GBC/CIC/CIC Dr. Rick Griffith

24 May 1998/25 March 07/ 30 September 2012 Message #4 of 24

NIV 40 Minutes

**Who Blessed You?**

Title

***1 Corinthians 3***

**Topic:** Divisions

**Subject:** The way to prevent divisions (maintain unity)

**Complement:** is to see all blessings as ultimately from God—not from our leaders.

**Purpose:** The listeners will see all our blessings as ultimately from God—not our leaders.

# Introduction

### [Divisions are often based on selfish interests. Hodgin #169]

#### A Baptist preacher once received a call from a woman who was very upset over the death of her pet cat. She asked him to conduct a funeral service for Homer! The Baptist preacher explained that this was a little out of his line, and he referred her to a friend, a Presbyterian pastor down the street.

Cat

#### Later, the preacher learned that his Presbyterian friend had referred her to a Methodist minister, who had referred her to someone else.

#### About an hour later, she called the Baptist preacher back and she was still upset. The woman said she was at her wit’s end. She couldn’t find a preacher to conduct Homer’s services, and she didn’t know what to do. She said she planned to give $1000 to the church of the minister who performed this service for Homer. The Baptist preacher took only a moment to mull this over and then said to her, “Well, why didn’t you tell me in the first place that Homer was a *Baptist* cat?!”

### Sometimes denominations can be helpful labels!

### But on the negative side, in this woman’s case, she had her predetermined mindset as to what she was going to have done—and she only needed “leader” to do it for her.

### The ancient church at Corinth divided over leaders—arguing over being in the “right group,” whether the PAP, AYE, CTE or SDP. The result? This destroyed their *unity*.

Unity

### In our study of 1 Corinthians 1–2, we have seen in the past weeks that Paul has been telling the Corinthians how to attain unity:

Path

#### Focus on the positive (1:1-9).

• salvation

#### Focus on the foolish—Christ crucified (1:18–2:5).

• foolish

#### Focus on God’s wisdom (2:6-26).

• wisdom

#### These issues primarily relate to the *message*. Now let’s see how Paul focuses his attention on the *messengers* as we ask this same question again…

### Subject: What else do we need to grasp in order to have unity? The first four verses of 1 Corinthians 3 are very direct and basically say…

Unity

# I. Don’t be carnal by following only your favorite leader (1-4).

MP

[Arguing over certain leaders reveals we are worldly rather than led of the Spirit.]

[Spiritual Christians are united, carnal Christians are divided on trivial issues.]

## Notice how Paul said the Corinthians were carnal rather than spiritual (1).

Chair

### In chapter 2 Paul spoke about the chair—the seat of decisions in our lives. He contrasted believers and unbelievers—those with the Spirit and those without the Spirit. Now Paul gives another contrast that relates only to believers—contrasting believers empowered by the Spirit with those empowered by the flesh.

• Carnal

Circles

### What does it mean to be “worldly” (NIV)?

#### Actually, I like the NASB translation of “men of flesh” better here. When I think of infants, I don’t think of worldliness. But when I think of babies, I do think of flesh—that’s about all you get! No spiritual concerns at all!

Flesh

#### The word here in verse 1 (*sarkikos*) means “belonging to flesh,” or “like flesh” (Hanna 289).

Cry baby

#### This refers to self-centered Christians. Just as a baby is concerned only for himself, those of the world also look out only for their own interests.

##### Have you ever heard a baby say, “Oh, I’m so sorry I cried and embarrassed you! And sorry for that mess I made on the floor!”

##### No, babies are by nature selfish. These people who teach we are basically good from the start haven’t had kids!

### This word is similar to but different from another word in verse 3 (*sarkinos*). The “worldly” in verse 3 means “made of flesh,” which is different than the “like flesh” of verse 1 (Hanna 289). It doesn’t refer to a carnal babe but rather to a carnal adult. This “made of flesh” person in verse 3 is not just unspiritual but anti-spiritual!

Cry man

#### Have you ever seen a baby up here for baby dedication who cries and cries? You probably say to yourself, “Oh, he needs his nappy changed… or he didn’t get enough sleep… or some other legitimate excuse.”

#### Imagine, though, 20 years later and the same person comes before us for baptism. During his testimony he says, “Oh, I forgot to go potty! I woke up too early this morning and feel real tired so forget about me getting baptised today!”

#### So what’s wrong with that? What’s OK for a baby is not appropriate years down the line when we’re expecting some signs of maturity.

### Paul is saying that older Christians in Corinth are acting like babies. We sure get enough encouragement to do this today!

#### You’ve heard the phrase, “You gotta look out for number 1.” Who’s that? You, of course! That’s the world’s fleshly thinking.

You are #1

#### “You deserve a break today, so get up and get away”—do you kids know where? Come spend your money at our restaurant! Why? Because as you are most important to you, so we are most important to us! Even if it hurts you!

You are #1

#### Last Christmas one of the department store ornaments really said it well. Can you read it? “It’s all about me this season”! Really? Is that what Christmas is about—blatant carnality?

All about me

(In verses 2-4 Paul says that…)

## Carnality is seen in a selfish lifestyle (2-4). Three signs of selfishness are here. First…

Selfish

### Carnal Christians can’t understand advanced doctrine as they’re too selfish to try (2).

3:2

#### What would be some examples of “milk” doctrine verses “solid food”?

##### “Milk” includes basics of the faith such as the attributes of God, salvation by faith, eternal security, and the deity of Christ.

##### On the other hand, “solid food” refers to more mature matters like biblical leadership principles, how to interpret biblical eschatology, etc.

