

Spiritual Growth

Building up the Body of Christ

BY PASTOR MIKE MACINTOSH



I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?

1 Corinthians 3:2-3

Carnal Christians

When you were a toddler, it took time just to get off the floor and balance. Even when you gained balance and coordination, you couldn't get up and start running until your muscles had developed, enabling you to walk.

Stay close to Jesus and allow people to build into your life. But be careful how you build on it.

In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul is talking to people who should have been way down the road in their Christian experience; yet they still don't have the most basic of skills—how to receive. Paul has to take them back to the ABCs of the Christian walk so they can get off the baby bottle and start eating with a fork. He calls these people carnal Christians. Verse 3 defines carnality: If envy or other works of the flesh master you, if you behave like mere men who have never known God, you have not matured as a Christian. You are carnal.

Carnal people have always been in the church and still are today. A carnal Christian has 1½ of their two feet in the world and half a foot in the church. A carnal Christian is worldly minded, not heavenly minded. He tries to restrain himself from living out his heart's lusts but is frustrated and sometimes crosses the line.

We look at people like this and think, *How could they be like that?* Then we realize, *Oh—it's us.* There may be simple things in our lives that are keeping us from receiving more spiritually. For the Corinthians, the issue was envy and competition.

Game Plan

In verses 4-7 we learn that these Christians were siding up behind the big-name preachers of their time. Paul points out, *“neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase”* (verse 7b). Spiritual growth doesn't come from bestselling authors or vibrant teachers, but through God alone. Therefore, a person who preaches is not more powerful or spiritual than any other member of the body of Christ. Planters and waterers are on the same team!

Now, I like football. Just as each player has his position on the field, God has gifted each of us with a position in the church body. In football, if you are responsible to hike the ball and block the guy in front of you, that's what you do. As a believer, you are only accountable for what God has given you the ability to do. It's great to know there's a person smiling at the church's front door—that may be your position. Wherever you serve in the church—in the café, directing traffic, music ministry—you're called to play that position to the best of your ability, even on the days you would rather not see anyone.

Paul also says *“each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor”* (verse 8b). The reward isn't based on position or power, but on the level of obedience. To illustrate, let's say I had the ability to lift 100 pounds, but I settled for 30 or 40. You could only lift 30 or 40, but you did that. You would receive a greater reward than I because I wasted my ability. When you stand before God for your reward, He may say, “You were a businessman, and you used your time, money, and influence for Me.” Or, “You were a teacher, and you prayed for each group of children that came through.” Whatever gift God has given you, use it for His glory, not the world's.

Build on a Good Foundation

For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:9-11

Many people confuse Christianity with going to a building when in reality it's about being the building. Paul's position was as the master builder, or architect, of the Christian body. He was given understanding of everything that needed to be done, from laborers to engineers. Our job is to follow those instructions. The great news is that God works with us—we are His fellow workers. Ephesians 2:10 tells us we are also His workmanship, the Greek word *poema*—an artistic endeavor.

Think of a mosaic, made of thousands of tiny chips. A few missing pieces, however, throws off the whole picture. Each person in the body of Christ is crucial, and therefore, each of us must “take heed”—those two words are emphasized in the original writing. Stay close to Jesus and allow people to build into your life. But be careful how you build on it. Are you walking with the right people, doing the right things, or lowering your standards? Do you carve out time to sit and listen to God? Do you act on what He has shown you? How are you building for God in your heart? 🙌

Mike MacIntosh established Horizon Christian Fellowship in 1974 and is the organizer of an international evangelical outreach called Festival of Life. His book, When Your World Falls Apart, documents relief efforts in New York City after 9/11. He has written several books, including Finding God and Falling in Love with the Bible.