

UNITED to build God's Temple

1 Corinthians 3:1-23

MPS: God builds His church by uniting His servants to labor in His wisdom.

OBJ: Every person can understand laboring in God's wisdom to build the church by 5 shifts.

INTRO We are in a new series entitled UNITED: Together in the Gospel, a study of 1 Corinthians. IN this series we are laboring for one thing, to live as a people united in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

ILLUS In *Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win*, Jocko Willink and Leif Babin recount a story of the final portion of Navy SEAL training. The SEALs are in teams of 6 and successively running the same exercises. Each time, the winning team gets to sit out and rest the next round. All the men are exhausted in every capacity. The exercise is designed to help them learn unity and relying on their team. Team 2 was having trouble, yelling, cursing and blaming each other and losing every challenge. Their leader was unable to bring them together. Team 6, on the other hand, was led by a strong leader. They were working well together and winning every time they competed. In an effort to test both teams they switched the leaders. By the next challenge Team 2 won and a complete turnaround had taken place. **Unity makes all the difference because it fuels God's people for kingdom mission in the world.**

TRANS 1 Corinthians 3 helps us look at the difference unity makes in the church and how we as the church labor together.

MPS: God builds His church by uniting His servants to labor in His wisdom.

OBJ: I want us to see 5 SHIFTS every person must make in the church to move from worldly to Godly wisdom in building God's Temple. Each person must make each of the five shifts. And, we will likely find that one or more is especially challenging for us. The point is, watch yourself and ask, "which do I need to most focus on in my own life, thinking and serving?"

#1: Shift of nature; from "being merely human" to "Gospel-centered, Spirit-fueled people". .1-4

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ²I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, ³for 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? ⁴For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human?

TRANS This first shift means recognizing the "new" person God has made us in Jesus to live out of our new nature.

Paul addresses the main problem in the Corinthian church. They remain as "infants" instead of growing Christians, as they were when he was with them. Though Christians, they continued to live out of their flesh. Divisions always arise when Christians persist to live in the flesh. Divisions in the church stunt the growth of the church. **Christians who live out of the flesh deny their new identity and thwart gospel growth in the church.**

Jealousy and strife among them demonstrated their flesh-driven lives. Tensions and competitions always exist among those driven by the flesh. Divisions arise when people choose sides to validate their opinions or fortify their positions. We don't need any specific issue. The flesh causes us to create divisions on every issue. Paul calls this "being merely human". Nothing is wrong with being human, except when you use it to avoid living and growing spiritually. **God created us as humans, but he saves us to redeem our humanity and live as spiritual people.**

Two distinctives guide Christians in unity, and destroy divisions. First, "the word of the cross" centers the Christian life and the church.(1:18) The gospel sources the Christian life in health, growth and maturity. **The gospel proves unlimited in power and bottomless in wisdom for the person who dares to mine its riches and plunge its depths.** Second, Holy Spirit empowers Christians to live in godly wisdom. The Spirit leads us to discern all of life and guards us from condemnation in

life.(2:15) The Christian who walks in the Spirit enjoys the intimacy of God's presence and the fellowship of unity among God's people. When Christians live Gospel-centered, Spirit-filled lives, they put down personal agendas and competitions to build up 'together with one another' in the church.

#1: God wills that Christians shift from living as "merely human" to Gospel-centered, Spirit-fueled lives.

#2: Shift of perspective; from choosing sides to all serving God's work. .5-9

⁵What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. ⁸He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. ⁹For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

TRANS This second shift addresses how we view all that is happening in the church. All that gets done in the church is for one reason, so God can do what only He can do.