#### Could it be that some of us here have been believers for many years but we are still worldly, fleshly, carnal?

##### What meat have you chewed in the Word lately—or are you still on formula?

##### One disturbing trend I see in our evangelical churches is that we hardly ever have any Bible studies straight from the Bible. We feel we can’t just learn from God Himself without having a study guide of some sort. I’m not against study guides or books or teachers. I am involved in all of this! But too often *they* become our guide rather than the Word itself. Let’s get back into the meat of the Word—study a paragraph this week, everyone do their own study on the next paragraph or chapter, then come together to share our insights.

(So carnal Christians can’t understand advanced doctrine. What else shows them to be selfish and worldly?)

### Carnal Christians fight over personal rights (3).

3:3

#### Sibling rivalry—that’s just life for kids. They haven’t learned how to compromise and get along.

#### But what a tragedy when this happens in the church.

#### What was the church jealous and quarreling about? Nothing is given except rallying around certain leaders.

##### I saw an example of this when friends showed me another publication advocating the King James Version.

##### This one is a specific attack on the NIV, saying the NIV is a translation that attacks the redemption, virgin birth, and deity of Christ.

##### It also accuses the NIV and Zondervan of being of Satan! And concerned mostly with making money.

##### The end of the chapter says, “But to us who are being saved, we cleave to the Good Book, the KJV, on which our beloved… Church was founded (he gives the name of the denomination). Over these five decades it has been our unfailing guide, lamp to our feet, light to our path.” Timothy Tow—Life BP

##### Now am I saying that we shouldn’t use the KJV? No, if it is a blessing to you, fine. But let’s not divide the body of Christ into those that are true Christians and false Christians based on some differences in translation that really don’t affect a single major doctrine! This really boils down to whether one is following their leader’s preferred translation.

### Carnal Christians also divide into personal-interest groups like unbelievers (4).

3:4

#### Rivalries are sometimes fueled by a fear of losing our own leadership spot.

##### A boss once approached one of his more ambitious men and told him, “I’ve had my eye on you. You’re a hard worker, and you’ve put in long hours. You’re very ambitious.”

##### “Thank you,” replied the employee.

##### Then the boss added, “So, consequently, I’m going to fire you. It’s men like you who start competing companies” (Hodgin #171).

##### Reminds me of how we can often feel threatened in the church too—so we’re jealous like verse 3 says.

#### The church thought that its blessings came from human leaders, so it argued over who blessed them most!

#### Dads, can you handle it when your kids cry, “I want Mom instead!”? I hope so.

#### But how sad when people in the church say, “I want Apollos to preach! This Paul guy bores me!” or “Don’t expect to find me at Men’s Meeting if so-and-so teaches!”

#### It’s also sad when we resist the unity God wants us to have with other God-fearing churches. This is seen if we hesitate to attend Christian events at other churches with whom we are in doctrinal agreement on major issues—like Good Friday.

MPI

(Paul is saying in verses 1-4 that divisiveness is a sure sign of carnality in the church. Instead, we need to be led by the Spirit. So how else do we attain unity? In the rest of the chapter he says to…)

# II. See all blessings as from God—not leaders (5-23).

MP

[We’re unified when we give God credit for our growth. We’re divided when we credit people.]

## Leaders—like us all—are only instruments of God accountable to Him (5-15).

Leaders

### You see, God causes church growth, not leaders (5-9).

• Growth

#### Paul’s saying here that ultimately all Christian leaders are merely servants with relatively insignificant roles compared to God’s role.

##### Isn’t this bad grammar to say, “What is Apollos?” and “What is Paul?” Shouldn’t this be “Who is Apollos?” and “Who is Paul?”

##### Yes, but Paul breaks normal grammar rules for his point—that he and Apollos are only instruments in His hands––as if they have no right to personhood!

#### Notice this apple in my hand.

##### “Who was more important to give this apple? The man who planted the seed? or the man who watered it?”

##### The answer, of course, is neither. The one who is most important is the One who gave the farmer the money to buy the seed and the strength and know-how to plant it! And this same One provided another enough money or rain for water to water it—and gave the one who waters the wisdom not to over-water or underwater so as to kill the seed!

#### The same is true in the church. Who is more important?

##### Tom Chandler and I who planted the seed that has grown into Crossroads? or Lewis who came along afterwards to water the seed—or Carol who came later handle our finances or Singpu to lead our worship?

##### We know that ultimately God is the one who has caused this church to grow.

##### Did you notice the emphasis on God in verse 9? “For we are *God’s* fellow workers; you are *God’s* field, *God’s* building.” The Greek has the word “God” first in each phrase to emphasize that the church did not grow from any man’s work. God was the real church planter, the real church grower.

(In verses 10-15 the metaphor changes from agriculture to construction where Paul says…)

### God will reward each believer’s service (10-15).

• reward

#### Paul established the church while Apollos built on this foundation (10-11).

##### Both had an equal role to play before God.

##### Besides, Christ Himself was the real foundation. What other foundation was being laid there at Corinth? He implies that the believers thought of certain leaders as their foundation.

(Now this issue of how one serves doesn’t apply just to Paul, Apollos and other Christian leaders! The following verses say that…)

#### Every believer’s service will be rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ (12-15).

Judgment

##### Here’s a key NT text on the rewards given to believers at Christ’s return. But is this judgment for unbelievers or rewards for believers?

Bema in Paul’s day

Corinth Market

###### In downtown Corinth archaeologists have unearthed the various shops in blue and temples in red—but also a “bema” seat, or judgment seat. In fact, this seat of power still exists today.

