



1 CORINTHIANS – FACT SHEET 4

Chapter 3:

Up to now, the Apostle has been speaking largely in the past tense with regards the Corinthians; encouraging them to, ‘think of what (they) were’ (1:26); their calling (1:2,26), baptisms (1:13); the first time ‘I came to you’ (2:1). Chapter 3 also commences recalling those early founding days of Paul’s work in Corinth, how Paul amongst the new Corinthian converts had to address them, ‘as mere infants in Christ’ (3:1).

Within this chapter, Paul encourages the Corinthians to be **a mature people**. We can consider this in four ways:

First – they are to be mature in their LEARNING:1-4:

As new converts, it was understandable that when Paul first ministered amongst them, he gave them spiritual ‘milk’ (3:2). However, some 3 years on, writing from Ephesus, the Apostle is frustrated as he finds that with regards to receiving the ‘solid food’ of God’s Word, they ‘are still not ready’ (3:2). Their ‘infant like’ behaviour is symptomized with cliques and people promotion, jealousies and quarrelling (3:3); putting their hope and focus on ‘mere men’ (3:4). The Corinthians still need to be treated like babies rather than adults; it is time that they became mature in their learning, understanding and application of God’s Word.

Second – Paul outlines the need to be mature in our LEADERSHIP:5-9:

In verse 5, Paul commences by de-personalising himself and Apollos – both the focus of cliques and debate. Not even using the word ‘who’ – Paul asks ‘what after all is Apollos? And what is Paul?’ (3:5). Before they can dwell on this too long (perhaps prolonging their debate), the Apostle provides the answer, ‘only servants’ (3:5). Both Paul and Apollos have been ‘assigned tasks’ by the Lord to serve, both to ‘plant’ and ‘water’ (3:6), referring to Paul’s founding work of Gospel preaching, developed by Apollos and his teaching. Yet ultimately, ‘God made it grow’ (3:6). It is a privilege to be involved in the Lord’s work, but it has to be borne in mind that, ‘he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God’ (3:7). Our motivation for labouring for God is to please Him (3:8); and it is in divine co-operation as ‘God’s fellow workers’ (3:9), that we can confidently ‘plough God’s field’.

Third – Paul outlines the need to be mature in our SERVICE & MINISTRY:10-17:

The Apostle moves from 'agriculture' (plants, waters, grow, field); onto 'architecture' (foundation, builder, temple). He now describes himself as, 'an expert builder' (3:10) who laid the foundation work at Corinth, for 'someone else' to build upon. The Apostle recognises that his service and ministry is part of a much bigger work and that God uses many people to contribute. Yet the warnings are clear to all who would work to 'build' God's people, 'one should be careful how he builds' (3:10). Any building needs a strong foundation, the Apostle reminds the Corinthians of theirs, namely 'Jesus Christ' (3:11). Verses 11-17 give a stark warning to anyone who might endeavour to build to a sub-standard quality (3:12-13). Genuine mistakes and errors will indeed be tested, however our assured salvation, despite our imperfections, is comforting within a passage of stark warnings (3:15). The building project the Apostle is referring to are God's people themselves, who need reminding that they are, 'God's temple' (3:16). The Apostle uses this picture here on a corporate level; later to use the same picture for the individual life being built up in Christ (6:19). Anyone intentionally endeavouring to tear down or destroy God's temple needs to be warned that, 'God will destroy him' (3:17). God's builders need to be certain that they have a mature and serious approach to their service and ministry.

Fourth – the chapter concludes with the challenge to be mature in our SELF-ASSESSMENT: 18-23:

The Corinthians in general were not short on confidence. Indeed in later chapters, their self-confidence and over inflated egos are clearly inferred by the Apostle. When it comes to 'improving' our walk and developing our maturity in Christ, it is much easier to point out the development needs of others. However, in verse 18, Paul warns against self-deception and reliance upon human wisdom (3:18). The 'standards of this age' are flawed, as Paul clearly outlined in chapter 2 (2:6-9); and re-iterates here in chapter 3 (3:19-20). So what is the mature response to God's challenge? Paul exhorts the Corinthians to demonstrate this, not simply in 'agreement' but in action; 'so then...no more' (3:21). The ultimate boast should be that they belong to Christ; and just as Christ is in total fellowship and intimacy with His Father, so they too, 'are of Christ' (3:23). A mature self-assessment concludes with less of self and more of Him; anything else is simply deceiving ourselves.

For further study:

The word 'mature' is used many times within the scriptures – consider the following passages and consider the challenge they bring to us to 'grow up in our faith': Luke 8:13-15, Ephesians 4:13, Hebrews 5:14, James 1:4

Further Reading/Bibliography: *The Holy Bible, 1 Corinthians (Morris, Tyndale), The Message of 1 Corinthians (Prior, IVP) 1 Corinthians, A Shorter Exegetical & Pastoral Commentary (Thiselton, Eerdmans).*

"Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your Word" Psalm 119:18