Paul addresses the root of their division. People in Corinth reflected their secular world in judging people by their privileges, status and wealth. People were doing this in the church too.¹ They chose which leaders they wanted to follow by outward strengths and gifts that they most valued from a worldly perspective. The leaders didn't create the divisions, but the people exalted them to validate their own divisions. The people wanted to exalt the leaders to satisfy their demand for and win the competition they held from a worldly perspective. *When Christians hold to worldly values, they reduce the church to just another venue to satisfy fleshly pleasures.*

Paul reminds the Corinthians that regardless of what work each one performed, it all served one purpose and goal. True servants always direct their work to the right object of glory. No one servant in the church was responsible, but God was the one that gave the growth. *God uses the labors of all His people in the church, but it is always God that provides the growth.*

When the church is united, every servant serves one Lord. They understand that the ultimate goal is greater than any one winning or achieving over the other. When people rest and trust in unity, they feel no need to pit one leader against another or to celebrate one servant or ministry over the other. When leaders rest and trust in unity, they are free to serve one another. Leaders must lead out of unity or the church will never live in unity. *Unity frees everyone to serve together, knowing that every servant will receive his reward from God.*

When everyone serves together, God gives the growth. We serve while we wait and watch because we want God to show up. When the church shifts from "choosing sides" to "united servants that exalt God's work", everyone focuses on one unifying glory, that God works among His people to do what only He can do. *The aim of all united servants in the church is this one glory, "...but only GOD gives the growth".*

ILLUS "But God" is the moment in every story that we await. These moments are not random acts to surprise us, but faithful expressions that unite us. Wherever you are, whatever you do, whomever you are with, no matter what is happening, we all await God's work that gives the growth. May the mantra of LifePoint be "and God gave the growth."

#2: God builds His church when Christians shift from "choosing sides" to "all serving God's work."

#3: Shift of purpose; from competition to take care how we serve. .10-15

¹⁰According 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. ¹¹For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which

¹ D. A. Carson et al., eds., *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1166.

is Jesus Christ. ¹²Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— ¹³each 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. ¹⁴If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

TRANS This third shift brings a strong sense of personal responsibility to each Christian for how they serve so the church can flourish.

Paul reminds the Corinthians of his work in order to evaluate their own work and motives. He laid the only foundation of Jesus Christ. Some tried to establish other 'foundations' and mislead people into following them. Others were making a mockery of the church by using it for selfish purposes of gain, indulgence and pleasure. Paul warns that both of these would only hurt themselves and the church. And, they would be discovered. When "the Day" comes, a reference to God's appointed time for judgment, the true motives of their service would be revealed, and they would be rewarded accordingly. [One may slight the Lord in serving Him for a time, but only service that honors Him will last and produce an eternal reward.](#)

Three confessions help every Christian heed his counsel. **First**, God's grace is the supply for all our abilities, in natural talent and spiritual gifting. When we believe our service gets supplied by our ability, we dismiss God and bolster our pride through self-sufficiency. Christians serve out of the overflowing supply of grace that God gives to our life. Anything less is insufficient for the church. **Second**, we practice to hone our craft to mastery. "Grace" is never justification for "lazy". No matter what you do in the church, every person should study and practice to master their service. **ILLUS** My mother always reminded me, "Jesus deserves your best in everything you do." When the church gets your last effort instead of your best, and especially when the church tolerates laziness from its leaders, that is the first abhorrent, false witness to Jesus' Lordship. **Third**, we serve in such a way to ensure that when others build upon our service it makes their serving stronger, more encouraging and glorious. Nothing that gets done in the church is in isolation. All serving is intricately interlinked and networked to depend upon others. [A faithful confession shapes our serving as much as our serving manifests our true confession of Jesus' Lordship.](#)

Servants give careful attention to how they serve for the sake of a faithful testimony to Jesus Christ. Paul didn't say he was a skilled, master craftsman. He said his work was "like". He uses a metaphor to make his point. Skilled master craftsmen do not achieve that title without careful attention to every detail of their work, practiced over an extended period of time, and with many failures and imperfections. Few will be labeled a master at your craft among the masses of the world. But anyone can give careful attention to how they serve so that it matters to faithfully represent the Lord Jesus Christ. The skill and craft of a master demonstrates much about the skilled, master craftsman. [Your serving says something about you and what you believe about the Lord Jesus.](#)

When we recognize Jesus is the only foundation and all our serving extends from Him, then what we do and how we do it becomes of utmost importance. We can let go of any and all competition with others and strive to excel for the sake of Christ and His community. [When built on the foundation of the Gospel, every act of service bears witness to the Lordship of Jesus.](#)