Bema exists

###### From the top of Acrocorinth you can see the city below with such a great view that…

View

Acrocorinth

###### You can see this huge platform below. Some graphic artist has made a diagram of this significant platform.

Speaker on top

Victim below

Main City

Close up

###### The speaker or judge stood above, and the one being judged stood below.

###### One source notes, “In Grecian games in Athens, the old arena contained a raised platform on which the president or umpire of the arena sat. From here he rewarded all the contestants; and here he rewarded all winners. It was called the ‘bema’ or ‘reward seat.’ It was never used of a judicial bench” (L. Sale-Harrison, *Judgment Seat of Christ*, 8; cited by Pentecost, Things to Come, 220). Really? Only a reward bench? That’s *one* usage.

• Really?

Rewards

###### To be completely honest, *bema* is also used of Jesus standing before Pilate on his judicial seat—on his chair above the crowd—and Acts 18 records the same about Paul being judged before Gallio in Corinth.

Jesus   
bema

Pilate   
bema

###### But two verses convince me that Paul has in mind only believers here:

Reward Seat

Verse 11: These people are building on Jesus Christ. Paul draws on their knowledge and applies it to believers being rewarded. Notice that unbelievers are not in view here.

Lasting materials

And, as verse 15 says, even the ones who receive no reward are still saved—though by the skin of their teeth.

Saved via fire

##### Verse 12 has six various materials we use to build on the foundation of Christ. What do these materials symbolize? They represent our works after salvation: either lasting (refined by fire) or temporal (burnt by fire).

Perishable materials

##### If you were to build a magnificent temple, what materials would you use?

###### Would you go get some sticks from your garden? In Paul’s day people built their homes out of wood, hay, or straw.

###### But to build a temple of such materials was unthinkable. And today to build a shopping centre or skyscraper out of straw would be preposterous!

###### Yet Christ says that some of us are building our spiritual service for Him with leftovers. And Christ himself will test our works with fire to see what’s left over after his purging eye.

Fire

(So verses 5-15 have told us that we shouldn’t divide over leaders because all leaders are equal—they will, and, in fact, each one of us will give Him an account of our service for Him. Now, in the final segment of this chapter we see who really does deserve our praise…)

SP A

## God deserves credit for our blessings, not any man (16-23). Why does He deserve credit?

SP B

### God indwells His church and will judge believers with death if needed (16-17).

• Indwells

#### What does it mean that, “if anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him”? Does this mean that believers who commit suicide won’t go to heaven? After all, won’t he be destroying “a temple of the Holy Spirit” like in 1 Corinthians 6:19?

##### No, this idea would contradict the eternal security of verse 15. The “you yourselves” is plural, so Paul has in mind the *whole* church as God’s temple. After all, that’s what the structure is in verses 9-15.

##### So this is not a reference like 6:19 where each believer is said to be a temple of the Spirit. That’s also why “temple” here is singular.

#### But then who is this that can “destroy the church” and what does it mean that, “God will destroy him”? There’s two ways to look at this.

##### One is that those who “destroy the church” are not Christians at all—and these will suffer hell for opposing the church. But if verse 16 refers to unbelievers, this isn’t consistent with verse 15, so it doesn’t seem as likely.

##### A better interpretation is that if an individual believer sins to the extent of doing great harm to the church, God will take his life. An actual example of this is 11:30 where some people in the church had died from abusing the Lord’s table. Ananias and Sapphira are another example in Acts 5. This view is consistent with verse 15 that refers to believers.

(In any case, the focus here is that God Himself is the one who indwells—so He deserves credit for our blessings, not men. Another reason to give God credit is in verses 18-20…)

### God provides true wisdom that is far better than our human “wisdom” (18-20).

• Wisdom

#### We’ve talked much about the uselessness of the world’s wisdom in church affairs.

#### Thank God that He has given us all the wisdom that we need right now! In fact…

### God eventually will give us every leader and everything in the world (21-23).

• Give everything

#### Paul is looking to the eventual possession of the earth by the saints—so guaranteed that he refers to this in the present tense.

#### He’s saying, “You think you’ve got to argue over who’s got the best leader? Just wait, and eventually you will have us all as leaders! In fact, the whole world will be yours! So stop fighting over it now. You’ll get what’s coming to you.”

• Give everything

# Conclusion

### Unity comes from seeing all blessings as from **God**—not from **leaders** (Main Idea).

MI

### Who blessed you? Me? Lewis? No, ultimately God has! All of us believers, like Paul and Apollos, are merely servants with the same purpose.

#### A mouse and an elephant once had to cross through a forest. So the mouse climbed up on the elephant’s head, grabbed an ear, and the elephant took off through the woods, smashing down trees and clearing a path through the dense foliage—the mouse all along holding on for dear life. After getting to the clearing on the other side, the mouse turned around and said, “Wow! Look what we did!”

Black

#### When we get to heaven we’re going to look back at our time on earth and realize that ultimately God was the Real Mover‚ and we had just hung on to Him.

### Any other exhortations here? What about this issue of the carnal Christian?

#### Let’s not get the idea that there’s no such thing as a carnal Christian. This is what some say who teach Lordship Salvation. This text clearly indicates that there are indeed believers who live in the power of the flesh.

Circles

#### Of course the other extreme is to think that you can trust Christ and there be absolutely no change in your life.

##### Even with these carnal Corinthians we still see *some* evidence of God’s work. In 1:6-7 Paul acknowledges that God had granted them every spiritual gift.

##### If Christ has made no difference in your life to this day, may I invite you to trust Him for salvation?

#### Yet the question for most of us who are Christians is: are you a carnal or a spiritual believer? How would you know? Remember the indicators in verses 1-4?

