from relationship with Jesus. In fact, just the opposite is true. **Jesus said unless His followers stay close to Him and obey His commands, they will not bear “much fruit” for Him—“for without Me you can do nothing”** (John 15:5).
2. **The Test of Motive.** Jesus said, “Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven” (Matthew 6:1). What should be our motive? To serve God and bring Him glory. Even ordinary actions like eating and drinking can bring God glory (1 Corinthians 10:31). By contrast, our most “religious” action is worthless if our motive is to build up our own egos or reputations.
3. **The Test of Love.** True good works are always focused on sincerely trying to improve the well-being of another. Jesus said, “But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil” (Luke 6:35).

Works considered gold or silver when placed in a fire are refined. The dross, the impurities are burned out leaving a purer work. That is good news. For it is very difficult to have completely pure motives in whatever we do. The fire will remove the impure parts of the work but not the whole work.

But if our works are more like wood, hay or straw they will be completely burned up—nothing left.

Works that survive will result in rewards. Works that are burned up will have no reward. Notice that the person will be saved but will suffer loss. Loss is felt when one’s works are deemed unworthy by our worthy King. The person will stand with empty hands, no rewards to show or use in eternity. Great regret will fill that person’s heart.

That feeling of regret will not last for eternity because there is no sorrow or weeping in the new heaven. But let's not make light of the fact that for an undetermined amount of time the person will suffer loss. And the loss of rewards will also result in missed opportunities to serve God more fully for eternity.

You might be wondering, why is there a need for judgment for the Christian? **If God did not look at what we did with our lives on earth then each person would be treated equally in heaven and that is not fair.**

Would it be fair to treat people who lived completely for themselves and then accepted Christ on their deathbed, equally to believers who have given their homes, their money, their time, their talents on earth to serve God?

Would it be fair to treat parents who sacrifice much for their kids but little for Christ be treated the same in eternity with parents who put their families in harms way to spread the gospel in remote places?

Would it be fair to give the same responsibilities in heaven to someone who has bore little fruit with someone who has bore much fruit?

Would it be fair for Christians who have never experienced great persecution to be given the same responsibilities in heaven as those who have been raped, beaten, burned, butchered or even martyred because they would not deny Jesus?

**God does look at how we live our lives for Him and rewards us accordingly.**

Listen to what Jesus said in Matt. 19:29, "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a **hundred** times as much and will inherit eternal life."

The truth of this reality- that we will give an account of our lives to Jesus- should cause fear- reverence toward God and how we live for Him. The reality that Paul would stand

before God motivated him to make his life count. He didn't want to regret his life when he stood before God.

**God's desire is not that we enter eternity with little to show for it.** His desire is to shower us with rewards. Listen to His heart in this area.

Matt 19:29 which you heard previously, "And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or property, for my sake, will receive a **hundred times** as much in return and will have eternal life."

Hebrews 11:6, "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must **believe** that he exists **and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.**"

Rev. 22:12 Jesus speaking, "See, I am coming soon, and my reward is with me, to repay all according to their deeds."

These passages show God's excitement to give us the rewards that we have been accumulating. Rev. 22:12 give us a picture of Jesus excitedly coming with our rewards. He can't wait to give them to us.

Not only did Jesus encourage us to pursue rewards but Apostle Paul himself lived an incredibly sacrificial and painful life in order to earn his rewards. Paul says in Philippians 3:14, "I press on toward the goal to win the **prize** for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

God hasn't hidden from us what it takes to earn these rewards. He hasn't asked us to guess what would make Him happy. He has planted them throughout Scripture.

**What are the actions we can do that God will reward?**

Bruce Wilkinson has written a simple list that we can remember. Each word begins with an "S".

1. God will reward you for **seeking** Him through spiritual acts such as fasting and praying.
2. God will reward you for **submitting** to your employer as a faithful steward.
3. God will reward you for **self-denial** in His service.
4. God will reward you for **serving** those in need in His name.
5. God will reward you for **suffering** for His name and reputation.
6. God will reward your for **sacrifices** you make for Him.
7. God will reward you for **sharing** of your time, talent and treasure to further His kingdom.

Theodore H. Epp wrote, “God is eager to reward us and does everything possible to help us lay up rewards. But if we are slothful and carnal, so that our service counts for nothing, we shall we saved, yet as by fire. Let us determine by the grace of God not to be empty handed when we stand before the...Judgment Seat of Christ.”

Lastly,

**We are to trust God’s wisdom over the world’s.**

Verse 18, “Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. <sup>19</sup> For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their craftiness,” <sup>20</sup> and again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.” <sup>21</sup> So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, <sup>22</sup> whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, <sup>23</sup> and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.”

Paul turns back to the topic of wisdom. The Corinthians were infatuated with the wisdom of the world. They were giving it a higher honor than the teachings they had received from Paul.

Paul makes it clear that God's wisdom is wiser than the world's. God says man's wisdom is futile meaning useless.

Putting our hope in people is the world's wisdom. Putting our hope in God is His wisdom.

Trusting in our own goodness to get into heaven is the world's wisdom. Trusting in the finished work of Christ on the cross is God's wisdom.

1 Cor 3 directs us to live purposeful lives because what we do on earth impacts what we do in heaven. Because I care about you, I hope you will be led by the Spirit and do the works that God has prepared for you to do before the world was created.

May you one day hear from the Lord Himself, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into your rest."

Let's pray

o.b.g.