When we build with precious and valuable materials, testing refines to greater beauty. Sometimes precious and valuable materials are finely tuned messages or strings on an instrument. And sometimes they are perfectly timed hugs. When our serving is built on the Lord Jesus, it removes the pressure to perform perfectly in the moment because Jesus is using it for an eternal impact. It doesn't mean testing won't be hard. It does mean it will result in greater beauty and reward that proves it was worth it. [True servants serve out of love for the Lord Jesus and in anticipation of His great reward.](#)

- ? How is your serving? Are other people blessed and Jesus adorned because you served them with your "craft"?
- ? Is LifePoint more eternally beautiful because of your service?
- ? Do you serve in such a way so that a test refines for greater glory and reward, and not consumes your work?

#3: [God wants His people to live out His eternal purpose in life and serve for glory that He might reward them.](#)

#4: **Shift of focus; from “church for me” to God’s Temple. .16-17**

¹⁶Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.

TRANS This fourth shift moves us from understanding that it’s not about “me”, but “we” so each person can give personal priority to the gathering, service and ministry of the church.

This shift represents a major change of focus. The church must train every person that we are not a purveyor of services to improve your life, but a people of redemption within which God wants to radically redeem your life. **The only thing crazier than the promise that God might make one of us holy is this, that by faith in Jesus He would dare to make us all holy.**

Christian, God’s Spirit lives in you and builds you together with His people for His holy purposes. Every “you” in verse 16 and 17 is plural. **So, what does that mean for us?** God’s not talking to you (singular) but to you (plural). You (singular) are part of what God is saying and doing. But you (plural) are His Temple, His habitation and the ones He is building. You (singular) are important to God. But you (plural) are His precious focus, His glorious place of habitation, His Temple. And each of you (singular) should shift your focus to make you (plural) a priority for His glory. **God’s glory, what we most desire, is most powerful when His Temple is fully intact, without fracture, crack or weakness.**

The gathered body of Christ is God’s precious Temple, His dwelling place. NEVER come into this house and fail to expect God to show up in His Temple. Look around. God is up to something BIG, BIGGER than me, than you or than any one of us. **What this verse says about the people in this church shatters any self-serving focus one could hold for the church.** When you (singular) get together, you (plural) should come “peaked” with great anticipation and expectation. **God is uniquely present with eternal glory among the gathering of His saints in the local church.**

People who live as ‘mere human beings’ in the church and work their wiles to create divisions will answer directly to God for it. When you mess with the church out of personal and worldly values and ways, you pick a fight with God. **God doesn’t put up with those who work to destroy his Temple.** *For God’s temple is holy, and you (plural) are that temple.*

#4: God desires that His people live as one, where His presence is most powerful and his glory most potent.

#5: **Shift of conviction; from worldly wisdom to God-boasting. .18-23**

¹⁸Let 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. ¹⁹For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their craftiness,” ²⁰and again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.” ²¹So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, ²²whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, ²³and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.

TRANS This fourth shift is cumulative of all the others, where what we understand about God, about ourselves and about God’s work becomes the defining conviction of life. This is the shift where we judge all things by Spirit-discernment through “the word of the cross” that we might enjoy all things to boast in God.

Paul’s teaching cannot remain a theoretical concept to weigh against other worldly theories. He warns that no one allow themselves to be deceived in this way. Wordly wisdom is a snare that always captures. Those thoughts are already known by God and proven to be worthless. **Worldly wisdom is folly to God that only leads to futility.**

The only wisdom that matters is worthy of our eternal boasting. When we live and walk in God’s wisdom, all of life is an opportunity to boast in God. Nothing is outside his domain or control. **The eternal redemption that God works through Christ Jesus provides a un-limited supply of boasting material, un-limited praise and glory.**

- ? Has God-boasting become a conviction for you, giving Him praise in all of life for all things?
- ? What have you failed to boast in God for today? Is He not worthy?

#5: God wants to do greater things through THIS church, LifePoint, so we can boast in His great work for glory.

CLOSE These five shifts move the church from divisions among us to UNITED in Jesus Christ.

- ? **What one or two shifts do you most need to focus on today?**