##### If you can’t handle advanced spiritual truths, you are carnal.

• Meat?

###### Are you growing in the meat or solid food of verse 2? If you still need milk, then you are a carnal Christian.

###### Carnality may be true of you because you *don’t see the blessings* in your life—or you attribute them to a *human* leader. Thank God himself!

##### Second, what are you doing to further unify this church?

• Unity?

###### We don’t have a divisiveness problem.

###### But please realize that whatever you do—whatever—either unites us or divides us. How’s your speech?

### Yes, God ultimately blesses us, but the church still needs leaders—so here is my challenge to the men at Crossroads. Join us Saturday for our men’s meeting.

Grace Baptist Church Dr. Rick Griffith

24 May 1998 Message #4

NIV 40 Minutes

**Who Blessed You?**

***1 Corinthians 3***

**Topic:** Divisions

**Subject:** The way to prevent divisions

**Complement:** is to see all blessings as ultimately from God—not from our leaders.

**Purpose:** The listeners will see all our blessings as ultimately from God—not our leaders.

# Introduction

### [Divisions are often based on selfish interests. Hodgin #169]

#### A Baptist preacher once received a call from a woman who was very upset over the death of her pet cat. She asked him to conduct a funeral service for Homer! The Baptist preacher explained that this was a little out of his line, and he referred her to a friend, a Presbyterian pastor down the street.

#### Later, the preacher learned that his Presbyterian friend had referred her to a Methodist minister, who had referred her to someone else.

#### About an hour later, she called the Baptist preacher back and she was still upset. The woman said she was at her wit’s end. She couldn’t find a preacher to conduct Homer’s services, and she didn’t know what to do. She said she planned to give $1000 to the church of the minister who performed this service for Homer. The Baptist preacher took only a moment to mull this over and then said to her, “Well, why didn’t you tell me Homer was a Baptist cat in the first place?!”

### Sometimes denominations can be helpful labels! But on the negative side, sometimes divisions are based on issues that really don’t matter.

### Sometimes I chuckle when guest speakers go to great lengths in their introductions to prove to us all that they really are Baptists at heart—even though they may be worshipping at another church!

### The ancient church at Corinth certainly was hung up on this issue of divisions—being in the “right group.”

### As we have been studying 1 Corinthians 1–2 Paul has been telling the Corinthians how to attain unity:

#### Focus on the positive (1:1-9).

#### Focus on the foolish—Christ crucified (1:18–2:5).

#### Focus on God’s wisdom (2:6-26).

#### These issues primarily relate to the *message*. Now let’s see how Paul focuses his attention on the *messengers* as we ask this same question again…

### Subject: What else do we need to grasp in order to have unity? The first four verses of 1 Corinthians 3 show us that…

# I. Divisions show we’re carnal—not spiritual (1-4).

[Arguing over certain leaders reveals we are worldly rather than led of the Spirit.]

[Spiritual Christians are united, carnal Christians are divided on trivial issues.]

## Notice how Paul said the Corinthians were carnal rather than spiritual (1).

### Chapter 2 contrasted believers and unbelievers—those with the Spirit and those without the Spirit. Now Paul gives another contrast which relates only to believers—between believers empowered by the flesh verses those empowered by the Spirit.

### What does it mean to be “worldly” (NIV)?

#### Actually, I like the NASB translation of “men of flesh” better here. When I think of infants, I don’t think of worldliness. But when I think of babies, I do think of flesh—that’s about all you get! No spiritual concerns at all!

#### The word here (sarkikovς) means “belonging to flesh,” or “like flesh” (Hanna 289).

#### This refers to self-centered Christians. Just as a baby is concerned only for himself, those of the world also look out only for their own interests.

##### Have you ever heard a baby say, “Oh, I’m so sorry I cried and embarrassed you! And sorry for that mess I made on the floor!”

##### No, babies are by nature selfish. These people who teach we are basically good from the start haven’t had kids!

### This word is similar to but different from another word in verse 3 (sarkinovς). The “worldly” in verse 3 means “made of flesh,” which is different than the “like flesh” of verse 1 (Hanna 289). It doesn’t refer to a carnal babe but rather to a carnal adult. This “made of flesh” person in verse 3 is not just unspiritual but anti-spiritual!

#### Have you ever seen a baby up here for baby dedication who cries and cries? You probably say to yourself, “Oh, she needs her nappy changed… or he didn’t get enough sleep… or some other legitimate excuse.”

#### Imagine, though, 20 years later and the same person comes before us for baptism. During her testimony she says, “Oh, I forgot to go potty! I woke up too early this morning and feel real tired so forget about me getting baptised today!”

#### So what’s wrong with that? What is appropriate for a baby is not appropriate years down the line when we’re expecting some signs of maturity.

### Paul is saying that older Christians in Corinth are acting like babies. You’ve heard the phrase, “You’ve got to look out for number one.” Who’s that? You, of course! That’s the world’s fleshly thinking: “Do yourself a favor… you deserve a break today”—so come spend your money at our restaurant! Why? Because as you are most important to you, so we are most important to us!

(This is what Paul means in verses 2-4 where he says that…)

## Carnality is seen in a selfish lifestyle (2-4). Three signs of selfishness are here. First…

### Carnal Christians can’t understand advanced doctrine as they’re too selfish to try (2-3a).

#### What would be some examples of “milk” doctrine verses “solid food”?

##### “Milk” includes basics of the faith such as the attributes of God, salvation by faith, eternal security, and the deity of Christ.

##### On the other hand, “solid food” refers to more mature matters like biblical leadership principles, how to interpret the Bible, etc.

#### Could it be that some of us here have been believers for many years but we are still worldly, fleshly, carnal?

##### What meat have you chewed in the Word lately—or are you still on formula?

##### One disturbing trend I see in our evangelical churches is that we hardly ever have any Bible studies straight from the Bible. We feel that we can’t just learn from God Himself without having a study guide of some sort. I’m not against study guides or books or teachers. I am involved in all of this! But too often *they* become our guide rather than the Word itself. Let’s get back into the meat of the Word—study a paragraph this week, everyone do their own study on the next paragraph or chapter, then come together to share our insights.

(So carnal Christians can’t understand advanced doctrine. What else shows them to be selfish and worldly?)

### Carnal Christians fight over personal rights (3b).

#### Sibling rivalry—that’s just life for kids. They haven’t learned how to compromise and get along.

#### But what a tragedy when this happens in the church.

#### What was the church jealous and quarreling about? Nothing is given except rallying around certain leaders.

##### I saw another example of this last week when friends in this church showed me another publication advocating the King James Version.

##### This one is a specific attack on the NIV, saying the NIV is a translation which attacks the redemption, virgin birth, and deity of Christ.

##### Yet the article never deals with the real issue.

###### You see, we don’t have the original autographs today—only copies of them called manuscripts. And these manuscripts are so much alike that no doctrine is affected, although they do fall into two major divisions.

###### The KJV was translated in 1611 from manuscripts available at that time. It was an excellent job of rendering the Bible into the language of their day.

###### But in the 400 years since the KJV, thousands of manuscripts have been discovered—and many of these are older and more reliable than those used for the KJV.

###### The problem is that the manuscripts for the KJV are slightly longer than those used to translate the NIV.

###### The article never once says that many older, more reliable manuscripts back the NIV and lack these phrases. Nor does he admit that the NIV upholds every one of these key doctrines in several other places in the NT.

##### It also accuses the NIV and Zondervan of being of Satan! And concerned mostly with making money.

##### The end of the chapter says, “But to us who are being saved, we cleave to the Good Book, the KJV, on which our beloved… Church was founded (he gives the name of the denomination). Over these five decades it has been our unfailing guide, lamp to our feet, light to our path.” Timothy Tow—Life BP

##### Now am I saying that we shouldn’t use the KJV? No, if it is a blessing to you, fine. But let’s not divide the body of Christ into those that are true Christians and false Christians based on some differences in translation which really don’t affect a single major doctrine!

#### Rivalries are often fueled by a fear of losing our own leadership spot.

##### A boss once approached one of his more ambitious men and told him, “I’ve had my eye on you. You’re a hard worker, and you’ve put in long hours. You’re very ambitious.”

##### “Thank you,” replied the employee.

##### Then the boss added, “So, consequently, I’m going to fire you. It’s men like you who start competing companies” (Hodgin #171).

##### Reminds me of how we can often feel threatened in the church too—so we’re jealous like verse 3 says.

### Carnal Christians also divide into personal-interest groups like unbelievers (4).

#### The church thought that its blessings came from human leaders, so it argued over who blessed them most!

#### Dads, can you handle it when your kids cry, “I want Mom instead!”? I hope so.

#### But how sad when people in the church say, “I want Apollos to preach! This Paul guy bores me!” or “Don’t expect to find me at GBS if so-and-so teaches!”

#### It’s also sad when we resist the unity God wants us to have with other God-fearing churches. This is seen if we feel threatened by Christian events sponsored by other churches with whom we are in doctrinal agreement on major issues.

(You see, Paul is saying in verses 1-4 that divisiveness is a sure sign of carnality in the church. Instead, we need to be led by the Spirit. So how else do we attain unity? In the rest of the chapter he says to recognize that…)

# II. All blessings come from God—not leaders (5-23).

[We’re unified when we give God credit for our growth. We’re divided when we credit people.]

## Leaders—like us all—are only instruments of God accountable to Him (5-15).

### You see, God causes church growth, not leaders (5-9).

#### Paul’s saying here that ultimately all Christian leaders are merely servants with relatively insignificant roles compared to God’s role.

##### Isn’t this bad grammar to say, “What is Apollos?” and “What is Paul?” Shouldn’t this be “Who is Apollos?” and “Who is Paul?”

##### Yes, Paul breaks the normal rules of grammar to make his point—that he and Apollos are only instruments in His hands, almost as if they have no right to claim personhood!

#### This afternoon when you eat lunch, ask yourself—or your kids—this question.

##### Pick up the apple (or whatever fruit or vegetable you have) and ask, “Who was more important to give us this apple? The man who planted the seed? or the man who watered it?” Then wait for an answer.

##### The answer, of course, is neither. The one who is most important is the One who gave the farmer the money to buy the seed and the strength and know-how to plant it! And this same One provided another enough money or rain for water to water it—and gave the one who waters the wisdom not to over-water or underwater so as to kill the seed!

#### The same in the church. Who is more important?

##### Dr. P who planted the seed which grew into Grace Baptist? or Pastor Ooi or Pastor Rick or Pastor Chin or the Graces?

##### We all know that ultimately God is the one who has caused this church to grow.

##### Did you notice the emphasis on God in verse 9? “For we are *God’s* fellow workers; you are *God’s* field, *God’s* building.” The Greek has the word “God” first in each phrase to emphasize that the church did not grow from any man’s work. God was the real church planter, the real church grower.

(In verses 10-15 the metaphor changes from agriculture to construction where Paul says…)

### God will reward each believer’s service (10-15).

#### Paul established the church while Apollos built on this foundation (10-11).

##### Both had an equal role to play before God.

##### Besides, Christ Himself was the real foundation. What other foundation was being laid there at Corinth? The implication is that the believers thought of certain leaders as their foundation.

(Now this issue of how one serves doesn’t apply just to Paul, Apollos and other Christian leaders! The following verses say that…)

#### Every believer’s service will be rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ (12-15).

##### Here’s the key NT text on the rewards given to believers at Christ’s return.

###### Notice that unbelievers are not in view here. These people are building on Jesus Christ.

###### And, as verse 15 says, even the ones who receive no reward are still saved—though by the skin of their teeth.

##### Verse 12 lists six different materials we use to build on the foundation of Christ.

###### What do these materials symbolize? They represent our works before God after salvation: either lasting (refined by fire) or temporal (burnt by fire).

###### Notice how the materials are cheaper and cheaper as you read on.

##### If you were going to build a magnificent temple, what materials would you use?

###### Would you go get some sticks from your garden? In Paul’s day people built their homes out of wood, hay, or straw.

###### But to build a temple of such materials was unthinkable. And today to build a shopping centre or skyscraper out of straw would be preposterous!

###### Yet Christ says that some of us are building our spiritual service for Him with the leftovers in our lives.

(So verses 5-15 have told us that we shouldn’t divide over leaders because all leaders are equal—they will, and, in fact, each one of us will give Him an account of our service for Him. Now, in the final segment of this chapter we see who really does deserve our praise…)

## God deserves credit for our blessings, not any man (16-23). Why does He deserve credit?

### God indwells His church and will judge individuals with death if needed (16-17).

#### What does it mean that “if anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him”? Does this mean that believers who commit suicide won’t go to heaven? After all, won’t he be destroying “a temple of the Holy Spirit” like in 1 Corinthians 6:19?

##### No, this idea would contradict the eternal security of verse 15. The “you yourselves” is plural, so Paul has in mind the *whole* church as God’s temple. After all, that’s what the structure is in verses 9-15.

##### So this is not a reference like 6:19 where each believer is said to be a temple of the Spirit. That’s also why “temple” here is singular.

#### But then who is this that can “destroy the church” and what does it mean that “God will destroy him”? There’s two ways to look at this.

##### One is that those who “destroy the church” are not Christians at all—and these will suffer hell for opposing the church. But if verse 16 refers to unbelievers, this isn’t consistent with verse 15, so it doesn’t seem as likely.

##### A better interpretation is that if an individual believer sins to the extent of doing great harm to the church, God will take his life. An actual example of this is 11:30 where some people in the church had died from abusing the Lord’s table. Ananias and Sapphira are another example in Acts 5. This view is consistent with verse 15 that refers to believers.

(In any case, the focus here is that God Himself is the one who indwells—so He deserves credit for our blessings, not men. Another reason to give God credit is in verses 18-20…)

### God provides true wisdom which is far better than our human “wisdom” (18-20).

#### We’ve talked much about the uselessness of the world’s wisdom in church affairs.

#### Thank God that He has given us all the wisdom that we need right now! In fact…

### God eventually will give us every leader and everything in the world (21-23).

#### Paul is looking to the eventual possession of the earth by the saints—so guaranteed that he refers to this in the present tense.

#### He’s saying, “You think you’ve got to argue over who’s got the best leader? Just wait, and eventually you will have us all as leaders! In fact, the whole world will be yours! So stop fighting over it now. You’ll get what’s coming to you.”

# Conclusion

### So the way to prevent divisions is to see all blessings as ultimately from God (M.I.).

### Who blessed you? Dr. P? Other pastors? Bill Gothard? No, ultimately God has! All of these believers, like Paul and Apollos, are merely servants with the same purpose.

#### A mouse and an elephant once had to cross through a forest. So the mouse climbed up on the elephant’s head, grabbed an ear, and the elephant took off through the woods, smashing down trees and clearing a path through the dense foliage—the mouse all along holding on for dear life. After getting to the clearing on the other side, the mouse turned around and said, “Wow! Look what we did!”

#### When we get to heaven we’re going to look back at our time on earth and realize that ultimately God was the Real Mover‚ and we had just hung on to Him.

### Any other exhortations here? What about this issue of the carnal Christian?

#### Let’s not get the idea that there’s no such thing as a carnal Christian. This is what John MacArthur teaches as he advocates his Lordship Salvation view. This text clearly indicates that there are indeed believers who live in the power of the flesh.

#### Of course the other extreme is to think that we can trust Christ and there be absolutely no change in our life.

##### Even with these carnal Corinthians we still see *some* evidence of God’s work. In 1:6-7 Paul acknowledges that God had granted them every spiritual gift.

##### If Christ has made no difference in your life to this day, may I invite you to trust Him for salvation?

#### Yet the question for most of us here who are Christians is this: are you a carnal or a spiritual believer? How would you know? Remember the indicators in verses 1-4?

##### If you can’t handle advanced spiritual truths, you are carnal.

###### Do you love God’s Word? Do you read it daily?

###### If not, I’d suggest that you make the commitment that one of you already has made: “No Bible, no breakfast.”

##### Second, do you unify or divide this church?

###### If your speech tears down others, leading to divisiveness, you are carnal.

###### The solution? Repent—turn from this sin and be restored to the Lord.

### For us all, God says in this text that we are all accountable to Him. Let’s be rewarded fully from the One who has already blessed us incredibly and promised us even more!

**Preliminary Questions**

**Verses Questions**

Context What did the author record just prior to this passage? Paul just finished telling them that their divisions could be solved by seeking God’s wisdom. He contrasted two types of people: believers (who have the Spirit) and unbelievers (who don’t have the Spirit).

Purpose Why is this passage in the Bible? Now Paul contrasts two types of believers alone to reveal how carnal Christians ignore the equality among the saints.

Background What historical context helps understand this passage? The Corinthian church had been started by Paul (summer 51-Sept 52) then followed by Apollos a year later (Sept 53). Now, three years after Apollos’ ministry began, Paul writes them (early spring 56). Only some of the believers remember him.

1 Why couldn’t Paul deal with the church as spiritual believers? Because of their divisions.

What does it mean to be “worldly” or “carnal”? This refers to self-centered Christians—as a baby is concerned only for himself and just as the world looks out only for its own interests.

2 What would be some examples of “milk” doctrine verses “solid food”? “Milk” includes basics of the faith such as the attributes of God, salvation by faith, eternal security, deity of Christ. On the other hand, “solid food” refers to biblical leadership principles, how to interpret the Bible, using Greek and Hebrew, textual criticism, etc.

3 What was the church jealous and quarreling about? Nothing is given except rallying around certain leaders (e.g., Timothy Tow).

4 What does it mean to be “mere men”? It means to act like non-Christians!

5 Isn’t this bad grammar to say, “What is Apollos?” and “What is Paul?” Shouldn’t this be “Who is Apollos?” and “Who is Paul?” Yes, Paul breaks the normal rules of grammar to make his point—that he and Apollos are only instruments in His hands, almost as if they have no right to claim personhood!

6 What does the planting and watering refer to? Paul was the church planter and Apollos an early pastor.

10 Is Paul boasting about being “an expert builder”? No, for he says that this was: (a) all by God’s grace (10a) and (b) simply his task before God (5).

11 What other foundation was being laid there at Corinth? The implication is that the believers thought of certain leaders as their foundation.

12 What do these materials symbolize? They represent our works before God: either lasting (refined by fire) or temporal (burnt by fire).

13 When is this Judgment Day? This is the judgment seat of Christ for believers.

17 What does it mean that “If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him”? Does this mean that believers who commit suicide won’t go to heaven? After all, he would be destroying “a temple of the Holy Spirit” (cf. 6:19). No, such a thought is contrary to the eternal security of verse 15. The “you yourselves” is plural, meaning that Paul has in mind the whole church as God’s building or temple (cf. vv. 9-15; cf. 1 Pet. 2:5). That’s why “temple” is singular. So this is not a reference like 6:19 where each believer is said to be a temple of the Spirit.

But then what does it mean to “destroy the church” and “God will destroy him”? There’s two ways to look at this. One is that if an individual believer sins to the extent of doing great harm to the church, God will take his life. An actual example of this is 11:30 where certain people in the church had died from abusing the Lord’s table. Ananias and Sapphira are another example in Acts 5. This view is consistent with verse 15 that refers to believers.

Another interpretation is that those who “destroy the church” are not Christians at all—and these will suffer eternal punishment for opposing God’s church. This would make verse 16 contrast with verse 15.

21 Does the “all things are yours” indicate sarcasm or is Paul looking to the eventual possession of the earth by the saints? Or does he mean “All these Christian leaders belong to the whole church” (NIVSB, 1740)?

**Tentative Subject/Complement Statements**

Carnal Christians ignore the equality among the saints, which leads to divisions.

“In this passage Paul continues the theme of godly wisdom as the key to growth in the Christian faith, which 2:6-16 introduced” (Blomberg, 72).

**Possible Illustrations**

KJV-only attacks by Timothy Tow

Call to unity with Lawrence Khong

City-wide displays of unity

Baptist-wide associations (Asian Baptist Congress)

Ahhhhhchooooo! “Bless you!” you say. But have you ever asked why we say that? Because blessings come from God. The old German belief was that when a person sneezed, he dismissed his spirit. So people started saying “Gesundheit!” to restore it. Translated, this means, “Bless you!”

**Who Blessed You?**

***1 Corinthians 3***

**Exegetical Outline**

***Exegetical Idea:* The way to church unity for the selfish Corinthians was to see that the source of its blessings was God, not its leaders.**

# I. Problem: The divisions in the Corinthians revealed them to be carnal and selfish (1-4).

## The classification of believers in which Paul placed the Corinthians was carnal rather than spiritual (1).

## The evidences of carnal Corinthian believers was seen in their selfish lifestyle (2-4).

### They couldn’t understand doctrine beyond the basics like a newborn baby can’t understand mature things (2-3a).

### They fought with one another based on personal rights (3b).

### They divided into personal-interest groups just like unbelievers (4).

# II. Solution: The way to unity was for the Corinthians to see that God gave the church blessings, not man (5-23).

## Leaders—like us all—are only instruments of God accountable to Him (5-15).

### God causes church growth, not leaders (5-9).

### God will reward each believer’s service, including Paul and Apollos’ (10-15).

#### Paul established the church while Apollos built on this foundation (10a).

#### Every believer’s service will be rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ (10b-15).

## The One who deserves credit in Corinth is God, not any man (16-23).

### God indwelt the church and will judge individuals with death if needed (16-17).

### God’s true wisdom needed to replace the members’ human “wisdom” (18-20).

### God would eventually give the church every leader and everything in the world (21-23).

**Homiletical Outline** (Cyclical inductive form)

# Introduction

### [Divisions are often based on selfish interests: Homer, the Baptist cat/Baptist speakers]

### Paul told the Corinthians how to attain unity: positive, Christ crucified, wisdom.

### Subject: How can we have unity?

# I. Don’t be carnal by following only your favorite leader (1-4).

## The Corinthians were carnal—spiritual (1a; contrast, sarkikos-baby/nos-test, #1, Macs).

## Carnality is seen in a selfish lifestyle (1b-4).

### Carnal Christians can’t understand advanced doctrine (1b-2; milk v. Meat, Bible study).

### Carnal Christians fight over personal rights (3; sibling rivalry & KJV/NIV, boss).

### Carnal Christians divide into personal-interest groups (4; Mommy! Apollos! GBS! city).

(So how else do we attain unity? We need to see that…)

# II. See all blessings as from God—not leaders (5-23).

## Leaders—like us all—are only instruments of God accountable to Him (5-15).

### God causes church growth, not leaders (5-9; grammar, apple, God in v. 9).

### God will reward each believer’s service (10-15).

#### Paul established the church but Apollos built on this foundation (10a; equal, Christ).

#### Every believer’s service will be rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ (10b-15; believers, materials, temple).

## God deserves credit for our blessings, not any man (16-23).

### God indwells the church and will judge individuals with death if needed (16-17; suicide, temple = church, destroyer = unbel. vs. believer).

### God provides true wisdom that is far better than our human “wisdom” (18-20).

### God eventually will give us every leader and everything in the world (21-23).

# Conclusion

### Unity comes from seeing all blessings as from God—not from leaders (Main Idea).

### Who blessed you? Pastors? (Mouse and elephant)

### No Carnal v. No Change (gospel)— you advancing (No Bible, No breakfast), unifying?

### For us all, God says in this text that we are all accountable to Him. Let’s be rewarded fully from the One who has already blessed us incredibly and promised us even more!

Rick Griffith

25 March 2007



Who Blessed You?

*1 Corinthians 3*

# Introduction

How can we have \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_?

# I. Don’t be carnal by following only your favorite leader (1-4).

Carnality is a selfish lifestyle in three ways:

# II. See all blessings as from God—not leaders (5-23).

## Leaders—like us all—are only instruments of God accountable to Him (5-15).

## God deserves credit for our blessings, not any man (16-23).

# Conclusion

### Unity comes from seeing all blessings as from God—not from leaders (Main Idea).

### Who blessed you?

# A Look at Our Articles: What church structure will God use to bless us?

### Congregational Authority

### Elder Leadership

### How does congregational authority relate to elders?

a. Leadership by elders and congregational authority are not contradictory

b. Ultimate authority in the local church rests with the congregation but these people should be led by elders

### Our Timetable

a. Elder Nominations: April 1-15

b. Elder Interviews: May 4-15

c. Membership: May 6

d. Elder Confirmations: May 6-20

Rick Griffith

25 March 2007



Who Blessed You?

*1 Corinthians 3*

# Introduction

How can we have \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_?

# I. Don’t be \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_by following only your favorite \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (1-4).

Carnality is a selfish lifestyle in three ways:

# II. See all \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_as from \_\_\_\_\_\_\_—not leaders (5-23).

## Leaders—like us all—are only instruments of God accountable to Him (5-15).

## God deserves credit for our blessings, not any man (16-23).

# Conclusion

### Unity comes from seeing all blessings as from \_\_\_\_\_\_\_—not from \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (Main Idea).

### Who blessed you?

# A Look at Our Articles: What church structure will God use to bless us?

### Congregational Authority

### Elder Leadership

### How does congregational authority relate to elders?

a. Elder leadership and congregational authority are not \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

b. Ultimate authority in the local church rests with the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_but these people should be led by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

### Our Timetable

a. Elder Nominations: April 1-15

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 **Rick Griffith**

30 September 2012

*Message 4 of 24 in “Becoming Who We Are” 1 Corinthians Series*

**Who Blessed You?**

***1 Corinthians 3***

# Introduction

How can we maintain \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ unity?

# I. Don’t be \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ carnal by following only your favorite \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ leader (1-4).

Carnality is a selfish lifestyle in three ways:

### Carnal Christians can’t understand advanced doctrine (1-2).

### Carnal Christians fight over personal rights (3).

### Carnal Christians divide into personal-interest groups (4).

# II. See all \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ blessings as from \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ God—not leaders (5-23).

## Leaders—like us all—are only instruments of God accountable to Him (5-15).

### God causes church growth, not leaders (5-9).

### God will reward each believer’s service (10-15).

#### Paul established the church but Apollos built on this foundation (10a).

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### God provides true wisdom that is far better than our human “wisdom” (18-20).

### God eventually will give us every leader and everything in the world (21-23).

# Conclusion

### Unity comes from seeing all blessings as from \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ God —not from \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ leaders (Main Idea).

### Who blessed you?

Home Group Questions:

1. Read 1 Corinthians 3 aloud. In the columns below, list the *responsibilities to maintain church unity* for both the leaders and the congregation:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Leader Roles** | **Follower Roles** |
| Servants (3:5) | Be mature (3:1-3) |
| Instruments (3:7) | Preserve unity (3:4) |
| Be God’s workers (3:9) | Build with good materials (3:12) |
|  |  |

1. How do verses 5-9 help you give God (not any man) credit for growth at Crossroads?

God used Paul to plant a church in the most immoral city of the Roman Empire

God raised up leaders who had never planted a church before

Shannah just trust Christ two months ago

God blesses us in spite of us

1. What is the difference between the various building materials in verse 12? Can you correlate them to specific acts of service in your own Christian experience?

Some are temporary rewards while others are lasting rewards

Some are with bad motivation while others are with good motivation

1. What prayer do you need to pray to better guard unity in our church?